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Children, Schools and Families
Committee

**Young people not in
education,
employment or
training**

Eighth Report of Session 2009–10

Volume II

Oral and written evidence

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The Children, Schools and Families Committee

The Children, Schools and Families Committee is appointed by the House of Commons to examine the expenditure, administration and policy of the Department for Children, Schools and Families and its associated public bodies.

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National Union of Students
Equality and Human Rights Commission
Rosemary Smith
North Lancs Training Group Ltd

Oral evidence

Taken before the Children, Schools and Families Committee on Monday 25 January 2010

Members present

Mr Barry Sheerman (Chairman)

Annette Brooke
Ms Karen Buck
Mr David Chaytor

Mr Andrew Pelling
Helen Southworth
Mr Graham Stuart

Witnesses: **Professor Rob MacDonald**, Teesside University, **Dr Sue Maguire**, Warwick University, **Professor Richard Pring**, Oxford University, and **Professor Jocey Quinn**, London Metropolitan University, gave evidence.

Q1 Chairman: I always start these sessions by welcoming you all. I welcome to our deliberations Professor Jocey Quinn, Professor Richard Pring, Professor Rob MacDonald and Dr Sue Maguire. We are grateful that you have given the time to us. This is the first session of our quite brief look at this category of young people who are not in employment, education or training. As I said outside, we are having two sessions this week, then we are going to the Netherlands to look at the rather good record that it has in this area. Do you mind if we don't use your professorial rank and title? You are all professors and doctors, so would you mind if we used your first names? You can call anyone anything on my Committee except me who you have to call the Chairman. Let's get started then. I normally give people a chance to open up. From my side and your side, I want this to be reasonably rapid-fire. The background, as I see it, is that over the last number of years, the Government have introduced a whole range of policies to encourage young people to get into education and stay in education. We were just talking about education maintenance allowances in Question Time today, so there are EMAs. We now have something that I've always approved of—a much more diverse pathway post-14, ranging from the academic route through to the apprentice route and the new diplomas, which are growing apace. So we have a package of routes post-14 that one would have thought were very attractive. At the same time, as we know, two of the major inquiries into skills suggested that the number of unskilled and semi-skilled jobs in our economy is diminishing very fast indeed. I'm sure you are familiar with both: the two Leitch reports clearly pointed that out. One more piece of background is that we're moving in 2013 to the participation age rising to 17 and then, two years on, to 18. So a whole range of policies have been introduced and there is a whole new expectation of people's involvement in education and training in the future—the quite near future. Why do we have a problem with NEETs, or do we have a problem with NEETs? Jocey?

Professor Quinn: First of all, I'd like to contest the term "NEETs" because I think that it lumps together a lot of very diverse young people and tends to fix them as an alien species almost. It's also very much

a deficit term, which focuses on what they lack and what they are not doing, rather than what they actually can do and want to do. So I think that much of the problem comes from the way we think about these young people and the way we position them. It also stems from the fact that we have a lot of assumptions about them that are not backed up by real knowledge. We actually don't know very much about what these young people think about education and training, work and their lives, and that's the position that we need to work from.

Q2 Chairman: I thought people like you were being paid quite a lot of money to conduct research on who these NEETs were and weren't.

Professor Quinn: I think that's one of the reasons why I was asked to come and give evidence today—because I have conducted research with young people, which has taken that position, which is that we need to listen to them and talk to them about how they understand the situation. There are many different reasons why people come to be not in education, employment or training. One of them is what I have mentioned before, which has to do with the way we conceptualise them and think of them in negative ways, which they are very much aware of and which influence their life trajectories. There are also, obviously, very many structural factors that influence whether people become not in education, employment or training—factors like poverty, class, the decline of traditional industries, globalisation and so on. Then, of course, there are the practical policy and practitioner issues—things that happen at a school level that turn these young people off education very firmly at a very early age. The emphasis on streaming people and examining people from the moment they enter school has a strong influence in making a lot of young people turn off education. So there are many different reasons why people may become NEET.

Q3 Chairman: Jocey, I absolutely agree with you. The only trouble with using NEETs as shorthand is that several people have written to us about that in the large number of submissions that we've had on

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this, but at the end of the day people still use the shorthand. Can we come back to the terminology? Richard, why are we where we are?

Professor Pring: First of all, I want to agree with that to a great extent, although a lot of work has been done on these young people and why they think and act in the way that they do. In our own Nuffield review, for example, we had 36 workshops around the country, with an average of about 10 young people in each workshop; that is quite a lot. In Sheffield, for example, a distinction is made between those who are long-term NEET, who make up about 37% of those on the books, and those who are short-term NEET, who make up about 40%. So there are quite a lot of young people who are NEET at the moment, but who are looking for jobs, will find jobs and will go on to them. Then, of course, there was another really difficult lot of about 23% in Sheffield. I have no doubt that that is typical of many different places. One has to make those distinctions. One also has to see that the problem differs right across the country. The total number of people in all those different categories in the south-east is about 5%; in parts of the north-east it is about 13 or 14%, and in Hull it is different again. So there is a tremendous difference, and any policy has to differentiate by region, and look at the different sorts of people involved. In this group, there are also 20,000 young women who are mothers or who are pregnant, and that raises a different set of issues about how to bring them back into learning, or how to keep them learning. One thing that comes from that is that one has to make distinctions, and one cannot just say that one solution fits all these groups; there are many different solutions, which have to be decided on much more regionally, in the light of economic conditions and the number of people involved. So that is about looking at the group. There is also an interesting rise in the number of people who leave education and training at 17, having embarked on it post-16 only to find themselves on the wrong course—they feel that the course does not seem to be leading anywhere. They have just not received good advice. One thing that I hope will come out of all this is a greater emphasis on a really good information, advice and guidance service. At the moment, that service is not doing justice to a lot of these young people in many ways, and I can expand on that a lot, if you want. That is enough for the moment, but there may be other things that I'd like to add.

Q4 Chairman: Rob, we are not really supposed to use this category at all, but when people do use it, or categories like it, they say that this country is worse than other countries and that other countries do better than us. Is there hard evidence that that is the case?

Professor Pring: Not that I am aware.

Chairman: I was asking Rob. I will come back to you, Richard.

Professor MacDonald: Richard, you might be able to answer this question better than I can. One thing that we can say is that the term "NEET", which was invented in this country, is now being used in many

other places; it is one of our exports. You can go to the Netherlands, New Zealand and other countries and find them beginning to map NEETs. Other countries are perhaps less concerned about mapping the problem, and one thing that is valuable about having the term is that it focuses our attention on the problem. It might not be the best term, and I completely agree with what colleagues have said so far about it lumping together a diverse set of young people and a diverse set of issues, but one good thing about having this category is that it focuses our attention on the problem or problems. As for your question about other countries, I am sorry, but I cannot tell you the answer.

Q5 Chairman: Sue, what is your take on this? Where are we with this category? I am now embarrassed to use the word "NEETs".

Dr Maguire: I would like us to cast our minds back to 1988, when we had the young unemployed. The '88 Social Security Act withdrew young people's entitlement to claim income support or jobseeker's allowance. Those young people fell into a black hole until reports such as the social exclusion unit report highlighted the plight of young people who had disappeared. They were given the name "status zero" before they were called NEETs.

Chairman: They were called what?

Dr Maguire: Status zero, because they had no classification in unemployment statistics.

Professor MacDonald: Careers service statistics.

Dr Maguire: Yes. Before they were called NEETs, they were given the title of "status zero", which is perhaps slightly more unpleasant. These young people were pushed under the surface, to disguise youth unemployment statistics. We are living with the consequences of their disappearance. Since they have been brought back into the arena, we have learned an awful lot about young people who are NEET. They are not drug addicts or teenage parents; they comprise very different groups of young people, who all have different needs. I can remember going to the Treasury a few years ago and sitting round the table with a lobby of organisations that represented different categories of young people—the homeless, drug addicts—who had severe needs. However, we should also be aware that a lot of young people are just sitting at home being supported by their parents, because they are not entitled to any income support or jobseeker's allowance. Their voice often gets lost in the extreme needs of the more vulnerable groups, and I think that we should not forget that a lot of young people need maybe a little bit of guidance and support, which would lift them out of that category.

Q6 Chairman: Do you want to come back on that international point, Richard?

Professor Pring: I don't know a great deal about this, but from what I have seen, I think that people would define this category differently in different places, including some people but not others. I do not know to what extent other countries would include, for

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example, young people who are teenage mothers in that classification; that is quite a substantial number. I think that we have to look at it very carefully, to ensure that we are talking about the same thing in different countries.

Dr Maguire: May I just mention that we are rather damning about our performance, in terms of NEETs. One intervention has been the piloting of activity agreements, which mirrored the Australian youth allowance. When it was evaluated in Australia, it was found that the personal support that young people got was lacking and inadequate. The evaluation evidence that we have gathered on activity agreements suggests that the policy has been implemented far more effectively in this country than in Australia, which is where we initially borrowed the policy from. I do not think that we should be all-damning about our performance.

Chairman: The Chairman always gets to warm up witnesses. I now hand over to David, who will consider the characteristics of those in the category that cannot be named.

Q7 Mr Chaytor: May I come back to Jocey on classification. I understand what you have all said about the diversity of the group—perhaps there is a 40-20-40 split within the totality—but what is there other than NEETs? Does there need to be a rebranding, or should the totality of 16 to 19-year-olds be ignored, with a focus instead on, for instance, only the sustained NEETs?

Professor Quinn: That is quite a difficult question to answer. Part of me thinks that what we should be looking at is the broad sweep of young people, including those who are in education or training, and the different relationships among those young people. Another part of me recognises that if we are going to focus on the most vulnerable, we have to have some categories. But within the overarching term of NEET, you have so many different subsets of people. For example, you have people who are in jobs without training one minute, who the next minute move back to being NEET, and who then move back again. NEET is not a fixed category at any time. People have talked about the different subsets of people who might be pregnant or looking after children, or looking after parents. There are lots of different groups within that. We need a more subtle way of addressing the group, and different kinds of approach to the different subgroups. We also need to recognise that young people move across those different categories. That is the reality of their lives; they do not stick in one place.

Q8 Mr Chaytor: But is it conceivable that there could be a complete abolition of the term? I don't understand. If there is a need to classify and record for benefits purposes, or for statistics on staying-on rates, there must be some overall term for classifying such people.

Professor Quinn: I think we probably do need an overall term, but this term is so—

Mr Chaytor: But you haven't got one, and you are not recommending one.

Professor Quinn: I haven't got one for you, I'm afraid. This term is so problematic that it at least needs to be thought about. Is it the right thing to use? The other problem is the way that people use it. For example, I have seen adverts from software companies to local authorities saying, "Get this software and manage your NEETs," as though NEETs were a kind of strange group that had to be controlled, or a problem. That is something that needs to be addressed—the way that these young people are categorised as a problem. The positive aspects of their lives are not built on.

Q9 Mr Chaytor: Before the sitting started, I was asking the Chairman this: do you think most NEETs know they are NEETs? Another thing that interests me is that your criticism, as academics, of the term NEETs is that it is disparaging, but is it widely or increasingly used by young people as a disparaging term?

Professor MacDonald: May I step back a little bit and talk about the evidence base that I will use to answer two of these questions? I will be very quick.

Chairman: We always like an evidence base, so take your time.

Professor MacDonald: This is research undertaken in Teesside, in some of Britain's poorest neighbourhoods, over about 10 years, funded by the Economic and Social Research Council and the Joseph Rowntree Foundation. It is a series of studies with what I would probably describe as some of the most hard-to-reach young people. One of the nice things about our research is that it is longitudinal, so it followed the same people over a long period. Some are in their 30s now. Secondly, it is quite broad. We are not interested just in people's education and employment experiences, but in their housing, leisure, family, drug and criminal experiences as well. That is the background. That is probably what I will be talking about today when I answer questions. Do people call themselves NEETs? Of course they don't. They will say, "I was unemployed", "I was out of a job" or "I was looking for a job". As for the term NEET, in my experience, it has absolutely no currency with the people whom we might call NEETs. Secondly, is it an issue for them? Of course it is in a sense, but not in the sense in which I think the policy discourses currently construe it. If you look at these people's lives overall—this is why I stress the particular base of young people whom I am talking to; I very much recognise that there is heterogeneity within any group, and that things will differ according to place, region and local labour market—the key experience for the people to whom I talked, almost to a man and woman, was one of economic marginality. That is the best phrase that I can come up with. It is not a particularly attractive one—it doesn't flow off the tongue—but "economically marginal" characterises all their experiences. What these young people describe is a period over years of churning between jobs, schemes, courses and unemployment; that is sometimes referred to as the "low pay, no pay" cycle. That is their lasting experience into their 30s. Yes, "NEET" is important, in that they would be NEET,

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as we might call it, at particular points in time, but probably more significant to them overall is the fact of that insecure labour market career, whereby they churn through various options but never make progress forward, really. To answer your questions, no, these young people do not know that they are NEET. No, it is not a particularly derogatory term, because they do not know the term itself. I cannot think of a particularly better one, but for those people, a unifying experience was economic marginality. Regardless of whether they were young mothers, unemployed people looking for jobs or people with criminal record histories, the thing that they shared was that they remained economically marginal in this context.

Q10 Mr Chaytor: Just one point on classification. Are people on gap years classified as NEETs?

Professor Pring: They are included as well.

Q11 Mr Chaytor: But they presumably don't have the same sense of economic marginality as the rest of them. Or weren't there any of them in Teesside?

Professor MacDonald: People don't go on gap years in the neighbourhoods I study.

Dr Maguire: In terms of economic marginality, my research would suggest that it's social isolation that young people face as well. The majority of young people between the ages of 16 and 18 who are the classified NEET population aren't able to claim any income support or jobseeker's allowance. So they are effectively left at home. Unless they seek to engage with Connexions—they are not forced to engage with it, because they are under no obligation to do so—a lot of young people are socially isolated. I do not think that we should underestimate that problem.

Q12 Chairman: So there aren't any benefits at all until people are 18?

Dr Maguire: Unless they are estranged from their family or under threat of estrangement, they are not entitled to any benefit whatsoever. Also, unless they are actively engaged in an education policy, so that they are eligible for education maintenance allowance under an income assessment, or they participate in a training programme, so that the training allowance kicks in, they are not entitled to any benefit.

Mr Chaytor: Richard, you were going to respond earlier and there is also a question that I want to put to you.

Professor Pring: Just very briefly, the figures—9.4%, or whatever it was two years ago—include those young people on a gap year. Those young people make up a very small proportion, but it makes you realise what different sets of people there are within the figures. I simply want to say that the work we did with Rathbone, which was for our Nuffield review, was only one of two pieces of research that we did. Basically, we are doing a review of 14 to 19. Certainly, however, the very extensive work that we did with Rathbone, which involved, as I said,

interviewing more than 300 young people from around the country who are in this category, confirmed everything that Rob was just saying.

Q13 Mr Chaytor: I just want to ask one thing about international income comparisons. When we see these figures that put the UK towards the bottom of the OECD league table for the rates of people staying on in full-time education, are we absolutely comparing like with like, because we define NEETs as those beyond the age of 16, but in school systems that continue to 18 surely a different methodology must be used?

Professor Pring: I would have thought so. We are being compared with countries that have a very different policy of carrying on with education beyond 16 as a normal way of life, and so on. I think that these comparisons are worth making, but one needs to look at them rather sceptically—that is all.

Q14 Chairman: We have some visitors today in the public seats who are from America. Do they have the same problem in the United States, because there has been a tremendous decline in unskilled occupations in the United States? Does the US have a NEET category, or does it just call them “young unemployed”?

Professor Pring: I cannot tell you that. I don't know if anyone else here can.

Dr Maguire: I don't know, but I think that the US has a much more fluid system than we do, in terms of moving in and out of education, certainly for higher education. So it is much easier to move back into education in the US.

Chairman: With the credit system.

Dr Maguire: Yes.

Chairman: Okay. Let us move on. Karen.

Q15 Ms Buck: Whether we like it or not, we expect this issue to be in some way a political issue; the labelling and construction of the group that we use NEET as shorthand for is quite highly charged. Of course, part of the story of that is that the number technically in the NEET group has gone up. If you look at the National Audit Office report, it seems on the face of it as if that change can be almost entirely explained by a fall in the number of young people aged between 16 and 18 who are in employment, because the number in education has gone up. Is that your understanding? Also, is that really driven by the overall impact on youth unemployment of the downturn of the last couple of years, or is there a relationship between the increasing expectation that young people stay on at school, and therefore a move away from employers providing jobs for precisely that group? Is the emphasis on reducing NEETs in some way oddly increasing the number of NEETs, because of the downward pressure on employment?

Dr Maguire: Although the NEET population of 16 to 18 looks to have stayed about the same over the last 10 years—it has gone up slightly in the last couple of years—we have seen quite significant changes in that period of time. So the NEET population among 16-year-olds is at its lowest for 10

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years. Among 17-year-olds, I think that it has declined over the last three years. However, where the real problem now occurs is among 18-year-olds and I think that you can attribute that to two factors. One is a decline in the labour market. However, perhaps we can also see that, as a response to more and more young people staying on in education, they are being kept in education and then coming out at a much later stage, so that we have a much bigger problem now among 18-year-olds, because of increased participation as well as the effect of the labour market.

Professor Pring: Could I just say there is a need to check the figures very carefully here. Certainly, the evidence we got for the Nuffield review—and don't forget this is now possibly out of date, because of the year and a half since we actually finished putting the review in to the publishers, and the recession; so it's probably worse—was that the figure had been more or less steady for 10 years on the overall NEET category. I think that the work of the Learning and Skills Council was really saying that more and more people are staying on but then dropping out at 17 because of inappropriate courses, or that having achieved Level 2 they are then being shoved on another Level 2 course and they can't quite see the point, because it doesn't relate to improving their employability. So I think one needs to look very carefully at the figures, and I suspect you'll get some variation in terms of interpreting the figures.

Q16 Ms Buck: I think that's incredibly important, and actually drilling down into these subcategories within that heading is very important. So does everybody agree, then, that really what we're looking at is less a staying-on-into-education issue, and more about moving forward into employment progression—so falling off at 18, or on the wrong course towards vocation or employment?

Dr Maguire: Yes.

Professor Quinn: I'd just like to say something here with respect to that. In the research that I did, which was in the south-west of England, and was really with young people in jobs without training who had moved in and out of being NEET, one of the things that came over very strongly there was this feeling that often young people were being kept in training and education when they didn't really see the point in it. The kind of skills and training that they wanted was something that led to a meaningful job that they wanted to do; but aged 16 they didn't necessarily know what that job was. The system tends to assume that they follow a sort of career trajectory in a linear fashion. They don't, in reality, and they need some space to think about what they want to do; and in our research we found it was often when they were older—say about 19—that they realised there was something there that they might like to actually train for; but it was having that motivation of identifying something that they particularly wanted to do, and knowing that they needed the qualification to do it, that would make them sustain education and training. What they particularly didn't like was

being sent on what they call bogus courses, which were customer care-type courses, which they saw as just a means of keeping statistics down.

Q17 Ms Buck: Just a couple of questions about the characteristics of the group. First, there's been a lot of media coverage recently about the extent to which young white students, particularly boys, have been most at risk of educational under-achievement. On the other hand, the IPPR research last week showed that young black people were disproportionately at risk of unemployment. Those two don't quite go together in this particular context. What is it that we know about the profile of the young people in those categories staying on into education and going on to employment, and the relationship of ethnicity to that?

Dr Maguire: I think the IPPR research was looking not at staying on in education but movement into employment, whereas when we're talking about educational underachievement, which I think is a separate issue, we talk about young white males underperforming in the education system; so I think we're talking about two quite different issues, really. I think we're talking about—I think Rob has the article—half of black people aged 16 to 24, in terms of access to employment; and perhaps we're talking about different issues.

Q18 Ms Buck: But are we? When we are talking about this particular group, from what you have already said today, part of the story is about young people's approach to the skills, qualifications and training that may lead them forward into their lives. If, on the one hand, you have an emerging pattern in which young white people—young white boys, in particular—are the ones who are trailing academically, which would put them in the categories that you have all been describing as at risk, yet on the other hand it is young black people who are most at risk of being unemployed, that raises some questions about who it is we are dealing with, and what the relationship is there.

Professor Pring: I read a very brief account in the newspaper of that research, but I have not read the research, so I really do not feel I can go into it in detail, but I think the IPPR research referred very much to the last year or so. In other words, things have changed quite a lot, in terms of employment opportunities and so on, because of the recession, particularly as regards young black people. Once again, one really has to look at the figures very much more regionally. The places where we did quite a lot of our work—not me personally, but other people in the team—were the north-east and the north-west, but especially the north-east and Nottinghamshire. Some of the ex-mining areas, where there had been no work to fill the gap left by the closing of the mines and so on, would essentially be almost entirely white places, where there was no work, massive unemployment, and no facilities for young people, in terms of travelling and so on, to move into towns and so on. You will get pockets that relate to a particular decline in industry where there has not

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been that increase, but I could not really comment now, because I think that that research was fairly recent.

Chairman: What was the research you were referring to, Karen? Where was that done?

Ms Buck: The IPPR research.

Dr Maguire: It was in *The Guardian*.

Ms Buck: It was published last week.

Professor MacDonald: I would make a slightly different contribution. Some research produced by the IPPR last year was different from this. It didn't get a lot of publicity, but it would challenge some of the things that we have been saying today. It predicted, in terms of the British labour market, that the proportion of low-skilled and low-quality jobs was likely to be sustained or to grow over the next 20 years. The reason I make the point about that IPPR research is that, to go back to the young adults in our studies, they got jobs. Long-term NEET was not a problem for them; long-term unemployment was not an issue for these people. The issue was about churning between jobs and unemployment. While I take Richard's point about the decimation of particular communities and places, in terms of the absence and decline of old industries, even in some of the highest-unemployment areas there are jobs to be got. Even the most disadvantaged young people you can probably find—disadvantaged in terms of their white working-class backgrounds, lack of educational qualifications and so on—could get jobs, and did get jobs recurrently, but they were also unemployed recurrently. That takes us to the question, "Why does that happen? What lies behind that churning around the labour market?" rather than the simple question, "Are they unemployed, or are they not unemployed?" I'm afraid that I am going to keep coming back to this issue.

Q19 Ms Buck: It's because they haven't been on enough customer care courses, I should imagine. My last question to the four of you goes back to the shorthand concept of the NEET. What three characteristics would you each associate with the young people most at risk of falling into this category?

Chairman: Shall we reverse the order? Sue, why don't you start?

Dr Maguire: What would I associate with being NEET?

Chairman: We are all trying not to use the word "NEET" now.

Dr Maguire: I would associate being NEET with being detached from official agencies from which you can access support and help; with disillusionment with education and training, probably starting much earlier than year 11; and with being male.

Professor MacDonald: I will answer slightly differently, and again this is located wholly in terms of the research for the sort of context we're talking about. Young people are very keen to work. There are traditional working-class attitudes and ethics about the importance of jobs in places and contexts

where lasting, regular, sustained, decent work no longer exists for young people. That's what makes them NEET.

Ms Buck: You've cheated; you only had one.

Professor Pring: One of the issues referred to needs emphasising. Some very interesting and very good research has just come out from ESRC: it is called *Children's Lives, Children's Futures*. It interviewed and questioned about 1,000 young people at the age of 11 and 12 and their teachers. It is quite clear that a substantial number are already fed up with school and saying that they would like to leave as soon as possible. On the whole, but not necessarily entirely, they are the ones whose whole history of school has been one of being seen as failures and so on. The argument here is that you can begin to predict, if you are very careful, even early on in secondary school those who are likely to drop out and not want to carry on with learning. That research was carried by people such as Reay and Wilian at the Institute of Education quite a bit ago. So you can predict. Secondly, 5% of young people in any one year are excluded at least temporarily from school. They are already showing their disillusionment and so on with that. Permanent exclusions have gone down, but there are still a substantial number. The Youth Justice Board says that it can already pick out young people. You've got a fairly substantial number whom you can predict are going to be caught, unless you do something very special with them while they are at school. There are quite a few very good and interesting initiatives in which that is happening, but not enough.

Q20 Ms Buck: The NAO report seemed to indicate that those with statemented special needs were likely to remain in education, presumably because of that level of support. Do we know anything about non-statutory special needs, such as School Action Plus? Is that being monitored as an indicator?

Dr Maguire: It is, yes.

Ms Buck: Are we saying that special needs correlates negatively—

Dr Maguire: Under School Action Plus? Yes, it does.

Professor Quinn: I would agree with my colleagues that disengagement from education from a very early age is one of the key factors, as is being aware that you are being positioned in that way. Some of the people in our research called themselves "the thick bunch". They felt that other people saw them in that way, and they were treated in that way all through their school careers, so it becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. I think that living in areas of social deprivation where there are lots of different issues related to poverty also contributes to becoming NEET. I would endorse the idea that it is also about lack of access to jobs in the local area, particularly in areas where the traditional industries have totally declined. May I take up the point about masculinity and young white men, as I didn't have a chance to talk about it before? Some of the evidence has shown that young, white, working-class men, particularly in areas outside London, are the least likely to go on to higher education. That is very much to do with locality, as people have said. In the

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research that I have done—not only research with young people in jobs without training, but research with working-class students who have dropped out of university—negative ideas about working-class masculinity have been a strong shaping factor in their educational lives. The kind of advice that they were given by careers advisers was that if they wanted to do certain kinds of jobs, particularly in the creative industries, they were told, “No, that’s not for you. You should look at being an engineer, or a computer programmer”—things that were felt to be more appropriate for them. There are all sorts of stereotypes that are shaping people in certain ways, and that often causes negative trajectories in their educational lives. That is something that needs to be addressed for young white men. Moving on from that, the research that I have done shows that a lot of those young men are engaged in learning in informal contexts. They have a lot of things that they enjoy doing and that they are enthusiastic about. The problem is that no connections are made between that and the formal education system, and that is an important issue.

Q21 Chairman: Could I push you just a little on that answer, Jocey. I think that Rob mentioned the cycle among young people in areas that formerly had mining and heavy industry, where high-paid, relatively unskilled jobs are no longer available. If you did the analysis, you would find a concentration of NEETs in those areas, but it would be different in an urban area such as London. Where is the concentration of NEETs? Where do we find the most NEETs per head of population? In the north-east or the east of England? Are they in traditional industrial areas?

Professor Quinn: I don’t know the exact answer to that.

Professor Pring: The work that has come out of the Learning and Skills Council and Rathbone shows that the north-east tops it, but even then it is different in different parts of the north-east. Next, you’re talking about the north and then the north-west. There’s a real dividing line between the north, the midlands and then the south-east, where things aren’t nearly the same. The statistics are there and they are in the Learning and Skills Council research.

Q22 Chairman: So we can find out exactly what they are?

Professor Pring: Yes. But even in a particular region, such as the north, you get Hull, which is very high, and then, not too far away, but not within easy reach, relatively low figures. So we are talking not just about one large region, but about specific pockets in particular regions. But overall, the north-east suffers most.

Q23 Chairman: Evidence given to this Committee suggests that the eastern region is the lowest educational performer of all the regions, but it would not be high up in terms of NEETs. Is that right?

Professor Pring: Sorry, I didn’t catch that.

Chairman: If you are mapping against educational attainment, evidence given to this Committee some time in the past suggested that the lowest educational performer was the eastern region, because of the rural and coastal poverty, so I am surprised that it is not up there in terms of NEETs. We could match the figures to give us some indication of what is happening.

Professor Pring: Certainly, as far as the NEET category goes, it is the north-east.

Chairman: Sue, do you want to come in?

Dr Maguire: I was just thinking about the north-east. Doesn’t it have very low staying-on-post-16 rates, which might be different from attainment rates? Again, that might be linked to this.

Q24 Chairman: I never find much of a correlation. Based on the evidence given to the Committee by the universities that come before us, I always find education in the area to be very high quality. Last week, the Leader of the Opposition talked about good universities and the others. Do you find that in terms of research? Should the Committee start weighing up whether you come from good universities in looking at the quality of your research? Are you the only one we should listen to, Richard?

Mr Stuart: He’s just stirring.

Chairman: No, I was worried. I am asking the witnesses whether they are worried that a leading person in our political life is bringing back the notion of good universities and the others; that’s all. Does that worry you at all?

Professor MacDonald: I don’t know whether I should look at the camera and smile at my vice-chancellor. The University of Teesside is the university of the year, as judged by *The Times Higher Educational Supplement*. Of course, I am going to disagree with that proposal.

Chairman: I am teasing. I’m just winding Graham up because he was a bit late for Committee. Anyway, we will move on. Huddersfield is an excellent university, as you all know, and the rate at which it gets people into jobs is better than at any other university.

Q25 Mr Stuart: May I come in before we move on, Chairman. What work has been done on the parents of young people who are NEET? Has much work been done to find out about their attitudes or the level of support?

Professor Pring: It is a very important question. What comes across in work on these areas is the strong correlation between youngsters wanting to leave education and the lack of support from parents who do not suggest that they should go on to university or start further studies. To some extent, that might be the case with the Rathbone stuff. One has to be very careful because of the many different categories there are. Where it relates to large-scale unemployment in a particular area, I do not think that is to do with parental issues. Certainly, with—if we dare say it—the bottom category of really inactive people, there is a strong correlation. Do not forget that one sixth of our young people aged 15, 16

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and 17 are now brought up in households where there is no employment at all. There is a sense in which that whole background is one in which it is seen as perfectly normal not to go to work. That is a very large statistic, and it really has evolved quite a lot over the last 15 years. It also comes back to the other part of this, which I feel very keen on. It involves a thing called Family Links. If we really want to improve both attitudes and general achievement at school, we have to work much harder with the parents so that they know what goes on in school, they support what goes on in school and they are also able to work with their young people in the same way that teachers are trying to do in school. There is a lot of evidence for that. I think it is very important.

Chairman: Jockey, do you want to come in?

Professor Quinn: I just wanted to say something about parents as resources for getting jobs. In the research that I did, a lot of the young people got their jobs not through Connexions or Jobcentre Plus but through families—through uncles, brothers or fathers. As Richard was saying, in some families there has been unemployment for generations, and those resources are not there, so it is sometimes to do with that rather than a will to go into education.

Chairman: Sorry, we were communicating with Clerks. Rob, do you want to come in on Graham's question specifically?

Professor MacDonald: I hear a lot this idea about the link between NEET and low aspirations, parental attitudes or parental worklessness. In our research into the most high-unemployment areas for 10 years, we find not a jot of evidence. What we find—I will say it again—is that young people are NEET partly because they are so keen to get a job. That is why they do not want to go on training schemes or into further education, or to go to university. Like their parents do or used to do, they want to work for a living. They leave school, which has not—I agree completely with the comments made about school—done a lot for them, and they look for work. They find work, but they find work which is low-skilled, low-quality and insecure, and which takes them in and chucks them out. That explains why they have that churning experience of the labour market. It is almost the reverse of what might have been implied. Yes, parental attitudes are important, because they share their parents' positive attitudes to employment.

Q26 Chairman: Is that because of a change in the quality of employment?

Professor MacDonald: Exactly.

Q27 Chairman: Take my constituency. It was diverse—engineering, chemicals and textiles—with lots of jobs that young people with not great academic skills could go into. Now those industries are there, but they are very small employers.

Professor MacDonald: In 1965, Teesside had 1.5% unemployment. It was a low-unemployment area. It was—

Chairman: But the employment would have been relatively well paid.

Professor MacDonald: It was good-quality working-class jobs—top of the working classes, working in steel and chemicals. This is where these people come from, that is their background and that is what has changed.

Chairman: My unskilled and semi-skilled young people now go into retail and distribution at minimum wage.

Professor MacDonald: This is exactly what I am talking about. They get jobs as security guards, cashiers, shelf stackers, factory operatives, cleaners and care workers. That is the nature of the employment they get.

Q28 Chairman: It is interesting. You seem to be disagreeing, Richard. Do you want to come back?

Professor Pring: I want to come in a little bit. I looked up the figures in Sheffield. I think this would be typical, no doubt, of quite a few places. I quoted at the very beginning that of all the people in the NEET category in Sheffield, 37%—nearly 40%—were long-term unemployed. That means unemployed for over six months; that is the official definition. Then there were 40% who were short-term, but 40% is quite a lot of long-term unemployment among 17 and 18-year-olds. Then there was another group, just over 20%, who were also long-term but seen as exceedingly vulnerable. So we are talking about 60% of that lot who were not part of the link in and out of jobs.

Professor MacDonald: I wouldn't disagree about the gaps between jobs and whether they could happily be six months, or sometimes longer. However, over the course of, say, leaving at 16 through to 30, they might be in a job, out of a job, in a job, out of a job, and yes, the gaps might easily be six months. But they are not permanently out of work.

Q29 Chairman: Is that not a difference? He is doing a longitudinal study, while you are doing more of a snapshot.

Professor MacDonald: Yes, but I would say if I wanted to disagree with him.

Dr Maguire: I just want to pick up on this parent issue. As part of the evaluation of the piloting of the EMA, we interviewed 20,000 young people and their parents. One of the questions that we asked was about attitudes towards knowledge, about the education system and capacity to offer support to young people. It was interesting. We had a cohort of all young people, not just those engaged in learning, to get the effect of EMA. However, the young people in the NEET group were the least likely to have accessed careers guidance at school. Also, their parents felt less able than any other group of parents to offer advice to their children about what they could do post-16. Those parents felt particularly ill at ease about offering advice on educational opportunities. So those young people had a double whammy, in that they were not accessing independent careers guidance and their parents felt less able to give advice about post-16 options.

Chairman: We need to move on to the next set of questions, but can we get one more question in.

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Q30 Mr Stuart: Following that and the slight disagreement, if there is one, between Rob and Richard, I want to ask something. In our game—politics—the danger is that you seize on something and you immediately want a solution. NEET is relatively new and now we want a solution; there is a NEET and now we have a key solution for our party for NEETs. What do you think are the dangers in this NEET world? I am just concerned that both of you could be right and that there are, of course, a whole load of different people in different circumstances. Rob might be particularly looking at the blackspots, but you don't want to run from that to losing insight into places that are not a blackspot but where there may be common threads with places that are blackspots. How should we categorise NEETs so that we—

Chairman: Could you answer that question without going over the territory that we went over extensively before Graham arrived today?

Mr Stuart: I apologise, Chairman.

Chairman: That is not to criticise you, but we did go into this in quite a lot of detail. So could we have a brief reaction to that question? Jocey, you haven't said anything for a bit.

Professor Quinn: It's hard not to go over what we've already said.

Mr Stuart: I will read the transcript.

Chairman: Don't indulge Graham too much.

Professor Pring: I think that the problem with seeing this in terms of "the NEET problem" is that everyone looks for "the NEET solution", and there is no such thing as a "NEET solution" to this. One also has to think of one particular category within NEETs, namely those who are really long-term, who have really dropped out and who are inactive in terms of looking for employment and so on. It may only be about 1% of the population, but it is actually quite a significant 1%. One of the things in the Nuffield review, working with detached youth workers—I have never come across detached youth, mainly because I do not hang around corners—is that you have a category of young people who have really dropped out completely and who are reached by certain youth workers. Their work is quite brilliant. However, one of the problems is the funding arrangement for a lot of these workers. For example, in order to get money from Government to address particular learning problems, you have to have targets. Then, if you don't hit those targets, you lose the money. So the real problem in working with some of the most difficult young people is the lack of long-term funding to help these people who are working with them, because getting these young people back into learning is such a long job that it doesn't quite fit in with the target culture. That is one of the arguments that came through very strongly in the evidence to the Nuffield review. A second thing is that a lot of the people who reach these young people—not only those who are very difficult to reach, but other young people too—are youth workers. I think that the whole area of the youth service has been very neglected, both in terms of funding and in terms of how it links with

mainstream education. That is one thing that I would really like to see improved. Thirdly, one of the praiseworthy aspects of Government policy, at least in theory, has been saying that particular schools cannot now work in isolation; that there's got to be a sense of partnership between colleges of further education and schools. I think about 100,000 young people of 14 to 16 are now doing a substantial part of their curriculum in colleges of further education, where they've got access to much more practical resources and people who are much more experienced in that sort of thing. So the Government say there's got to be that sort of partnership. Where you see it happening—places such as Wolverhampton and Stevenage—you see a terrific difference. They can work together to provide a more flexible curriculum and more help, with the youth service involved, working with all these young people; and you see very real results. On the other hand, there are many areas where that partnership really hasn't got going at all, and under the new commissioning arrangements to local authorities, I would like to see money supporting such partnerships.

Chairman: David, do you want to sweep up a couple of questions?

Q31 Mr Chaytor: I want to ask a little bit more about attainment. Last year the figures for five A to Cs at GCSE including English and maths improved again and according to the departmental statistics the most rapid improvement has taken place in the schools serving the most deprived populations, so my question is: does it not follow that if attainment is gradually rising at the age of 16, the problem of NEETS should gradually wither away?

Professor MacDonald: No.

Q32 Mr Chaytor: If not, why not?

Professor MacDonald: Because that presumes that NEETS is a supply side problem—that it's somehow a product of the characteristics that young people carry. It will be in part, but I think you need to look at the demand side—what are the opportunities and options, and what's provided for people. It presumes that if all get well qualified there will be jobs or opportunities that require well qualified people. Life's not like that.

Dr Maguire: I would just like to endorse what Rob has said. Also, I think it's not just about attainment. I think we've already alluded to a big issue around the NEET group—their search for work. We have spent a lot of time over the last 10 years unpacking this NEET population, but what we actually don't know very much about is the youth labour market that these young people go into. We've been frantic in terms of improving attainment rates and staying-on rates, and we've neglected the silent population who move into work regardless of that. And we don't know anything about young people who go into work at 16 or 17; and actually there's very little support mechanism available to them to support that transition. They find their own jobs through family, or a few through connections; but it hasn't been a

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priority within guidance services to support transitions into the labour market outside the apprenticeship route. I think we're missing a trick here, and we really need to know exactly where these young people are going, particularly for the RPA agenda, because we're going to have to know where they are, in order to offer a learning package to meet their needs and their employers' needs.

Q33 Chairman: But aren't we already getting this from the young apprenticeships and the diplomas? You say—you know my original question—the pathways are more diverse and more accessible, they begin earlier and give the not-very-academic young person something to get their teeth into. Being involved in the Skills Commission, we've interviewed lots of young people who said, "I just wasn't turned on by the academic subjects; I wanted to do things with my hands—some practical things." Perhaps, I thought, we were giving young people more of an opportunity to do that. Aren't we?

Professor Pring: May I?

Chairman: Let me ask Sue that, and I'll come back to you, Richard.

Dr Maguire: The apprenticeship route is there, but apprenticeships are highly sought after and very competitive, and few and far between. We're talking about a group of young people who entered the labour market below that standard, who aren't Level 2, and can't attract that level of funding. And they're finding their own way into the labour market, and we really don't know very much about where they are, what they're doing and what sort of training they get. They carry this label "Jobs without training" and now there's an established churn between the JWT and the NEET group; so I don't think we can divorce these populations. The JWT population is as segmented as we are finding with the NEET group, but we actually don't know very much about that group of young people. I was involved in the evaluation of the learning agreement pilots, which was the first policy initiative target of the group for many, many years, and the infrastructure was not there to support the delivery of that pilot.

Q34 Chairman: So you couldn't then just say that anyone who was not in education or employment should be in a national apprenticeship scheme, working in the environment or the community? Richard said that we cannot have a simple solution, but a simple solution would be anyone who was not doing anything else going into a national apprenticeship scheme to work in the environment or in the community. What is wrong with such a scheme?

Dr Maguire: As it stands at the moment, that apprenticeship scheme is far too competitive for many young people. Some apprenticeships need five-plus GCSEs to get through the selection process.

Chairman: Yes, but evidence given at this Committee is that the average length of an apprenticeship is a year. There are top-of-the-range

manufacturing and engineering apprentices and very short retail, distribution and customer care apprenticeships.

Dr Maguire: There are, but I still maintain that apprenticeships are in short supply.

Q35 Chairman: But couldn't they roll out a national apprenticeship scheme that everyone had to do, so there would be no NEETS? We could abolish NEETS overnight.

Dr Maguire: You would?

Chairman: You are looking very worried, Rob.

Professor MacDonald: No, I don't know whether we are allowed to ask you questions back. We have a proportion of the cohort who go into further and higher education. We have a proportion who get apprenticeships. What is the gap between them? What is the percentage difference? I think that it is probably quite large. I think that that is what Sue is talking about. There is a chunk of people who either don't want to or aren't able to access good quality apprenticeships at aged 16 and upwards and who, as you say, are not particularly interested in going to university. A big question is what do we do for young people who want to work when the quality of what is on offer to them at the moment is such that it ensures that they become "socially excluded" and NEET over time. If you are saying we need to provide high quality routes for people who do not want to go to university—routes that are accessible and take them somewhere—I would wholeheartedly agree.

Dr Maguire: At the moment, a lot of training providers would not take a risk with the type of young people that we have been describing, because they are paid on output-related funding, which is delivering a Level 2 qualification. Some of the young people in that group would be too high risk; they would not attain their targets and they would not take them, which is exactly what we found in the learning agreement pilot. The way in which the funding system is structured is too risky.

Chairman: Very interesting. Jocey? I am in charge—some of the time.

Professor Quinn: I want to go back to the issue of attainment. Although there has been a rise in the level of attainment, it still leaves behind a big group of people who are not even getting the minimum Level 2 qualifications. That group is still with us, and I am sure that they will be with us for a long time. People have been talking about the kinds of skills that they want to have, but there is a mismatch between their sense of what is a valuable skill and a valuable job and the emphasis on accredited qualifications. The two do not always go together. For example, a lot of people in jobs without training felt that they were learning lots of really good skills in their jobs, but the skills were not accredited or recognised. To people from the outside, they were in a job without any kind of training at all. But to them, they felt that they were getting trained. They felt that they were always being pushed by people and organisations such as Connexions to get out of that situation and back into formal training and education, which was not

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necessarily appropriate for them. There is a big mismatch between the formal system and the expectations and desires of a lot of these young people.

Q36 Chairman: Do NEETS cost us very much?

Professor MacDonald: Yes.

Q37 Chairman: Can we weigh it up?

Professor MacDonald: Yes, you can, but I cannot tell you the answer exactly. I have in front of me a draft report—not by myself—from colleagues at the university of York for the Audit Commission. It estimates the lifetime costs of NEET and will be published shortly. I probably can say that they have a fantastic methodology where they take real-life cases of young people who are defined as NEET by the different sub-categories that we have talked about, estimate what the lifetime costs to the Exchequer would be without suitable interventions, and then with suitable interventions, and they look at the difference. The findings are very significant.

Q38 Chairman: You know what I am getting at. What is the cost of doing nothing, and what would be the cost of a national apprenticeship scheme that everyone had access to?

Mr Stuart: You are going to come up with a cost?

Professor MacDonald: They will come up with a cost.

Chairman: It is a good university, is it?

Q39 Mr Stuart: He's off again. He's a tyrannical stirrer. Can you say why the number of NEETs increased? It was only marginal, but basically we had a period of strong economic growth from 1997 to 2007—before the credit crunch—and yet the numbers appeared to grow. Is that because it is genuine? How much can we rely on the data on NEETs? How accurate are they?

Professor MacDonald: Isn't that the question we dealt with a moment ago about changing—

Chairman: You always have a feeling of déjà vu when Graham speaks.

Professor MacDonald: I might not have been paying attention quite closely enough.

Professor Pring: First of all, the figures remained pretty static during that period. They did not go down even during the period of economic growth. You are right.

Q40 Mr Stuart: Rob's point is that it is a lack of jobs—the serious point about the labour market. Well, the labour market did improve—not everywhere, but generally. You would therefore generally have thought that there would have been a reduction in the number of NEETs, especially if the education system was delivering in reality the claimed transformation in performance.

Professor MacDonald: Hasn't the biggest rise in NEETs been seen most recently as coterminous with the recession, which would actually suggest that demand-side factors are quite important?

Q41 Mr Stuart: But the 10 years of economic growth and the fact that it didn't diminish—if anything, it was about the same; it marginally increased to about 0.1%—

Dr Maguire: It has diminished substantially for 16-year-olds over the past 10 years. It has diminished for 17-year-olds over the past three years. Where we have seen the sharp rise is among 18-year-olds.

Q42 Mr Stuart: Was it from 1997 to 2007 that it was about 10.7% and 10.6%? I can't remember which one was which, but it suggested an extraordinary failure, considering all the economic dynamism and the doubling of spending on education. Why was that? We can easily go to a recession and say, "It's increasing now." If we cannot solve the 10-year problem, we are missing something, aren't we?

Professor MacDonald: Partly it is about deciphering the figures between 16, 17 and 18-year-olds. That point is important because it points to the effect of policy interventions, focusing on 16 and then 17 and pushing people out at 18. The fact that it has gone up more recently points back to the impact of the recession. That is all I can say. I suppose the final point is, if we had not had this policy, what would it have looked like?

Q43 Mr Stuart: That doesn't help us understand. We don't understand why there was no movement in those 10 years, despite it being a high priority for Government, the allocation of resources and the economy doing well—we know it sucked in a lot of labour from overseas, because there seemed to be such a buoyant jobs market, and yet there were our young people not moving anywhere. We need to understand it.

Professor Pring: Absolutely. I think it is a very important question. I don't think any of us can answer it, which is a pity. But it is an important one; it deserves an answer. I am very happy to go back to my colleagues in the skills and knowledge ESRC project. I think they will be able to give an answer. The question needs to be answered.

Q44 Chairman: Doesn't it take us back to Leitch, which I mentioned at the beginning of this session? We have this tremendous decline, a rapid decline, of available jobs for unskilled and semi-skilled young people. Yes, of course, in the recession we saw a lot of people coming in from eastern Europe with skills, and the economy grew partly on the basis of that. But for young people who do not have marketable skills, the reality is that Leitch said that there would be only 500,000 unskilled jobs in the economy by 2020.

Professor Pring: Yes, but those figures have been questioned very much by SKOPE, the Centre on Skills, Knowledge and Organisational Performance,¹ and by people like Ewart Keep of

¹ *Note by witness:* What the Leitch projections showed was that by 2020 there would be only 600,000 people with low or no qualifications, NOT that there would be only 600,000 low skilled jobs. It was a forecast of individual achievement of qualifications, not of employer demand for skills. See Felstead et al, 2007, *Work Skills*, SKOPE Issues Paper, University of Oxford, Department of Education, SKOPE

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Warwick University, now at Cardiff, who has made very strong arguments criticising the whole Leitch thing, mainly because it looks as though there isn't a decline, really, in unskilled work. You still need people to clean and wash up and all those sorts of things, and they're not declining. Moreover, one of the problems is that we are producing more graduates than there are graduate jobs, and they are then descending and taking over the sort of work that, previously, non-graduates would be able to have. It is a much more complicated one—

Q45 Chairman: Could you let us have some notation of the research that you just mentioned?

Professor Pring: Yes. I will give it to you afterwards. It is SKOPE, a £15 million ESRC research centre.

Chairman: That's all good news. We'll be moving on. Helen?

Q46 Helen Southworth: Can I ask you about opportunities and aspirations. Bearing in mind the issues that you've raised, Rob, around short-term jobs and low-paid jobs, how much work has been done on segmentation to identify young people who are either underperforming against or not currently able to aspire to what they could achieve? How much work has been done around mechanisms for people within those segments to raise either their ambitions or their targeting of jobs?

Professor MacDonald: I will go back to a point made by Sue a few moments ago about the lack of understanding that we have within research communities these days about the labour market and how it works. That wasn't really the case about 20 years ago. There was at least as much interest in the way that the labour market functioned for young people, and the routes that they had through, as there was in just studying the unemployed or trying to understand them. We have much less understanding. For instance, there is a very powerful policy discourse which would say that the sorts of jobs that young people sometimes get—working behind bars, perhaps working in supermarkets—are entry-level jobs, and that the insecure “low pay, no pay” cycle that I talked about is jobs for young people, who will use them, step between them, gain experience and then move onwards and upwards in the labour market. That seems to be the state of play, but there is very little research that will actually show you whether it is true or not. That is one of the things that we have been trying to test in Teesside with our qualitative studies. Being able to follow the same individuals over time shows us that actually, the sorts of job that they were doing at 16 were the same as at 26. Current study follows them into their 30s and adds people who are now in their 40s and 50s as well. It shows that those notionally entry-level jobs actually comprise the whole labour market for some sections of workers. They are the sorts of job that last over time. I don't know of a lot of other research that actually comments or looks longitudinally over time at people's patterns of experience of that sort of employment. It is absolutely crucial that we have a greater understanding of and focus on labour market opportunities and segments. What I would

say, again, is that I can see a growing interest not just in welfare to work and moving people from NEET into jobs, but in trying to keep people in jobs with job retention and advancement schemes and so forth. That is a relatively small policy area at the moment, but I think it is an absolutely crucial one. It is about aspirations not only that young people should have, but what aspirations we should have for their sort of employment. It is crucial that the sort of jobs that they do will be here for ever. Those jobs are important: a cleaner, a carer or working in shops. What must we do to improve the quality of those jobs so that people can make lives and make advancements?

Professor Pring: A lot of work has gone into this, industry by industry, by SKOPE over the past 10 years. Such work is available. For example, the work skills survey in its answer to Leitch and lots of others gave a great deal of detail about what is happening in different industries. That is something with which I can easily put you in touch.

Q47 Chairman: But Richard, we want to know about research, but we also want to know why we do not get the information from Jobcentre Plus. The Department for Work and Pensions must put an enormous amount of money into finding out just the sort of thing that you are talking about in terms of research. What does Jobcentre Plus do, if not that?

Dr Maguire: We have to remember that our starting point is NEET young people who are 16 to 18. They do not come under the parameters of Jobcentre Plus. They are the responsibility of the Connexions service; Jobcentre Plus has no responsibility for under-19s. Connexions has been charged in recent years with the responsibility of tackling the NEET problem. It has not been charged with understanding the youth labour market. We are not talking about the labour market per se. Rob and I are saying that we do not understand about young people within the labour market, and that is where there is a dearth of research evidence.

Q48 Chairman: So you are telling me that the Department for Work and Pensions does not really look at people until they come into the 18-plus category, and that it is not interested in tracking NEETs and what happens to them over time.

Dr Maguire: Again, we have to look at the fact that most under-18s are not claimants, so they are not the responsibility of DWP. They are not in the claimant count, because they cannot claim jobseeker's allowance or income support.

Q49 Helen Southworth: The longitudinal studies seem to show the difference between the snapshot of a person being in or out of training, education or employment. The longitudinal one tells us the consequences over time of dropping out. Surely that must be the thing that matters. If it was a temporary six or eight months issue, it could be very significant for the individual who is experiencing it; but if it were something that they actually get over, move back into the market and up without it having had a negative impact, that is a different matter.

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Professor MacDonald: Yes.

Q50 Helen Southworth: We need to identify where such things cast a shadow into the future and mean that people consistently over time will underperform and underachieve. We must intervene appropriately so that they do not do that. That is the whole point. It is critical to find mechanisms that identify the difference between someone who has experienced a short-term impact that they will override because of other mechanisms.

Professor MacDonald: I completely agree.

Q51 Helen Southworth: We need to learn what mechanisms get people back on track.

Professor MacDonald: Yes. That's what I've been trying to say. We can each probably point to different examples of things that work. There are very good examples of that. Richard was talking about the importance of detached youth work with "hard-to-reach" young people. I stress again the importance of third, fourth and fifth opportunities for people to re-engage. One of the things that I have not said is, yes, while we talked earlier about educational disengagement for people in their teenage years, perhaps, it strikes us from our research how people change, and how they would be very keen to re-engage later on, perhaps when they are 22, 25 or 30. But the opportunity to do that might not be so clear. It is exactly as you say. We must try to avoid the longer-term impacts of things that happened to people at the end of their teens and early 20s.

Q52 Helen Southworth: So the flexibility's crucial?

Professor MacDonald: Yes.

Professor Quinn: Going back to the issue of aspirations, there are qualitative studies that look at young people, their perception of their lives and what they want to do with them, and one thing that comes out of that work is that people have desires and aspirations to do something significant, including helping others, working in a particular field, contributing to the community and learning meaningful skills that will get them the kind of job that they want to do and would enjoy doing. One issue is how we home in on those aspirations, wishes and desires and facilitate them, and people here have spoken about different things that can play a part in that. One is an holistic view of the young person, where you employ different agencies from the voluntary sector and so on to build up with that young person the things that they are able to do and want to do. For example, I talked about informal learning, and the young person might have lots of skills that they don't necessarily see as a pathway into work, but which could be built into a pathway into training and work. That kind of holistic vision is what is missing in the way that we work with these young people.

Dr Maguire: One example where an holistic approach to policy is being piloted is the activity agreement pilots that are operating in eight areas across England. Young people receive financial support, as well as intensive support from a PA, so we can pick up where they may wobble. They are

also offered intensive and personalised learning packages, and the young person and the adviser negotiate what the young person wants to do. It has been quite illuminating evaluating that policy. You might think that telling a young person, "You can do anything as long as you're engaging in some form of learning" will lead them to come up with crazy and really expensive learning or training options, but that hasn't been the case. Most of these young people, when asked what they want to do in terms of learning, say that they want to learn basic skills or to have some work experience. The personal adviser has a budget to purchase individualised packages of learning for the young person, who is given £30 a week for 20 weeks and allowed to stay on the programme for 30 weeks. The adviser can withdraw the payment if the young person doesn't turn up, but there is a constant source of support throughout the 20 weeks, and the young person obviously feels as though they are getting something that is particularly tailored to their needs.

Chairman: We'd like some more information on that pilot.

Dr Maguire: Yes, certainly.²

Q53 Chairman: It seems a little like something I once said to the Prime Minister. I teased him by saying that I wanted ordinary people such as those in the NEET category to have what people such as Graham have—a life coach and a personal trainer. Is this coming through the policy chain now?

Mr Stuart: You perform both those roles, Chairman.

Professor Pring: This is a terribly important question. As has been mentioned, there are all sorts of interventions and local initiatives around the country, which are geared to young people to keep them in learning and give them support. If you go to Lewisham college, for example, it has some wonderful schemes to bring young people on and so on. On Merseyside, there is "Preparation for Progress", which takes young people and tries to help them. So there are lots of schemes around, but again and again the problem is getting the funding. Immediately you try to bring them into mainstream funding arrangements, they hit targets that do not relate to them. What we have now is a culture in which the learners have to fit in with the qualification system, but it has to be the other way round: the qualifications have to fit in with what is seen as necessary for particular learners, and then we'll get somewhere. In all these different institutions, the real difficulty is that the funding streams do not enable some of these things to get going.

Dr Maguire: That's what the activity agreement is.

Q54 Helen Southworth: Can I turn the previous question upside down, in a way. In terms of segmenting, can you identify those groups or categories of young people who are most vulnerable within the process? If so, what work has been done with those young people as individuals to find out

² *Note by witness:* See Department for Children, Schools and Families, *Activity Agreements Evaluation: Synthesis Report*, November 2008.

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what their aspirations are, and how they can match up and develop transferable skills that will help them to move towards realising their aspirations?

Professor Pring: I think it would change from region to region, and from locality to locality. Where you have got good partnerships, such as the ones that I have mentioned, and where there is a real coming together of the youth service, the advice service, schools, colleges, the local university and so on, you will find an enormous amount of work going on that enables these young people to find the proper route through.

Q55 Helen Southworth: So, for example, what is being done for a group that you made reference to earlier—young women who have children or who are pregnant?

Dr Maguire: There is the “care to learn” initiative, in which young people are given supported transition back into learning, and which covers child care costs. I think that the activity agreement is a good example of policy that looks at particularly vulnerable groups of young people; rather than saying, “You belong to that group, or that group,” it is about identifying a core group of vulnerable young people. However, the policy is delivered on the individual, so the starting point is that the young person negotiates with the adviser what they actually want to do. As Richard said, it is not about fitting people into existing patterns of learning. It is saying, “We will get you whatever you want to do, and we will sort that out.”

Q56 Helen Southworth: But how are we feeding in what is being learned from that process about the barriers and the variety of things that those young people want to do? How is that being fed into the policy and the decision-making process?

Dr Maguire: Well, the scheme is subject to national evaluation, and we have produced reports on an annual basis for three years. That is feeding into the planning for raising the participation age. It is an active pilot policy.

Chairman: Helen, can I hold you there a moment. I did a dreadful thing and jumped from the second section of our questions to the fourth section, and poor Annette has been left out in the cold. I am going to bring her back into the warmth of our discussions. We will look at policy approaches so far, and then Graham, Helen, and anyone else can come in, after poor Annette has had a chance.

Q57 Annette Brooke: Thank you. May I just pick up on the “care to learn” point. Obviously, we are focusing on a specific age group, but the “care to learn” situation seems to highlight the fact that we need to look at a wider age range. It has been pointed out to me that somebody who has had a baby as a teenager will probably not get back fully into whatever they want to do until they are over 19, and at that point they do not get any assistance with their child care costs. Taking that as one example, are we doing enough to look across a wider age range? I would imagine that for many people, such as those who have been alienated from school, things might

just take longer; they might not instantly fit into these programmes that you are suggesting for the 14-to-19 group.

Professor MacDonald: I think you are absolutely right—sorry, I don’t know if that question was put to me, or not.

Annette Brooke: It is to anybody.

Professor MacDonald: It is almost accepted wisdom now, I would say, within the youth research field, that the 16-to-19 phase does not equate with youth or with youth transitions, and it has passed its day. Most research programmes that get funded, for instance, will look at the 16-to-25 period. There is general acceptance that the youth phase—the movement from being a young person to being an adult—has become more extended over time, more complicated, more risky and so forth. So I think you are absolutely right. That is not just about issues to do with when people might complete their full-time education or get their firmest foothold on the labour market; it is to do with parenting as well. All these markers of movements to adulthood are being pushed up the age range for most young people.

Professor Quinn: I think the other issue is that the young people themselves have internalised this idea that they are a lost cause if they go past 19 and they have not got themselves sorted out. In the research that I have done, for example, one person said, “I now know that I’d like to do engineering, but I’m too old at 19.” There has been such an emphasis on that period of time that it has created a culture where people feel that if they have not sorted themselves out by that time, they are on the scrapheap. Also, there isn’t really an infrastructure to support, help and encourage people to come back into education when they are older. The kinds of advice and funding that are available for people aged 14 to 19 are not there for them when they are older. The system does not really facilitate flexible lifelong learning, and that is what we should be thinking about—the lifelong learning of everybody across the age ranges, not just what happens to young people at this stage.

Chairman: Very good point. Does Richard want to come in?

Professor Pring: Take the information, advice and guidance service, or IAG; in many ways, it has lots of faults and is not as comprehensive as it should be, but at least it exists, although really only for those up to the age of 18. People beyond that stage really do not have the kind of infrastructure that enables them to go back and get appropriate advice and so on. When you reach the age of 18, you drop off quite a few lists, as it were.

Q58 Annette Brooke: Is that an area that needs urgent attention, as far as policy makers are concerned?

Professor Pring: The IAG or—

Annette Brooke: I think you have talked about the IAG generally, but a number of initiatives apply to people aged up to 25, for example.

Professor Pring: Obviously, the more that this NEET category—if we can still use that word—extends up, the more the mechanism for giving support and so on ought to be extended. One thing

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that one learns from a lot of these young people is that there is a need for much more tailor-made support—learning support, seeing them and so on. If that particular category shifts up the age range, quite clearly that support ought to be extended, yes.

Q59 Annette Brooke: Will increasing the participation age partly add to the shifting-up of the age group?

Professor Pring: The increase in the participation age for education or training in some form or another, which was envisaged way back in 1918—it is taking a long time for us to get there—is very good in theory. However, unless there is good-quality, work-based learning available—there is not enough of it now to have the national apprenticeships scheme that the Chairman has been talking about—it is very difficult to know how it can be meaningful. I am talking about making sure that everybody is engaged in education and training in some form or another up to the age of 18. There really has to be a focus on preparing good-quality, work-based learning opportunities for all young people before that can work.

Q60 Annette Brooke: May I just look back for a moment. I jumped ahead of myself; I wanted to pick up one of my bugbears about “care to learn”. Obviously, we have had a raft of policy initiatives over the last 10 years. You have mentioned one or two successful interventions, but if you were preparing a report card for the Government on policy in this area, what assessment would you make of the various policies, and can you identify some that might get a “good”?

Chairman: Let us start with Jocey on that. A report card—we have just dealt with report cards in a previous inquiry, but a report card sounds good.

Professor Quinn: I think the problem is that some of the policy that is trying to address the needs of young people whom you might classify as NEET is countermanded by other policies that create the NEETs in the first place. For example, parental choice in respect of schooling has a big impact on creating inequalities in the schools system. That means that a lot of these young people end up in schools that are not well resourced, where they are not succeeding. That, to me, has a massive impact on producing NEETs.

Q61 Chairman: That’s a bit woolly, though, with great respect, Jocey. Come on. There must be, in this plethora of policies that we have seen, some good ones, in schools as well. Where is the “joined-upness” in this?

Professor Quinn: You want me to identify a specific policy that I—

Q62 Chairman: Well, we have just looked at the school system, including the national curriculum, testing and assessment and accountability. Some pretty hard criticisms were made, and I want you to draw them out and say whether it is down to testing and assessment or targets. What is it? Do they produce NEETs?

Professor Quinn: Well, I think that the testing—the SATs—the streaming of young people, and the weeding out of some people and putting them on to foundation level at GCSEs do have an impact and help to create NEETs. Many of the problems are structural. They are long-term problems to do with poverty and unemployment. In a way, simple policy cannot easily redress those problems, so tinkering around the system is not necessarily the answer.

Q63 Chairman: Okay, Richard, tinkering?

Professor Pring: I would say five out of 10, if you wanted a score.

Chairman: Nine out of 10.

Professor Pring: Five out of 10. You see some very good things. Did I not hear you mention the time to develop a national apprenticeship scheme? That is good. I give them 10 out of 10 for trying, but not nearly so good for ensuring that there is good quality work-based learning that enables such a scheme to make sense. The word “apprenticeship” remains the same, but the concept has changed. The target culture has made the system more accountable than it used to be in many respects. On the other hand, it has distorted some of the learning that goes on, especially for the most vulnerable people. For example, the foundation learning tier has been cobbled together with lots of other bits that bear no relationship to the particular learning needs of these most vulnerable young people. We heard David Chaytor referring to the much improved examination results and so on which is highly commendable. On the other hand, we have also seen a real undermining of practical learning, which is the main way in which many young people come to learn and the way in which many want to carry on learning in the future. Take GNVQ for example. For many young people, it was supposed to be built on a much more practical kind of learning, but how do you assess it? You make them sit examinations. You show that you can do something by writing essays about how you do it. The partnerships are absolutely crucial here. Encouraging partnerships has been a great innovation by the Labour Government, but other aspects of this policy militate against partnerships, namely fragmentation of the system—different admissions, funding and governance arrangements. There are some very good initiatives, and then other things that run counter to them.

Q64 Chairman: You totally left out diplomas and the expansion of apprenticeships.

Professor Pring: In many respects, if you take the diplomas, there is a real effort to say, “Look, there is this area where young people ought to be able to learn in an occupationally related way.” I don’t necessarily mean a vocational way. On the other hand, one found it very difficult to know how to reconcile that with some very good BTEC courses. One could also say that some of the diploma courses have been praised very highly by many of the schools that are undertaking them, but there are some diplomas—it depends on the particular line of the diploma—where there isn’t the kind of practical engagement that is supposed to be the essence of the

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system, because of the problems in the construction industry and in hairdressing and in other such occupations.

Chairman: Rob, you haven't yet filled in your report card on this.

Professor MacDonald: Goodness me. I won't pretend to be expert enough to do a full-scale evaluation across the board—as Richard has—and give marks for particular policies. I will say just two or three things. Jocey's answer wasn't woolly; it was correct.

Chairman: It was only me who said that it was woolly. That was to stimulate her; it was not to be rude.

Professor MacDonald: If we look at the life stories of the people in our research, pre-16 education is the biggest social policy investment that they will get. For most of them to emerge at 16—to use their words—“not feeling bothered about by my school” says something about how things have not changed. When you are an academic, it is great and useful to be able to report how things do change. It is a bit dull and a bit odd when you find that things do not change. There is a famous book in sociology of education called *Learning to Labour* by Paul Willis, going back to the early '70s.

Chairman: Paul who?

Professor MacDonald: Paul Willis. It looked at education for working-class boys, working-class lads, in schools in Wolverhampton in the early '70s. Some of the commentaries from the people in my study in 1990 to 2000 were word for word the same, about the relevance of school, how school wasn't for them, how teachers disrespected them, etc. That is quite hard to hear; especially if one is a supporter of the sorts of policy agendas that have been put in place. So that would be my first comment—that there are issues about social class, and inequalities, and poverty, which no matter the sort of range of policy initiatives we are thinking about, are very difficult to shift and change. Now; that might be woolly. The second point—a small thing. I think EMAs were a good thing—educational maintenance allowances; I don't know whether my colleagues would agree, but I just saw the actual practical benefit to individual young people in our research sites, who would not have stayed on but did stay on, because actually the material necessity of having income of £30 a week actually enabled them to stay on. So I would say that that was a positive development. I think a very positive development, which had potential but was a bit short-lived, perhaps, was the personal adviser role encapsulated within the Connexions service. Some of the work of personal advisers was fantastic in bringing together the range of resources and support for young people who often face various crises in their lives. So, I would pick out for commendation the personal adviser role in the Connexions service, which was a very good development, and the educational maintenance allowance.

Dr Maguire: I would endorse the EMA as a major success. I think we can quickly forget the chaos that existed, or the lack of financial support that was available for 16 to 19-year-olds prior to its

introduction. It was at the whim, the discretion, of local authorities to give young people funding, and I think that has transformed the landscape. I think that policy has built on that. The cross-government review that looked at financial support came forward with the activity agreements, which built on financial support and said, “For NEET young people let's have intensive support and tailored learning.” Where support has been absent for post-16 young people, there's been too much concentration on driving of post-16 education participation rates, at the expense of supporting young people who go into the labour market outside of apprenticeships. They have been a neglected population. I also think that there has been a lack of support and a lack of tracking for young people who fall out of learning. There is no requirement for training providers or colleges to instruct Connexions advisers when young people leave learning. There is too much focus on entry; and those young people are left, and become NEET. We could do a lot more to catch young people as they fall out, and there is a lot of work to do there. Finally, I think that more could have been done to prevent young people falling out of school before the age of 16. There are far too many young people that I have interviewed who have never been to school regularly since the age of 13 and 14, and they became a hidden population as well.

Q65 Annette Brooke: I am aware that it is very late, but I actually wanted to just dig a little bit on the effectiveness of Connexions. Clearly it has changed, and I just wonder if you have any comments. My feeling was, in its earlier days, in some ways it was actually pushing out some of the youth work that should have been there; and I'm not sure that that very good youth work that you've referred to has all been set up again. So if we could just have a brief comment on the effectiveness of Connexions.

Chairman: Let's reverse the order. We'll start with Sue and move back across.

Dr Maguire: At this point, I should make a confession. I used to be a careers adviser before I was a researcher. I had had very little contact with Connexions before I was charged with responsibility for evaluating the activity agreements. I did not particularly think that Connexions was a good brand—I was an old careers officer and I was not quite sure what they were trying to do—but I must say from my experience that I have been very impressed by the work that I have seen. Connexions advisers work very hard with young people and offer a lot of individual guidance and support. The problem is that Connexions has now been pushed around too much. They went through a very unstable position of being moved back into local authorities. I know from my own work that Connexions advisers feel vulnerable within the local authority model, because they do not think that they will be important enough within that agenda. It is critical that we preserve information, advice and guidance services within local authorities, and that the services that Connexions provides are protected. On the downside, I think that Connexions focused

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far too much, perhaps, on the NEETs group and neglected people in mainstream learning and employment, but I do not think that was their fault. That was the dictate that they were given.

Professor Pring: With Connexions, the only point that really emerged as far as we were concerned was the constant changing of function and so on, which made it a very unstable organisation in terms of who was responsible for what and so on. To repeat that point, they were required to focus particularly on more vulnerable people, which left a lot of gaps in support for other people. I have said again and again that it is important to have a good information, advice and guidance service. A lot of young people in schools do not get access to it, in so far as the sort of advice that they get in schools is very knowledgeable about university entry and that kind of thing, but there will not be a great deal of knowledge about local employment opportunities, apprenticeships and that kind of thing, such that that itself gets in the way of young people being able to move into the kind of employment that would give them satisfaction and enable them to see into the future. Connexions has not been able to provide that service. It is not extensive enough. Much more investment needs to be put into it.

Professor Quinn: The research project that I talked about before was conducted in collaboration with Connexions, so it had an opportunity to reflect on their work and see the positive and negative sides. One thing that came out was the difficulty of the job that they had even reaching a lot of young people and staying in contact with them. It is a very difficult job. Some Connexions advisers did, in the words of the young people, really help them, take them on board as people and understand where they were at, but they tended to be the Connexions advisers who went beyond their remit and spent some of their own time invested in the young people. For the majority of the advisers, it seemed that they were under such pressure to produce targets that it was very difficult for them to give the kind of holistic advice that was needed. Another issue that I have alluded to is the propensity of careers and Connexions staff to be rather stereotyped in the advice that they give people, channelling people into directions that they think are appropriate but are not necessarily what the young person wants. That is an issue. One thing that definitely emerged is that young people need information, advice and guidance. There is no doubt about it. They are vulnerable in lots of ways, and they need people who really understand the opportunities and problems that they face. More resource, better resource and better links across the system are imperative.

Professor MacDonald: I won't add very much. Many good youth workers got recruited into the Connexions service. The Connexions service was in opposition and felt that it was taking over the careers service and the youth service, so it was getting it from both sides. The only observation I would make is that, from talking to personal advisers and others who worked in the Connexions service, they seemed to spend an inordinate amount of their time ensuring that the NEET statistic in their area was below a

particular percentage, rather than actually talking to and working with young people. They always seemed to be obsessed with that policy target, of reducing it from whatever it was—from 14% to 13%. If we got it to 13%, that was a success for the locality, but if it was 14%, it wasn't. So lots of time was spent on the phone ringing around trying to ensure that a person was on the course—or not—rather than actually doing proper work with young people.

Chairman: You have been very patient with us. A quick question from Graham.

Q66 Mr Stuart: A return to my earlier question. How accurate are the data on NEETs?

Professor MacDonald: I don't know is the short answer. I presume they are reasonably accurate.

Q67 Mr Stuart: No reason to believe that they are not. You can normally triangulate with groups. If you want to find children, you would see who has claimed child benefit and see if there are discrepancies. It is fairly straightforward. If they are not claiming on DWP—under 18—how do we know who they are? This has also come up because of home educators, where there is said to be a high number of NEETs, but the numbers look a bit flaky.

Professor Pring: As far as we were concerned—the Nuffield review—we just depend on the DCSF statistics, so it is a question of whether you think they are true or not.

Dr Maguire: The NEET statistics are based on CCIS data, which is managed by Connexions. It has been a major preoccupation for them in recent years. They are tracking NEET young people on a very regular basis.

Q68 Chairman: Who is doing that?

Dr Maguire: Connexions. It is the CCIS data.

Professor MacDonald: More of an issue than how accurate is the headline figure is which sub-groups comprise that headline figure; and what percentages are in those would be a much more difficult thing to try to map, but not impossible.

Dr Maguire: They do that. I am quite confident about the statistics.

Q69 Mr Stuart: Female NEETs—has anyone looked at their propensity to have children? Is there a high correlation between being NEET and being a teenage mother?

Dr Maguire: I think there is a disproportionate number of young women who are NEET and are teenage parents.

Professor Pring: Out of 187,000 people who are NEET, I think 20,000 are either pregnant or already have children. So it is a very large proportion of the women who are NEET. Which happens first? Do they become NEET because they are young mothers? Or are they NEET and therefore become young mothers? I do not know. It needs to be looked into.

Mr Stuart: There is a high correlation between women who have no qualifications—none whatever—and having children in their teenage years.

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Q70 Helen Southworth: I have a question that doesn't follow, but about which I am curious. What works to identify aspirations for a young person that translates into applications for an appropriate job or an appropriate course, or for an appropriate college place?

Professor Pring: This will be different once again depending on the partnerships there are. You could go to particular partnerships where, right from the very beginning, at the age of 11 and 12, as part of the curriculum people are already thinking about these matters, seeing where there is a need for a different mode of learning and making sure that is offered, particularly through the local college of further education and so on. "Know thyself" becomes part of the school curriculum. There are many areas where that simply is not the case. There is good practice and no practice.

Q71 Helen Southworth: Is there a correlation between poor practice—or whatever phrase you want to use—on that issue and people becoming a NEET and being out of the system? Is there a correlation between not knowing how to—or not receiving advice about how to—identify what you want to do and how to apply for it?

Professor MacDonald: It absolutely must be the case. It's almost common sense, isn't it?

Q72 Helen Southworth: If you learn how to apply for something, are you more likely to succeed?

Professor MacDonald: But what there is available to apply for is also important. Recurrently, the young people in our research will tell us, "Well, I had a very quick—five-minute, if that—discussion with somebody. Was it a careers person? I don't know. It was somebody who said that I could go on this youth training scheme or that youth training scheme". That was the sense of the range of options that they were offered. If you're male, it was motor mechanics or painting and decorating, or construction. If you're female, it was business administration or beauty therapy. That was the sense of the world of options that was offered to them.

Q73 Helen Southworth: I am asking because I am trying to work out in my head whether there is a narrative, which is like, "If you teach a person to fish, they can feed themselves". If you teach a person to identify what they'd like to do and how to go for it, does that make a difference in the longitudinal success? If they're out of a job, can they find how to get another one? I ask that, because that's actually what we need to do, isn't it? It's not just about—

Professor Pring: There is quite a lot of evidence to show that a lot of people, because they haven't been given that advice, don't know what to do and then they possibly go along to a further education college, on to a course that they don't know anything about, and there is a very considerable drop-out from those Level 2 courses, precisely because it isn't what they want but it was what was available or it was what they were told to do. Now, how far you can generalise that—you've got to talk to people in the colleges, really, and they will say this. It certainly

comes across from our data on the Rathbone-Nuffield work. How you actually quantify that, I just don't know, but certainly there is enough anecdotal evidence, as it were, coming from the interviews with young people, and so on, to show that there isn't this in-depth understanding of a young person and what their aspirations are, and what they are likely to find satisfaction and pleasure in, in terms of work. In fact, they all go into the wrong courses and they will eventually drop out at some stage.

Q74 Chairman: Richard, you can be as good as you like, but some of the evidence that you have given us earlier—all four of you, in a sense—shows that perhaps some of these young people's estimation of what is available is pretty accurate, and what is available is not very much in some parts of our country. I remember that the last time we had a major recession, I used to say to people, mischievously—they were usually unemployed graduates—"Go and live in Reading." There were 365 employment agencies in Reading and it was the constituency with the highest rate of employment in the country. Isn't lack of mobility one of the key problems that NEETs face? People have said to me or to this Committee in the past, "Well, the wonderful thing about national service was every boy who could see or walk went into the national service and travelled." Now, is there not something about mobility that we are missing here?

Professor Quinn: Yes, I think there is something about mobility, in that a lot of these young people feel unable to move outside of their very local area, or even perhaps outside of the few streets that they live in, and that has a knock-on effect, obviously, on their ability to see what possibilities might exist for them. However, going back to an earlier point, there is definitely a lack of people working with them in a very systematic way to think about what they want to do and what they could do. Part of that is the problem of time that we talked about before—that people are churned through the system very quickly, expected to make these decisions about where they should go and they feel as if they're on a treadmill. A lot of them are either going into courses and dropping out or seeing their friends do that and so they say, "Well, that's not for me, I'm not going to do that". So there isn't that space and there isn't that culture of thinking, "Well, they deserve a time of reflection". I think that's very different from some of the expectations that we have for certain other young people, who are possibly allowed to have a gap year and to think about what they want to do, and they are resourced to do that; whereas with these young people, no, they are expected to just go on.

Q75 Chairman: Well, middle-class young people are a mobile generation, aren't they? They usually go to the university furthest away from their home—if they've got any sense.

Professor Pring: Just a quick point on that. What was very revealing about the Nuffield/Rathbone stuff was how many people in some of the inner cities—particularly in London—would not even shift to another postcode, because they were

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frightened of doing so or frightened of the gangs. It surprised me that if you offered a youth service and said, "There's a terrific youth club up the road," they would say no because it was out of their territory. That is not an insignificant thing in terms of mobility in some of the inner cities. When it came to some of the mining areas in the north-east and so on, mobility would depend on a decent transport system, and if there wasn't a transport system, people wouldn't be able to move. In other cases, they wouldn't be able to afford it. So this is a real problem. If people come from a family culture where travelling outside your area is regarded as not appropriate or dangerous, or where it is not the sort of thing that people have ever done, that is really something to overcome.

Professor MacDonald: There are many complicated reasons for place attachment, if we can look at it that way, but there are also many good things about it. If young people feel loyal to their communities and part of them, we might want to support that. So it is not just a negative thing. The other thing I would say is that we put these questions directly to our interviewees. We asked them, "Why didn't you go down to London?" They would say, "Well, I did try. I didn't know a soul." The point was made earlier that people got jobs in almost every case through people they knew; Jobcentre Plus didn't work, restart schemes didn't work and job clubs didn't work—they were daft. You get work through people you know. People would tell us, "If I go down there, I won't know anybody. How will I get a job?" Of course, there are answers that you can give to that, but there can be quite complicated social practices, which aren't just stupid or bad, behind why young people and adults feel quite strong place attachment.

Q76 Chairman: One thing has not come out of this session, although it has been an excellent session, and I can't see any difference between what a certain person called good universities and the other universities. You have all been fantastic, and I resent this idea of good universities and other universities. **Mr Stuart:** We've picked up on that.

Chairman: Perhaps I can stop winding Graham up. There's one thing you haven't given us. We are going to the Netherlands for a couple of days to have a look at the issue of NEETs, because we understand that they are more successful over there than we are. We are going to talk to some policy makers.

Mr Stuart: Better academics over there.

Chairman: Can I just push you on one thing. Let's strip out the Nordic countries, and the Committee knows how irritated I get when people talk about Finland. You've talked about countries like ours, such as France, Germany, Spain, Italy and the United States, and they have the same problem that

we have; in fact, from my knowledge of the United States and France, it is probably worse there. Are they doing things better or worse than us, or are we talking about a general, big, urban problem of former industrial nations? Where can we learn whether it is?

Professor Pring: In the States, things may be very different in Pennsylvania and certain areas of Chicago, for example; once again, it's very difficult to generalise. Obviously, the States have had a tradition of everybody being expected to stay on to get their certificate.

Q77 Chairman: Yes, Richard, but you know that loads of kids drop out by 14 and 15 in American cities.

Professor Pring: Yes, but none the less, the norm would be seen to be to stay on until 18, which has not been the case here, so it is a different thing. But I just do not know what the figures are in the United States, although I go there occasionally.

Q78 Chairman: What about France, Germany and Italy? What about the big European countries?

Professor MacDonald: I'm sorry. We're not very good on these international comparisons.

Q79 Chairman: Do you know anyone who is?

Professor MacDonald: I would be very surprised if their rates of NEET did not quite closely reflect the rates of adult unemployment.

Q80 Chairman: We are going to see the OECD. Would they be able to give us this information?

Professor MacDonald: Yes.

Q81 Chairman: It is something that interests me, and we discussed it in Committee. We like to learn from international experience. For example, Dr Maguire, you mentioned Australia.

Dr Maguire: Yes, and the Australian youth allowance. We flirted with the idea of having a youth allowance here on the back of EMAs. Certainly we've learned lessons from the Australian model.

Chairman: It was very unfair of me to bounce that question at you, but the fact is that it is only the beginning of the inquiry. Once we have you in our grip, we shan't let you go. You can go home tonight—suitably tagged, of course. Would you remain in touch with us? It is a shortish inquiry, but an important one, and we want to get it out before the election. If you think of any questions that we should have asked or questions that you should have answered differently, will you keep in touch? If you suddenly have an inspiration about the international comparison or anything else, please let us know. Thanks again. You have been very patient.

Wednesday 27 January 2010

Members present

Mr Barry Sheerman (Chairman)

Annette Brooke
Paul Holmes

Mr Graham Stuart
Mr Edward Timpson

Memorandum submitted by the Private Equity Foundation

1. The Private Equity Foundation (PEF) is pleased to provide evidence to the Select Committee as part of its inquiry into young people not in education, training or employment. The Private Equity Foundation is a leading venture philanthropy fund that works with carefully selected charities to empower young people to reach their full potential.

2. The Private Equity Foundation has developed a model of engaged philanthropy. Since its creation in 2006, PEF has secured the backing of over 70 private equity firms and their advisers, including banks, law firms, accountancy firms, consultants and search firms. Its investments address the NEET issue and include not just money but also pro bono expertise from the private equity community. By sharing its members' business skills, PEF can maximise the social return on its donors' investments and help charities achieve a step change in their impact to ensure even more young people benefit.

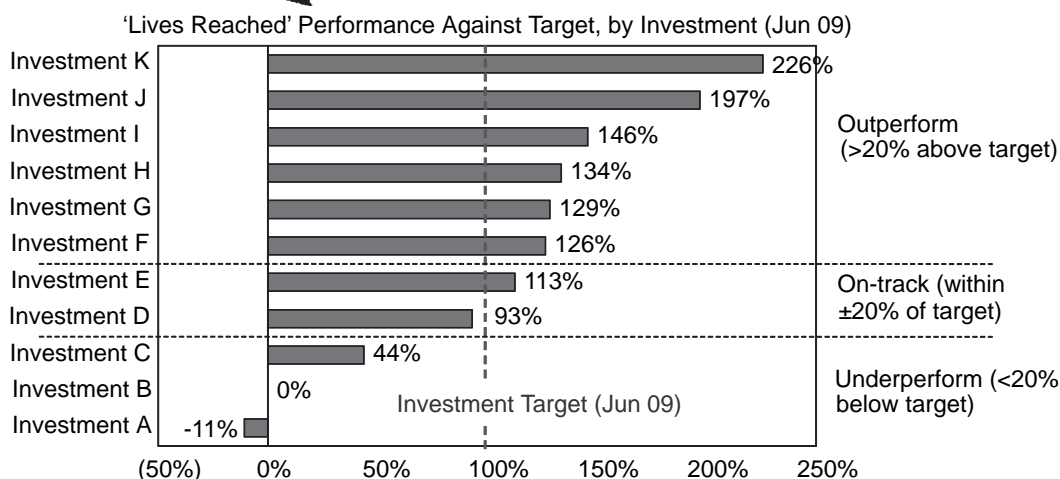
3. Over the past three years we have invested in 17 charities (see annex 1) blending together practical third sector experience with rigorous enquiry about what can help young people reach their full potential. Alongside this, the Private Equity Foundation has funded research into effective policy interventions to address the NEET issue (see annex 2) which has allowed us to consider further what actions need to be taken to tackle the issue effectively.

PEF has had a unique experience in the last three years bringing together business people with the third sector to scale up effective interventions to tackle the NEET issue

4. The Private Equity Foundation searches and evaluates high potential charities; grants funding, agrees priorities and creates partnerships; supports and grows the charity and increases social value. This has led to a significant increase in the reach of the charities in our portfolio as Exhibit 1 below exemplifies.

Exhibit 1

The majority of our investments are meeting or beating targets set for incremental children and young people helped by services



Note: 'Lives reached' is a proxy for investment return. This analysis is intended as an indicative, rather than as a definitive, assessment of investment performance.

PEF believes that there are four key areas that need to be focused on

- We need to create a robust and effective voluntary sector.

Following rigorous analysis, a handful of effective interventions need to be invested in and scaled up across the country. The Private Equity Foundation is working towards such an approach.

- There is no silver bullet—only an integrated approach will cater for the needs of NEETs.

All services for NEETs—such as the education system, careers advisers, social services, the health service and other services—all need to be working in conjunction to create a personalised service to NEET young people.

- Any approach has to be simple and one that is intelligible to NEET young people.

Many NEETs struggle with even the most basic tasks as many have poor literacy and numeracy levels. It is essential that young people have access to support services that they can understand and engage with, rather than the myriad of fragmented offers they currently face. A NEET service navigator would help young people find their way around the support services available to them and help them see the relevance of these to their lives.

- Current rising youth unemployment must not be neglected.

Given the inter-generational nature of worklessness, the current cohort of young people who become unemployed in this recession will be the parents of future NEETs. With over one million young people currently NEET, urgent action is needed to avoid long lasting effects—incentives for employers need to be considered.

The business sector is vital to address the NEET issue and support NEETs

5. There is no set of people better placed to engage with unemployed young people than those who can offer them employment opportunities, act as role models and give their skills voluntarily. Bringing together the business community and charities ensures that charities understand the employability skills businesses expect and young people need. The business community can also drive forward the charity sector to develop effective interventions and maximise the impact of their programmes to more young people.

Working with 17 charities alongside funding in depth research has helped PEF develop a knowledge base of what works. It is clear that:

- Early intervention is key.

Whether it is getting young people to school or improving their literacy and numeracy, to have real impact early intervention is needed. Raising the participation age will not in itself help address the NEET issue as many young people have already become disengaged by 16 and could be further alienated by being compelled to participate.

- Supporting young people to act as role models to help the NEETs of tomorrow could have a large impact.

PEF is currently investing in a start up charity called City Year. This is a gap year type programme, modelled on the US City Year programme. It will train young volunteers to go into schools and mentor young people. This brings together young people from a variety of backgrounds and gives young people at school, particularly those at risk of being NEET, role models they can relate to and be inspired by.

- Intervening to help teenage pregnancy is essential.

Supporting young parents will help the future generation of NEETs, who are likely to come from parents who themselves have been NEET.

- Interventions are needed at a community level.

Young people are more likely to become NEET in areas with high unemployment and low aspiration. Therefore, a holistic approach is essential in bringing together children, parents, families and communities to tackle the issue. This will create 2 for 1 benefits leading to a positive impact on our communities.

- Helping young people understand the world of work as early as possible is vital.

Young people from poor disadvantaged backgrounds with a history of unemployment have no opportunity to experience work or meet role models who are engaged in work. As a result, employers have a huge role to play in addressing this and schools must embrace the inspiration that connection with the world of work and the business community can have on the lives of young people. Introducing young people to the world of work is as important at primary school as it is at secondary school.

These lessons have also been borne out by the research we have funded:

- *IPPR “Youth Tracker” (2009)*—brings together evidence, statistics and opinions from experts on the issue of NEETs in the recession. Experts have highlighted that the recession will create more parental unemployment, stress and family breakdown leading to further NEET young people and pressures on services. With fierce competition for jobs, it has also been suggested that volunteering and publically funded employment must be considered.
- *Matrix “Wasted Potential” (2008)*—the causes behind young people becoming NEET range from education experience to family and home life, social relationships, socio-economic circumstances and psychological factors. Researchers found that there were a variety of reasons for young people becoming NEET. Some choose to opt out by taking a gap year, others struggled academically (often with basic skills), others face major obstacles such as homelessness, substance abuse or are carers and others, for example, due to the recession have not been able to find education, training or employment opportunities.
- *Demos “A stitch in Time: tackling educational disengagement” (2009)*—the interim report findings highlights that early intervention is vital. The key interventions that need to be focused on are around core academic skills of literacy, numeracy, speaking and communication, social and emotional competencies, building aspiration, supporting parents and focus on what we are offering children and young people to engage with inside and outside school
- *Demos “Service Nation” (2009)* found a national civic service could deliver significant benefits including lower dropping out rates, better academic outcomes, higher levels of engagement in schools, improved social skills and improved employability skills. To achieve this a lifecycle approach is needed with service learning at school, as well as support for young people to undertake national civic service for a year. 18–24 year olds receiving Job Seekers Allowance, undergraduates and employees should also be able to participate in shorter service opportunities.

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Annex 1

THE PRIVATE EQUITY FOUNDATION CHARITIES

- Volunteer Reading Help
- Community Links
- The Place2Be
- NSPCC
- Women for Women International
- Leap Confronting Conflict
- IntoUniversity
- Fairbridge
- School-Home Support
- Skill Force
- Tomorrows People
- Every Child a Chance Trust
- Vital Regeneration
- Hamburger Hauptschulmodell
- ProjektFabrik
- SchlaU
- City Year

Annex 2

LINKS TO WEBSITE

IPPR—Youth Tracker

<http://www.ippr.org.uk/members/download.asp?f=%2Fecomm%2Ffiles%2Fyouth%5Ftracker%5Fissue1%2Epdf>

<http://www.ippr.org.uk/publicationsandreports/publication.asp?id=714>

Matrix “Wasted Potential”

http://www.privateequityfoundation.org/fileadmin/user_upload/fullreport.pdf

Demos “A stitch in Time: tackling educational disengagement”

http://www.demos.co.uk/files/Demos_stitch_in_time_report_C.pdf?1243336176

Demos Service Nation

http://www.privateequityfoundation.org/fileadmin/templates/main/uploads/media/Service_Nation_EM_BARGOED_6_12_09.pdf

Memorandum submitted by Rathbone**BACKGROUND**

Rathbone is a national charity which engaged with over 15,000 young people aged 14–24 last year; a significant proportion of whom were NEET before coming to Rathbone.

Rathbone has a successful track record of working with disadvantaged and disengaged young people over many years; prior to coming to us most have poor attainment; personal and social barriers to learning; are subject to supervision by the youth justice system; are from care backgrounds and suffer the effects of poverty.

Our core programmes of learning are focused on youth training linked to employability and skills. In recent years this has been focused on the Entry to Employment Scheme (E2E) and Apprenticeships.

Rathbone has developed strong collaborative relationships with partners across the sectors including: government departments (DCSF, DWP, Home Office, Office of the Third Sector), Youth Justice Board, Ofsted, local authorities, colleges and schools, as well as national and local third sector organisations.

COMMENTS

Rathbone is pleased to respond to this inquiry and welcomes the opportunity to offer comments and suggestions to help to reduce the number of young people who are NEET. The voluntary sector generally has a good track record in designing and delivering successful and sustainable NEET reduction strategies. Rathbone’s work has been particularly fruitful in this area, initially through the Neighbourhood Support Fund (NSF) and more recently working with local authorities and charitable foundations to target and reduce the number of young people who are NEET. We have been very effective at reducing NEET figures with sustainable progressions into employment or continued training or education. Rathbone has been the subject of several DCSF research visits and evaluations focused on our work to reduce young people NEET.

There is cross-party support for the benefits the third sector can bring to youth and training provision, and wide recognition of the cost and other delivery advantages of third sector provision. In this very difficult area, the third sector is a unique resource to develop relationships with young people and to respond and provide support in a way that statutory organisations cannot. Young people who are NEET have highly specialist needs. The ability to provide genuine, successful support to them does exist—in large part in national voluntary organisations.

We would like to take this opportunity to highlight a serious concern that is felt across the voluntary sector concerning 14–19 reforms from next April. The transition of responsibility for funding from the LSC to local authorities is a significant shift in commissioning and delivery, requiring capacity building in both local government and the third sector. Rathbone, for instance, focuses staff on front line provision, enabled by central commissioning. There is a very real danger that in the transition the voluntary sector will not maintain its current level of participation in NEET reduction work, meaning a “dip” in the quantity and quality of provision. We are pleased that LSC contracts will be rolled over until April 2011, but during this time serious attention needs to be given to transitional support arrangements for national voluntary organisations to enable them to respond to this national policy shift. Local authorities have support through the React programme.

National voluntary organisations will need to restructure and re-build their regional LSC relationships with individual local authorities to maintain the level of provision currently available to young people; this will require additional infrastructure support. Rathbone recommends a phased process, supported over three years. The establishment of a working group, involving national providers, to assess how voluntary organisations should be supported is essential to this process. This could be developed from the existing DCSF third sector advisory group of which Rathbone is a member.

STRATEGIES FOR THE IDENTIFICATION OF YOUNG PEOPLE AT RISK OF FALLING INTO NEET CATEGORY

There is a significant amount of evidence to confirm that the earlier intervention for young people at risk of being NEET takes place the more effective it is. This view is supported by the work Rathbone has undertaken with schools and with young people who are at risk of dropping out of school. Interventions after a young person has left school are too late; earlier on they are more disposed to engage with support, advice and guidance. Moreover, it is far easier to re-motivate and encourage a young person when they are in school, before they have become NEET, exposed to risky behaviours or to potential offending lifestyles. It is the view of Rathbone that considerably more work needs to be happening in school in years 9, 10 and intensively in year 11 with those young people identified as being at risk.

Early signs of disengagement include low attendance, limited progress and achievement and poor behaviour. Risk factors include: care responsibilities, health and mental health issues, learning disabilities and bullying. Rathbone has developed an in-reach model in schools which allows support to be tailored to individual needs and extended seamlessly into the community for young people at risk.

Services and programmes to support those most at risk of becoming NEET, and to reduce the numbers and address the needs of those who have become persistently NEET.

Interventions that work with young people who are NEET must also target and work with young people categorised as Unknowns, ie known to have left school but cannot be tracked.

Rathbone and the Nuffield Foundation recently carried out a year long piece of research, the Engaging Youth Enquiry into young people who are NEET, a copy of our report's Executive Summary is enclosed as an appendix.¹ We interviewed over 500 young people who were NEET. The key finding from this research was that short term interventions that do not lead to further learning or employment were highly demotivating and encourage "churn" in the NEET statistics (covered in more detail below).

Young people who are NEET often have personal characteristics such as poor school achievement, low self esteem and are alienated from mainstream institutions. Interventions with young people who have been out of mainstream education and training for some time need to last for 12 months as a norm. Shorter interventions are simply not long enough for young people in this category to gain the skills and experience necessary for successful progression into sustainable employment.

Many young people who are NEET suffer from varied and overlapping disadvantages and lack family support structures. The Engaging Youth Enquiry confirmed the value of a "significant other", often a youth worker, to provide support, brokerage and transitional support. Rathbone data confirms that successful progression is increased by 50% where this role is provided. The voluntary sector is well placed to offer this "significant other" support because it offers a different relationship to statutory bodies and a different kind of trust. Furthermore, this support is often cheaper, more flexible and effective at reducing NEET figures.

Rathbone has developed a model of street based engagement and support to NEET young people. We know you cannot reach marginalised young people by sending them letters or using compulsion and you have to go out to disengaged young people. Last year Rathbone reached over 4,000 young people through its street based work and was able to successfully re-engage around 70% of these with mainstream programmes. The Rathbone model provides intensive support early on which tapers off quickly once the young person has re-engaged with training provision—responsive to need and providing long-term consistent support.

THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE GOVERNMENT'S NEET STRATEGY

The number of young people aged 16–18 who are NEET has remained fairly consistent at around 10% for the last 20 years despite numerous initiatives to reduce this number. Small decreases in 16–18s have been outweighed by increases to the 18–24 cohort.

We know from our records that significantly high numbers of young people joining Rathbone have been on short programmes several times. We know from our own work and that of other providers that the issue of young people "churning" in and out of NEET status—the so called revolving door syndrome—is a serious concern and may actually be doing more damage than good to young people. They have their hopes and expectations raised, only to be dashed as they come to the end of yet another short course and fall back into NEET status.

We believe the issue is as much about the sustainability of interventions as it is about getting the overall number of young people who are NEET down at any one time.

¹ Not printed.

Rathbone sees the current trend of interventions which typically give young people six months training eg the Future Jobs Fund, as “churning” the NEET numbers rather than reducing them.

Data mechanisms should be put in place in the NEET statistics to record whether young people are re-joining programmes or are new entrants. The omission of this information is a serious weakness in understanding the issue of “churn” and in designing strategies for permanently reducing NEET figures and creating sustainable models that take young people through to employment.

The likely impact of Raising the Participation Age on strategies for addressing the needs of young people NEET.

Rathbone has concerns about Raising the Participation Age. The patterns of behaviour that we see early on (pre-16 and pre-14) which lead to NEET status are not removed by existing compulsion to age 16. There is a long standing problem of non attendance of young people of statutory school age; even with current sanctions to fine parents and the issuing of enforcement notices. It therefore seems unlikely that these young people will attend provision after 16—unless the offer is substantially different.

The Engaging Youth Enquiry has confirmed that a majority of NEET young people simply want paid work for financial support and the status they associate with it and do not want further education and training. Many have pressures on them to make a financial contribution to the family income and many will have different needs, such as being parents or carers. Work provides a good learning environment, as long as it is properly regulated employment.

Rathbone recommends that a youth training scheme similar to that of the Youth Training Scheme (YTS) or the Community Programme (CP) of the 1980s is incorporated within the 14–19 offer. The key success factors of these previous initiatives were: an offer of 12 months’ placement as the norm and longer if the young person needed it; a non means tested allowance; and training based on real work experience. An offer which is in an employment growth area would be particularly beneficial—for instance environmental or green projects which young people are particularly keen to engage with and which provide transferable skills to the market place. We believe a properly constructed form of work creation would be a cost effective way of reducing NEET sustainably and will be cheaper than the estimated cost of Raising the Participation Age which appears focused on increased provision in colleges and school 6th forms.

The opportunities and future prospects in education, training and employment for 16–18 year olds.

Rathbone suggests that the prospects for young people leaving school would be improved if there was a broader offer, deregulating the curriculum to make it more flexible for those not inclined to traditional routes. The new diplomas do promote work related learning but critically are not work based, ie to learn on the job; to be able to complete practical tasks as opposed to theoretical understanding in the classroom. This makes learning real to young people who want to work.

We are concerned that the 14–19 curriculum reform strategy will again miss out those young people for whom an ongoing engagement with learning is most problematic. There is as yet no clear policy vision as to how a young person with complex learning and support needs will be enabled to develop a meaningful, sustained and fully funded learning pathway up to the age of 18. Much of the curriculum and qualifications reform process is focused on work-related rather than work-based learning. Other than apprenticeships, there is a distinct lack of policy engagement with the challenge of enabling young people both to progress into employment and to receive access to accredited and well-supported learning. We are extremely disappointed that the recent ASCL Bill has effectively removed work-based programme-led apprenticeships from the range of routes available to more vulnerable young people and see therefore the reform of the statutory framework applying to apprenticeships as representing a really significant reduction in opportunity for those young people to whom organisations such as Rathbone is most committed. With respect to the curriculum reform proposals relating to Foundation Learning, we are also very concerned that these will lead to an overly simplistic qualifications-driven approach to funding learning programmes which will be far from adequate in meeting the learning and support needs of our cohort of young people in the round. Again, whilst Entry to Employment is a far from perfect programme, the migration to Foundation Learning may well result in a real reduction in learning opportunities.

We believe that there is a need to really strengthen and further develop properly funded and structured work based learning opportunities and to considerably strengthen employers’ commitment to and engagement with the education of young people who are not going to take up an apprenticeship route. The casualisation of the labour market is of growing concern to Rathbone; we have found a huge increase in young people working casually through agencies in poorly regulated employment eg contract cleaning and factory work. A young person who is entering work for the first time and needs to develop work skills and an understanding of what is expected of them is not able to gain the right experience from this kind of work. It is also difficult for the young person to gain stability if their employment is ad hoc.

This is a worrying development, exacerbated by fewer employment opportunities because of competition from migrant workers, who may have a better education and stronger skills and, in the current employment market, graduates seeking employment.

December 2009

Witnesses: **John Copps**, Head of Sector Research, New Philanthropy Capital, **Shaks Ghosh**, Chief Executive, Private Equity Foundation, **Sonia Sodha**, Head of the Capabilities Programme, Demos, and **Dr Richard Williams**, Chief Executive, Rathbone, gave evidence.

Q82 Chairman: Let me welcome our witnesses this morning: Sonia Sodha, John Copps, Shaks Ghosh and Dr Richard Williams. We tend to be a bit informal in this Committee—do you mind if we revert to first names? Is that all right? Are you all happy with that? We get knights of the realm, lords, distinguished professors and all sorts. You can call members of the Committee anything you like, apart from me—you have to call me Chairman. You know what this inquiry is about. We had the first session looking at NEETs on Monday. What came resoundingly from that session was that NEET is an inappropriate category and we shouldn't really use it, but we then all proceeded to use it. We know the area we are looking at—young, unemployed people at the bottom of the employment pile, who very often move in and out of work. We know how that happens and we have a reasonable amount of experience in this area. We did a pre-legislative inquiry into apprenticeships not long ago, so we are not entirely naive about this. We are going to the Netherlands this afternoon to look at what they do there, because our research suggests that they do some rather interesting things that we could learn from. So, here we are. You have a unique opportunity to prime the Committee for our trip. We want to delve into your experience of what this category is. Why is it so difficult to evaluate it as a category? If someone walked up to me and said, "Look, these people are not in employment, education or training," I would have thought that was pretty neutral, but everyone tells me that is not the case. Let's start with Sonia.

Sonia Sodha: Hi. My name is Sonia Sodha and in 2009 I was head of the capabilities programme at Demos. That programme was responsible for research into children and young people and education issues. I think the reason why I have been invited here today is that we have been doing a big, year-long project looking at educational disengagement. The focus of our work on NEETs—as you say, it is a criticised term, but it is one that people often use as a shorthand—has really been on a preventive approach to the problem of youth unemployment. One of our critiques of Government policy in this area is that there has not been enough effort to join up services that tackle the issue of youth unemployment, aimed at the 16-to-18 and 16-to-24 age groups, with what goes on earlier in the school system. We published an interim report back in May, and we are publishing a final report in the last week of February. In our work, we are saying that although we have this policy problem, which we categorise as NEETs, it needs to be a mainstream part of education policy and the education system. We need to look at what we do to prevent young people becoming NEET, even when they are starting school at age 5, as well as when they are in primary school and secondary school. It is very important to have those 16-to-18 services for young people who are unemployed at age 16 to 18. It is just as important to tackle the risk factors that make a young person more likely to be unemployed during

those years. For example, one of the statistics that we point to in our report is that eight in 100 children leave primary school each year without the basic reading and numeracy skills that they need to do well and to benefit from secondary school. Our research has looked at the fact that 10% of five-year-olds are starting school without the behavioural skills that they need to learn. These are the children for whom school is an uphill struggle all the way through. Unless we tackle those risk factors early on and look at some of the systemic issues around special educational needs, behaviour and alternative provision, we are not going to tackle effectively the problem of youth unemployment in the long term.

Chairman: Thank you. That has got us moving. John.

John Copps: I am John Copps from the think-tank and consultancy New Philanthropy Capital. We focus on the charitable sector and improving the way in which it operates in the UK. I am the author of a report, published last year, that looked at NEETs and various different areas and, in particular, at the contribution that the charitable sector can make. In this particular area, we know that some of the things done by the Government do not work. It is important to think about other activities in the third and private sectors, and about how the Government can best work with them. We know that there is not one solution or one cause of young people being NEET, but we must consider skills and the different things offered by charities locally and nationally.

Q83 Chairman: Do you mean charities that are strictly defined as charities, or the third sector more broadly?

John Copps: The third sector more broadly. We are talking about not just single organisations, but partnerships between organisations—Shaks's is one of them—in the private and third sectors.

Shaks Ghosh: I am Shaks Ghosh of the Private Equity Foundation. Our mission is full potential. We have three mission-related goals, the first of which is empowering children and young people to achieve their full potential. The second goal is to enable the voluntary sector to achieve its full potential. We are building a portfolio of 17 charities, all operating with children and young people. I use the word "charity" interchangeably with "voluntary sector" and "not-for-profit organisations". Our third goal is to harness the business skills of the business community and offer them to the charities to help with capacity, to build them up and to make them stronger. The area in which we are particularly interested is that of children and young people, and we are trying to solve the NEET problem. The way that we see that panning out is through an integrated approach, with our charities falling into three clusters, the first of which is early intervention. It is pretty much as Sonia was explaining: if seven, eight and nine-year-olds do not get to school and do not learn to read and write, almost inevitably they will end up NEET. The second cluster of charities works with naughty teenagers, and tries to get those who

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abscond or are excluded from school to stay in school. The third cluster of charities, such as Fairbridge and Tomorrow's People, is made up of organisations that work with young people of 16-plus who are already NEET. We are discussing an important issue. The transition from the world of school to the world of work is difficult for everyone. It was difficult for all of us. The more disadvantaged people are, the more obstacles and problems they have to face in their lives and the more help they will need. We all need help in that difficult transition period. It strikes me that there has never been a more important time to look at such issues, what with the recession and rising unemployment, but on the plus side, there are also initiatives such as increasing the age of participation. How do we make that into an opportunity to solve the intractable problems caused by the issue of NEET? One of the things that bothers me is fragmentation. Of course, coming from the voluntary sector, we see fragmentation everywhere around us. It is one of the really big things that we will have to solve and address. If every organisation simply sees its end point as the young person leaving, we shall never mesh things together. As I think about the transition from school to work—or, indeed, the transitions that young people have to make as they move from voluntary organisation to voluntary organisation—it seems that organisations such as mine have a role to play in somehow putting our arms around the fragmented system that we have. By way of introduction to the issue of NEET, I want to point to the complications in the system. Not only is it fragmented, but it is difficult for young people to find their way around it. If we are really serious about enabling young people, particularly from disadvantaged backgrounds, to make the transition from the world of school to the world of work, we have to make it not only simpler, but more integrated. We really have to have a system that takes them by the hand and leads them through it.

Q84 Chairman: Richard, your written evidence was quite tough in its criticism of some major Government policies. I would be interested to hear what you have to say. The Committee is looking at the early years—Sure Start and children's centres—at the moment, and one would have thought, as Sonia has indicated, that that was tackling problems in the very early part of a child's life. Many of us rather admire the fact that there is a much more flexible route for young people post-14—a far more flexible and diverse route than we remember in the past. There are some interesting things going on, but in your evidence you suggest that you do not think much of them. Is that so?

Dr Williams: I will comment on that. I am Richard Williams, I am chief executive of Rathbone, a national youth voluntary organisation that works right across the UK. Last year we worked with about 17,500 young people, many of whom have the characteristics that Shaks described. Formally, our mission is to work with young people aged 14 to 24. We reviewed that recently, and our corporate plan

now talks about working with young people aged 11-plus, partly for reasons of engaging in early intervention.

Q85 Chairman: So you are going down to 11?

Dr Williams: Yes.

Chairman: I should declare an interest—I always host your annual reception.

Dr Williams: Which you do very well. Richard Pring was here yesterday, and I want to pick up the points that he made, albeit in the context of the “engaging youth” inquiry that we submitted along with our evidence. The “engaging youth” inquiry was a very important part of the wider Nuffield review. From my point of view, the significant difference between the “engaging youth” inquiry and most of the other research that has been done in this area was that it was very much based on an action research model. Going through people whom they know and trust, it engaged young people in talking directly to researchers about their life experiences and life circumstances. We ran 36 workshops with young people across the UK; we also ran six practitioner workshops at the same time. We were trying to understand, if you like, the articulation between young people's views of their experiences and the views of practitioners. That is what informed our evidence. We would agree, obviously, that the whole issue of using “NEET” as a descriptor is very problematic. Technically, it is a residual statistical category; it is not a meaningful description of anything that happens to young people. In the report, we say that we believe that it has led to a deficit model of young people with complex needs. In a sense, it has diverted attention away from worrying about how to support them in making sense of their lives and in finding meaningful trajectories—that includes transition to work, which I will come on to. We also take the view that it has very often led to preoccupation with performance management across the country, with NEET reduction almost an end in itself. I have now chaired two national conferences with Capita, in which lots of people from local authorities talked about NEET reduction in exactly those terms, saying that the objective was to get NEET numbers off the register. Looking beyond that is much more problematic. Our view, which echoes what others have said this morning, is that, in a sense, that focus has led to a great spawning of initiatives and short-term measures, which we would see as being part and parcel of the whole problem of churn—I am sure that people have already talked to you about that. In terms of the work with young people, four key findings or themes have emerged from this. One is about aspiration; often policy related to young people described as NEET is predicated on low motivation. Our finding in the report, having listened to young people speaking, is that generally they have high aspirations. We say that there is a real issue about whether a lack of motivation is a cause or an effect of the experience of exclusion. Certainly, our view was that much of NEET policy predicated on low motivation misses the point. The key point is how to engage with young people to help them to

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overcome the barriers that are blocking their progress; their aspirations are very normal. Principally, they want a job of the kind that we recognise as a proper job. They want a decent family life, a home and financial security. The second key finding, which comes through as much in the transcripts of the interviews or conversations as in the report, is that many of these young people are intensely alienated from school. Again, that is something that is often commented on. As an organisation, we do a lot of work with young people who are intensely alienated from school. They are not necessarily intensely alienated from learning. In the transcripts, there are lots of references made by young people to subjects within the general educational curriculum that they value and enjoy. More often than not, the issue with school is an issue to do with other factors, such as bullying, the experience of authority in school and problematic relationships with particular teachers. One thing that we worried about in the framework of the report is whether, in a sense, collectively we have perhaps spent too much time reforming the curriculum, and not enough time thinking about the nature of school and schooling and the experience of school for some of these young people. There is evidence around the country that, certainly at Key Stage 4, some people are experimenting and exploring ways of making the mainstream curriculum more meaningful and interesting for those sorts of young people. The question of work and of transition to work is really fundamental. In all the discussion groups that we ran, there was an overwhelming sense of a desire on the part of these young people to have a job. That is their primary goal. Yes, there are issues within—

Chairman: Their primary goal is what?

Dr Williams: To get a job. They want to be employed. There are issues about skills and qualifications but, equally, there are significant issues in different parts of the country around structural unemployment and its impact on young people. For example, in Northumberland, where we ran a workshop in Morpeth, there were young people with A-levels who could not get a job. They were not low attaining, but were blocked by the impact of structural unemployment. Competition in the labour market—there are people who are expert in the youth labour market to whom I can refer you—and casualisation are part of that. We are also worried about implications of the Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act 2009, in terms of its impact on employer-led and programme-led apprenticeships and the diminution, in effect, of opportunity for young people to make a transition into employment. I am happy to say more about that. The other key theme that comes through our report is the issue of transitional support. There has been reference to churn; it is a characteristic of the lives of these young people that often they are moving, or moved, in and around a variety of programmes, with minimal support between those programmes. Other than through references to Connexions, they often do not have what we would describe as “a significant other” who is an advocate for them through that process. Our view in the report

is that there is a need to go beyond the objective of providing better independent advice and guidance, and to look more fundamentally at mentoring, support, advocacy and sustained engagement with these young people through what is very often a complex transition process.

Chairman: That has given you all a chance to open up. My colleagues will ask you short, sharp questions, I hope, and you will give rather shorter answers than you did in your preambles. Let's get on with it. I am going to hand over to Annette to open with the first section of questions.

Q86 Annette Brooke: Everybody criticises the term NEET. Given that it covers such a diverse group of people, is there another way of describing the whole group?

John Copps: As you say, NEET is a bucket term. It has lots of different things inside it, and that has implications when you are delivering policy. The problems faced by a teenage mother are very different from those of a young person leaving care. Maybe it could be divided into two different categories. One would include problems that result from disengagement with education, which is a gradual process that builds up through time at school and in the system. The other would be crisis, which would cover the two examples I have just described. You need different responses for each. I can say a bit about what works later, but I think we know what can be successful in each of those examples.

Shaks Ghosh: I would leave it. I think it is complicated enough as it is. NEET is fairly factual. It is what it says on the tin: people who are not in education, employment or training. I would leave it, as long as we understand, as John says, that it is a very big bucket and that segmentation is absolutely critical. You need to know what is in the bucket; what different problems young people are facing; what brought them there; and how to solve the problems. If your Committee were to recommend that we call it something else, we could go through years of trying to work that out and years of trying to communicate it. It seems to me that it is semantics. It is a term; let's live with it, but let's get under the skin of it, and let's solve the different problems that are encompassed there.

Sonia Sodha: I would worry that if you came up with another term, it would just take on the same status as the term NEET. I would agree with Shaks that the most important thing is to disaggregate why young people are NEET, and to recognise the complexity of the issues that might lead to a young person becoming NEET, rather than focusing on the terminology.

Q87 Annette Brooke: May I just follow up with another short question? Is there anything that all NEETs have in common?

Dr Williams: I am thinking from our experience.

Chairman: They are all young.

Dr Williams: They are but, of course, they are getting older, and that is part of the big anxiety about the whole effectiveness of the strategy. I guess it is a

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difficulty in relating to mainstream services. I can't think of a sub-group of the young people with whom we work who are, in some form, successful in the way in which they access public services that are intended to support them.

Shaks Ghosh: If I were to look for a thread beyond employment and education, I would find it quite difficult. How far do you disaggregate it? Do you go to the 900,000, or do you try to create smaller and smaller groups within that? The group for which I have some concern is young people who are in full-time volunteering. We have done some work, together with Demos and a fabulous organisation called City Year, on national service. One of the problems in helping young people to spend a year in full-time national service is that they fall across all the issues around benefits and the problem of being NEET—not in education, employment or training. In some ways, it is quite neat to leave it as “not in education, employment or training,” because we know that they are the only things that NEETs have in common. They are young, and they are not in education, employment or training—that is it. As soon as you start to segment it further, you put more caveats on it. Having a broad-brush term like “not in education, employment or training” forces us to ask the question that you are asking, which is: “What are the different sub-categories here?”

Q88 Annette Brooke: May I just follow that up, quickly. People can combine the answers. Has Government policy really taken on board the different categories so far?

Sonia Sodha: One of the issues with policy over the last decade on this is that there has been, to some extent, a conflation—an assumption, as Richard said, that the problem is a lack of motivation or aspiration, or the fact that there is not a good enough vocational offer. In a lot of policy documents on the issue there is an in-built assumption that if we expand the nature of the offer available to young people and make sure that there is good vocational provision alongside academic provision, that will, to some extent, get round the issue. Obviously, the nature of the vocational offer is important. It is also important, though, not to conflate vocational provision with disengagement as a whole, because it is certainly not the case that all disengaged young people are disengaged because vocational provision is not good enough. That is one safety warning about policy over the last decade.

Dr Williams: In a way, I would answer that rhetorically and say, “What is the policy?”, because one might say that there is a series of policies.

Chairman: Can we turn the volume up?

Dr Williams: I apologise. I would say, “What is the policy?”. There is a series of policy intervention strategies, but is there a single policy? For example, we work in Scotland and Wales, and if we were talking about NEET in Scotland, somebody would say that there is a strategy called “More Choices, More Chances.” If we were in Wales, they would say that there was something called “The Learning Country”—there is a single policy vision about the

issue. In the English context, it is more complex. There is not a single policy that you could put your hand on that is about NEET.

Q89 Annette Brooke: Does England lack a strategy?

Dr Williams: It is a different, more complicated approach. As far as education and training are concerned, there is conflation of the idea of a work-related or general vocational curriculum as part of a way of re-engaging young people who are dropping out, and a work-based view of what should be available to such young people. There is not necessarily a comprehensive policy. There is a tension between some of what has happened with regard to education in the workplace and apprenticeships on the one hand, and the curriculum reforms as they apply to schools and colleges on the other hand. The kind of young people whom we are working with tend to fall through the gap of those approaches. I hope that makes sense.

Shaks Ghosh: If your question is: “Are there any groups of young people who are falling through the net of Government policy; are there any groups in this NEET category for whom there are not the right kind of policies?”, the answer is yes. I could identify four or five groups of them and say that there is more that we could and should do. Full-time volunteers would be one of those groups; young people who want to dedicate their lives to a year of service fall between the cracks.

Q90 Chairman: What was the organisation that provided this national service?

Shaks Ghosh: It is an American organisation called City Year. It recruits young people of 16, 17 and 18; it gives them some training and forms them into teams; then it sends them into schools in poor and disadvantaged areas to support teachers in the school yard, classroom and so on. It provides near-peer role models and creates an image of young people as positive citizens, rather than the media images that we see. Let me come back to the issue of Government policy. To cut the issue in a different way, the area that we really need to think about—the area where, it seems to me, there is a really big gap—has to do with what happens to young people when they leave school. At 16, when the head teacher no longer has responsibility for those young people and they are someone else's responsibility, they walk through the gates of that school, and it seems to me that we have no sense of how we support them at that point. If we could be sure that every young person who walked through the gates of that school left with a plan and someone who would help them to implement that plan or guide them through this very fragmented system, we would have a better chance with those young people. In the old days, it might have been parents, communities or the extended family who would have shepherd them through that process. Particularly in our very fragmented, urban communities, young people just do not have that support as they go through that difficult process.

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Q91 Chairman: In a number of the schools that I visit, they will have that, but kids certainly won't have it if they stop coming regularly at 13 or 14, let alone 15 and 16. The NEETs we are talking about are the ones that leak out of the system, rather than march out at 16. Is that not true?

Shaks Ghosh: I think that is absolutely right. I would say that the relationship with—let's use Richard's phrase—"the significant other" needs to start well before the young person is at the school gate, ready to depart. I am talking about a support or mentoring system that is focused on helping them to make the transition into the world of work. That process has to start well before the young person is 16. We need to devise a system where, when a young person is 14, we start to think about how they engage with the world of work. I know that some of this is happening with the 14-to-19 curriculum and so on, but I am talking about somebody who is charged with the responsibility of helping them manage that transition, who is obsessive about it, and who works with that young person in a very focused way to help them make that transition into the world of work. Maybe not every young person will need it, but it would be great if that offer were there for young people.

Q92 Annette Brooke: Would you say that Government targets in this area have been a help or a hindrance? Should we be using another method to assess the policies?

John Copps: I think it is helpful to have a grand ambition—an overall position of wanting to reduce the number of NEETs as a whole bucket—but I go back to what we said earlier. We need to recognise that there are lots of problems. We need to get to the root of the problems. When I was doing my research, I went to lots of projects and met young people. When you sit down and speak to them, one to one, they all have a specific problem, and it is heart-rending. It is something that you would never wish on anybody. They are problems that need individual attention. Having an overall policy is only valuable if it captures what is going on elsewhere. We need to include what the Government are doing about young offenders, children leaving care and worklessness. An overarching target has value, but the policy needs to realise that it is an umbrella that covers so much else.

Sonia Sodha: I agree with John in some respects, but one of the issues with the NEET target is that it has been very much focused on percentage reductions. While that is important—NEET is a category that we want to reduce—it means that it is easier for providers working with young people to work with those who are closest to not becoming NEET. Certainly, as part of our research at Demos, we have spoken to a lot of charities who work with NEET charities such as Fairbridge. They say—I'm sure that Rathbone will echo this—that they work with the very hard-to-reach young people, who start quite a long way away from being able to undertake training, employment, or full-time education. It takes a much longer period of time to work with that young person and get them to a point where they are

not NEET than it might to work with someone who is much closer to that point. So you need to think about the incentives that come with particular targets. I think that you see that in other areas of education policy, as well. For example, on schools, we know that the threshold targets mean that some schools are focused on children who are just below the threshold. If we focused on floor targets, holding schools responsible for children who are performing at the very low end of the spectrum—so that we were dealing with the intractable, long tail of underachievement—that would provide equal incentives for services and providers to focus on the children who are very hard to reach. Of course, providers want to focus on those groups, but sometimes, if you have targets that make it difficult for you to do so, that can be very difficult.

Q93 Mr Timpson: I was interested in what Richard said earlier about aspiration. His evidence suggests that many young people who fall into a NEET category actually do have aspiration. It may not be a huge ambition, but they do have that aspiration. But when I looked at Sonia's *Stitch in Time* report, one of the five key areas that it said we should focus on is building aspiration. So I want to know where we sit with aspiration, because it is something that people talk about a lot. They say that a lot of NEETs don't have ambition or aspiration and that that is something that is prevalent across the whole NEET population and is very difficult to tackle. So where are we on aspiration? Unless we know where we are starting from, it is very difficult to know when and where we channel our interventions.

Sonia Sodha: I do not think that we would ever want to say that a lack of ambition or aspiration is prevalent across the whole NEET population, but what we said in the report is that a lack of aspiration is one of five risk factors, at the child level, for becoming NEET later on. I think that is something that needs to be addressed. We know that some children in schools have low aspirations. We know, for example, that a child's aspiration is closely related to their parents' aspiration, but that is not to say that all young people who are very disengaged have no aspiration at all.

Q94 Chairman: I have the highest regard for Demos and all the other organisations represented here today, but I sometimes feel frustration with their sense of history. Jeff Ennis, the hon. Member for Barnsley, was on this Committee for a long time. He used to say, in evidence sessions similar to this, that in Barnsley, a mining area, a young man coming out of school and who wasn't very academic went into the mining industry. He would be highly paid for relatively unskilled work—hard work, but relatively unskilled work—and that was on offer right across his constituency. But today, for a similar young man coming out of school with a low level of qualifications, the very best that he will be offered is minimum wage plus, probably minimum wage, in retail and distribution. Young people may have aspirations, but if they don't have the skills the truth is that they are looking at a life on the breadline—on

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minimum wage. Is there not a sense of history that that is what has happened right across the industrial world? For people with low skills there are no longer high-paying jobs out there. They are going to be on the lowest jobs for a long time. Isn't that communicated across the generations? That is the frustration that I feel—that there isn't a sense of history in some of the research that we are doing. Is that a silly question?

Dr Williams: Absolutely not. I don't disagree with you. I think it is important to calibrate aspiration as a word. What I think we were referring to here is the idea that, in the vernacular of the NEET discourse, there is an assumption that there are large numbers of young people who are not motivated to do anything; they basically want to stay in bed all day. What we were tuning into through these workshops is that that is not the reality. What you are describing is a very important part of the reality of the experience of the sort of young people whom we are working with. So often, what you get is not an expression of demotivation, but a sense of helplessness about not being able to get where they want to be. To go back to the young man in the workshop that we ran in Morpeth, he had A-levels and, at the time when we were running that workshop, had been looking for a job for a very long time. What we are saying is that he was technically NEET, and that creates a feeling of hopelessness, demotivation and loss of morale. But it isn't necessarily the starting point. The issue that we were trying to pick up is that often, NEET policy is about getting young people off the NEET register as quickly as possible into something, without thinking more longitudinally about the real target, which should be about how those young people are enabled to make a transition to a sustainable future that involves, fundamentally, a job. This is where there is potentially an emerging disconnect between the process of educational reform and thinking about transition into the labour market.

Chairman: Many people have tremendous aspirations, but they are frustrated because what their qualifications offer at that time is low pay. Who is the most famous NEET in the world—Paris Hilton? She is an extraordinarily stupid young woman who is enormously wealthy out of the family inheritance. I suppose the frustration—

Mr Stuart: Leave Paris alone.

Chairman: She must be the stupidest person in the world, but she is certainly the most famous NEET, isn't she? She is not in employment, education or training, is she? She must be the most famous NEET in the world. What's wrong with it?

Mr Stuart: You should watch more daytime telly.

Chairman: Graham, come in. Stimulate us a bit more.

Q95 Mr Stuart: We had a group of academics here the other day, who made a telling point. From what I could pick up, they seemed to say that they couldn't explain why between 1997 and 2007, when we had a period of sustained economic growth, the number of NEETs did not move at all. They got all their box of tricks they doubtless called for for years—the EMA

and all the rest of it. The Government gave them most of the stuff they wanted, and they just could not begin to explain that. They love it now that there is a recession; they can say, "Oh, it's gone up under a recession." What they couldn't do was tell us what happened between 1997 and 2007. The only beginning of an explanation that I heard was that they said, "Well actually, our understanding of the labour and employment market now is nothing like it was 20 years ago. We do not have the understanding." Isn't the Chairman right? It is just that the jobs have gone, and the jobs you do get are rubbish. You churn between them and you can't find a sustainable and reasonable status within your community job, which would give you the opportunity to bring up a family and live on it. Aren't we today again talking absolutely as if there is something wrong with these young people? There are going to be some people who don't do that well, academically and in other ways. It seems to me, as a policy response, we have to somehow turn back the clock and provide employment. Is it our massive de-industrialisation? If we are the worst in Europe, is it because all the jobs have gone from here more than anywhere else? It's not that the young people have changed; it's not as if there are loads of stupid people, or that they lack aspiration or that their families are so awful. The truth is that there is no decent work for them, and we are making it out as if it is a problem with them, when actually it is about the offer. Either we create the employment or we send a very harsh message that none of this—the EMA or any of this stuff—is going to fix your lives, and the only message that we can send to families is, "You had better get your kids higher up the academic ladder than they ever have historically, because otherwise they are stuffed, because there aren't going to be the jobs." That would be the message that needs to be given at primary school level. At that point, we have to tackle educational under-performance, because the truth is, there is nothing much you can do at 16, 17 or 18 with people who do not have the skill set.

Shaks Ghosh: It does seem to me that the economy is on a twin track: there is the knowledge economy and there is the service economy. There are very few other opportunities for young people. If a degree-level qualification isn't right for you, the only option might be the service industry. But if you are not a highly sociable individual and do not have that sort of social skills, what is there for you? That is a deep structural problem that we have had ever since we started exporting our manufacturing and low-skilled jobs to India and China. I absolutely see that. If that is an issue that we want to tackle, bring it on; let's think about that. In the meantime, however, I think that there are lots of things we can do to prepare young people for the jobs that are there, but we are not doing that.

Mr Stuart: It sounds as though that might be more about lowering our aspiration rather than raising it. If the jobs that are there are the ones that the Chairman described, they are going to change.

Shaks Ghosh: It is about re-orientating it and everything that Richard was saying. These are not enormously high aspirations, are they? They are

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balanced, normal aspirations. When I was at Crisis, we ran a centre for homeless people and we would ask them, "What do you want from your life?" They would say, "I'd like a home and a girlfriend." It would break your heart, because we should be able to deliver a home, a job and a girlfriend. Richard is not saying that they all want to be brain surgeons or astronauts. They want a job. The jobs are, or were, there, so how can we connect them? That has to start with the school system and with our preparing young people to have the right kind of aspirations for the world of work. I have another couple of quick points on the issue of aspiration, which I think might be helpful. I think we use the language of aspiration very loosely. There is a bunch of stuff there around motivation and, as you were saying, Chair, around skills. So people have these aspirations. That is what they want, but they do not quite know how they are going to get there, because they do not have the skill set to get them there. I think there is also something about horizons, which goes back to the work that Sonia has been involved in.

Chairman: Horizons?

Shaks Ghosh: Horizons. Last week, I visited a school in Tower Hamlets and asked the head teacher: "What is the biggest challenge that you and your kids face going forward?" She said: "The big problem for the kids in this primary school is that their horizons are very limited." They rarely get out of their local area. If they are leaving Tower Hamlets, they think they are going abroad. The people they meet are largely unemployed. So when we talk about aspirations, we are talking about young people who actually have not seen how big the world is and how exciting and thrilling it can be. It was amazing that the head teacher said that it was not about targets or all the things that the Government expect her and the school to achieve; it was about, "How do I get these 250 kids out of Tower Hamlets to have visibility on the big, wide world out there?"

Chairman: Low mobility of a certain class of people. Quick ones from everyone else, please, because I want to move on to Paul. Sonia?

Sonia Sodha: Sorry, but could you remind me what the original question was?

Chairman: God knows. You can answer anything you like.

Q96 Mr Stuart: We are focusing on the supply side rather than the demand side. How much is it the demand side, and how much do we as policy makers need to be looking at the demand side to inform what we are talking about? Do we need a major look at the youth labour market before we come to conclusions that basically suggest it is all about something being wrong with these kids?

Sonia Sodha: I think you are absolutely right to say that we should be looking at the exact nature of low-paid and low-skilled jobs. There is probably a lot that can be done around that and around employment advancement and skills training in low-skilled jobs. I think there is something important there, but I would stress that eight in 100 children still leave primary school without being able to read

properly. That is shocking, and it is shocking that some children do not have the behavioural skills that they need to do well out of school. So I think yes, we do need the emphasis and focus on exactly what jobs we expect our young people to do. That is important. But we also need to make sure that our system is equipping young people with the skills that they need. Some of the work we have been doing at Demos has looked at the importance of what are commonly known as soft skills. These include motivation, the ability to apply yourself to a task, empathy and self-regulation, meaning the ability to self-regulate your behaviour. We know that those skills, over the last 30 years, have become much more important in the labour market. That is probably because, as you rightly say, the nature of the labour market has changed, there are far fewer established career trajectories and there is a lot more low-skilled work available for young people straight after school, which they churn in and out of. It is important to focus on the supply side of jobs, but we also need to focus on the skills that we are equipping our young people with and ask whether the education system is equipping them not just with academic skills, but with some of the soft skills that we like to call character capabilities, or social and emotional competences. Those are skills that young people need to do well in the workplace.

Chairman: John?

John Copps: Looking back at the historical perspective, there have always been a lot of structural changes in the labour market as well as many other big changes, as we have been discussing. However, as far as I have seen—and if you look back at the data—there has always been this 10% of young people out of work and out of education. We can look at the changes to the labour market but there are still some problems that we are just not dealing with, and have never really made much headway with.

Q97 Mr Stuart: You could conclude from the lack of progress between 1997 and 2007 that all the policy interventions that everyone had wanted—and many of which were implemented—were in fact wrong. Or it could be that if we had a better understanding of the labour market we would say, "Well, it would have been so much worse if we had not made those interventions." The understanding of whether what we have been doing is incorrect and we have to find an alternative—even though we do not know what it is yet—or whether what the Government has done in many ways has been good is important for what we recommend, and for what any Government does, is it not?

Chairman: Come back quickly, John; then I will move on.

John Copps: It is difficult to say which side. We have talked about aspirations and we have talked about understanding the labour market better—you have to work on both sides.

Chairman: Shaks, do you want to go on briefly?

Shaks Ghosh: I wanted to say something about serial failure, which is particularly the obsession with six-month programmes for young people and what that

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does to their aspirations and motivations. Six months, if you do not have a lot of numeracy, literacy and the soft skills that Sonia was talking about, is not a long time to find a job but also hold down a job. That is really what we are expecting people to do with this six-month roll-on, roll-off. When I visit some of the projects that our charities run in Newham and talk to these young people, it breaks my heart that their whole life is about this holding pattern of getting one six-month placement, then another six-month placement, then another. It seems that Government policy and employers are colluding in keeping young people in this holding pattern. Every time they end one of those six-month placements without finding a permanent job, it is another piece of failure that goes on their record chart. I can only imagine how destructive that is for their aspirations and motivation.

Chairman: Richard?

Dr Williams: I personally think the whole issue of the youth labour market is fundamental. I would say that in shorthand, there needs to be a much more pragmatic Government response to enable and support young people to get into the labour market, on the basis that it, if you like, equalises their chances. There are two points: first of all there are, at the moment, about the same number of young people in jobs without training—about 200,000—as are formally NEET. That, as a category, is derided by policy makers, who generally think it is the worst possible outcome. However, Exeter University did an interesting study in the south-west at the time we were doing this work, which found that most of the young people they talked to valued the opportunity to have a job because it was the first step on the ladder towards getting experience. Often a job without training is not really a job without training; it is a job without a formal vocational qualification. As an example of pragmatism, when I first came to Rathbone, five years ago, I met a chronically dyslexic young man in Felling in Gateshead, who had just got his first job painting and decorating. In that context, he was going to do an NVQ in painting and decorating, which was his first formal qualification. At the time, 2005–06, the Learning and Skills Council decided to focus on apprenticeships and so stopped funding freestanding vocational qualifications in the workplace. The significance of that is that as policy develops, it often diminishes rather than enhances opportunity. The Chairman said that we were fairly critical, but I think the same is now happening with the wider approach to apprenticeships and the clause in the Bill, now the Act, that requires an apprentice to have employed status. In our organisation, we have about 1,200 young people, some of whom gave evidence to the skills commission that the Chairman chaired which showed how important employer-led apprenticeships are in levering young people into the workplace. Nationally, based on the last Learning and Skills Council statistics, for 2007–08, 14% of 16 to 18-year-olds on apprenticeships were employer-led, programme-led apprentices. That category of apprenticeship has now gone and an implication is that many of those young people will end up back in

the NEET pool. So there is something to be said for a more case-sensitive, pragmatic approach to how Government uses the opportunity to intervene in policy terms to create opportunities to enable young people to make these transitions. My final point is that at the moment we have a very simplistic approach: the idea that young people should remain in formal education and learning in order to prepare for work, or do an apprenticeship, rather than, as is the case with most of the young people we work with, make the transition into work in order to learn. That is a fundamental but really important distinction and we have not really got that grounded in policy terms.

Mr Stuart: I'm sorry, Chair; I didn't follow what was said about the 14%.

Dr Williams: That was the figure we got through a Freedom of Information disclosure. The last figures from the Learning and Skills Council for apprenticeships are for 2007–08 and in that year, there were just over 107,000 16 to 18-year-olds in apprenticeship, of whom 14,600—which in round figures is 14%—were on employer-based, programme-led apprenticeships. That is quite different from the just under 5,000 who were in a college doing an apprenticeship.

Q98 Chairman: They are programme-led apprenticeships?

Dr Williams: Yes, but—

Q99 Mr Stuart: Does that mean that 86% did not have employment and only 14% did?

Dr Williams: No, it means that the majority were apprentices with employed status, but there was a significant percentage, 14%, who were programme-led, but in employment. The significant point, however, is that, for example, of the two young people that we had who gave evidence to the chairman of the skills commission inquiry on apprenticeship, one, as it happens, was chronically dyslexic and the other had serious issues of emotional vulnerability. Both those young people became extremely successful: one went on to do an advanced apprenticeship; both of them got jobs. All I am saying is that as a result of recent legislation that opportunity has now gone, and effectively, about 14% of 16 to 18-year-olds in apprenticeship are now at risk of passing back into the NEET group. It is necessary to think of policy in the round, from the viewpoint of what we are trying to do for this group of young people.

Chairman: I remember those two; they were very impressive. We should have called Paris Hilton at that session.

Dr Williams: You should have—our young people would have been infinitely more impressive than Paris Hilton.

Mr Stuart: Don't let our misogynist Chairman attack another young woman.

Chairman: Is there anything misogynist about calling Paris Hilton a NEET? I don't think so. Someone find me a male NEET. Who is a male equivalent of Paris Hilton as a NEET?

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Dr Williams: The more serious point that I am trying to make is that we have, at the moment, a very limited view of work-based learning and very limited policy instruments for enabling young people to make the transition into learning at work. We have a presumption that containing young people in mainstream educational institutions is the best thing for them, and that is not necessarily the case.

Chairman: One of the chaps who gave evidence to us basically said that he was not academic and wanted to do something with his hands. I remember him saying it. When he got the chance, he was good at it.

Dr Williams: Absolutely. The point that I am trying to make is that this whole issue of the youth labour market—how policy can be developed actively to support young people in what is an increasingly competitive part of the labour market—is really fundamental, and not enough is being done about that at the moment.

Chairman: Good. That was a very long session, and Annette really led us astray. Over to Paul now.

Q100 Paul Holmes: In her opening comments, Sonia said quite a bit about young people—five-year-olds and 11-year-olds—and how early this problem occurred. Shaks gave the example of a Tower Hamlets primary school where there was no horizon beyond high unemployment, and no aspirations. The “engaging youth” inquiry noted that many young people disengage astonishingly early in their learning careers. If we look at 16 to 18-year-olds or 14-year-olds, are we shutting the door after the horse has bolted? Should we be looking much earlier?

Sonia Sodha: That has really been the thrust of our work, and the thrust of our arguments in relation to the work that we have done on early intervention and prevention. We have always argued that it is very important to think about the 16-to-18 and 16-plus issues, which others have been talking about, but we also need to think much earlier on. It is very difficult to say whether there is one key point at which disengagement might occur in a child, and that is because of the complexity of what underlies disengagement. You will see, if you have had a chance to look at our report, that there are a number of different factors that might underpin disengagement at the child level in terms of the child’s environment—for example, family factors, community factors, peer group factors, whether they are experiencing bullying, and structural factors, such as experiences of poverty and disadvantage. There is not a simple, neat answer to your question that says, “This is the age that we should be looking at—the age at which disengagement starts.” There are some very interesting statistics that I can point you towards. For example, Sir Mike Tomlinson thinks that 10,000 children are lost to the education system by the time they reach Key Stage 4 at age 14. We know that 8% of children leave primary school not being able to read properly. I have banged on and on about that statistic. It is never too early to start thinking about disengagement; that is the key thing. If, for example, a child is experiencing a risk factor at age 5, or if they have experienced quite poor parenting—in some areas it has been estimated that up to half of children

are starting school without the communication skills that they need if they are to benefit from school—the teacher has an uphill battle. I think the emphasis, in terms of the disengagement agenda, has to be on a really big, joined-up, child-centred approach that starts from zero, from birth onwards.

Q101 Chairman: But that is what Sure Start and children’s centres are all about. It is what the foundation stage is all about. Government policies do recognise that if a child’s brain is unstimulated by the age of two, it will hold that child back for the rest of their life. These are policies that we have applauded in this Committee because they are evidence-based.

Sonia Sodha: Absolutely, and I think Sure Start has been great. There is evidence that it is having an impact, but I do not think that we can be complacent and say, “The box is ticked; Sure Start is done.” The evidence shows that the impact of Sure Start, while it has been there, has actually been quite modest. We know there is a set of very strongly evidence-based interventions that work in tackling these issues early. We know there are programmes such as the nurse-family partnership and Reading Recovery. Over the past few years, the Government have really got behind some of these programmes and put funding in, but we still know that they are not happening enough at the local level. We are not seeing enough evidence-based intervention. So the question is, how do we get services such as Sure Start—Sure Start is a service, not a particular intervention—doing things that we know are very evidence-based? May I just make one more point in relation to what policy has not done over the past decade—a question that Graham raised? An important point to make is that we need to think about policy in a joined-up way. A couple of areas of policy have been neglected by the Government. In the main, education policy has served children at the average or mean level fairly well in this country, but those whom we really need to be concerned about are children affected by the intractable, long tail of underachievement—those at the bottom of the attainments spectrum. I know that the Committee has already considered children identified as having special educational needs, but our education system deals with poor behaviour in a very punitive way. For example, 75% of children who are excluded have been identified as having special educational needs, particularly behavioural problems. There are key, systemic issues in our system, such as the way in which we deal with special educational needs, that have not been looking at properly over the past decade, and we should not forget that when talking about 16 to 18-year-olds. We need to think about those areas that have become a bit siloed, and are not part of mainstream policy. When the Committee writes the report, my plea is that you think about how that area joins up with some of the other areas that you have looked at.

Chairman: Sonia, you are good, but you are hard to control.

Q102 Paul Holmes: Richard said something slightly contradictory earlier when he said that too much emphasis has been placed on reforming the

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curriculum to deliver outcomes. A couple of sentences later, he said that there have been interesting experiments in making the curriculum relevant at about 14 years. So it is all about curriculum reform, is it?

Dr Williams: What I was trying to get at, particularly with regard to diplomas, is that it seems that the response to disengagement is to vocationalise the curriculum, as if vocationalising the curriculum would, of itself, re-engage and re-motivate young people. As someone who has been a teacher with this particular group, my wider, personal reflection is that that is probably true for a constituency of young people who, in GCSE terms, are probably at the C or D boundary. That is intrinsically true for young people who are deeply alienated from the whole process of being at school. What came through in the “engaging youth” inquiry is that, in a sense, we have collapsed re-engagement with learning into a particular curriculum strategy. That does not necessarily take full account of the school experience of those young people. That has also led to an over-reliance on diplomas as the vehicle for preparing young people for work, which goes back to my point about the important distinction between work-related general vocational education and work-based education. We have lost a vision of work-based learning in favour of what is really general vocational provision. That has never had a big appeal to this group. Diplomas are the current iteration, or a version, of that kind of provision, which has been around for a long time, and which is not the answer. What is reflected in the report is the need for a much more sophisticated view of how we start changing the experience of school so that we re-engage young people; it is not just about how we vocationalise bits of the curriculum.

Q103 Paul Holmes: Just one more question. The compulsory participation age will now be raised from 16 to 17, and then to 18. Will that solve the problem, or will it just move it into a new category? We will have people in compulsory training or education who really don’t want to be there.

Chairman: We will have Shaks to answer first.

Shaks Ghosh: There is no substitute for having an A1 education system. We have to keep with that. We have to aspire to it. We have to keep going at it, because it is preventive. I have explained about our portfolio; some of the organisations that we support do very early intervention, while some do the post-16 stuff. What is exciting about working with post-16 young people is that we target in a way that we cannot in schools. In schools, the intention is to raise the general standard, but with 16-year-olds we can start to be much more personalised in the packages of support and care given to young people. That takes me on to my point about increasing the age of participation. I think that could be a real opportunity to keep young people engaged, but there could not have been a worse time for it to happen, just as we are going into public expenditure cuts. That is going to be the tragedy of it.

Q104 Chairman: The last group of witnesses told us that it would save us money if we could solve the NEETs problem.

Shaks Ghosh: We can’t keep our young people in school up to the age of 16. If we are really serious about keeping them—

Chairman: The policy isn’t to keep children in school longer; it’s about participation, linked with work with training, FE and HE. It’s not just raising the school leaving age.

Shaks Ghosh: To create the imaginative offers that we need to keep those young people engaged, to get them engaged—

Q105 Chairman: It is for people like you, sitting in front of this Committee, to come up with those ideas, surely.

Shaks Ghosh: To come up with the ideas, with some of the money—

Chairman: The ideas on how you fill this new participation opportunity with the right kinds of programme. I have called on the Government to have a commission on this. We have a standing commission, if you like, in the expertise we’ve got in this country in this area, but I haven’t seen bold and imaginative programmes coming out to fill that opportunity at 17 and 18. Do you agree?

Shaks Ghosh: Let me talk about City Year and national service, for example. If that could count as what you did in those years, it would be a fantastic opportunity to continue learning, to serve in your community—maybe to serve some of the kids coming through—and to create a different kind of imagery around young people that is inspiring and aspirational. It would also help young people to connect to some of the skills that they need for the world of work, including getting up in the morning, making a commitment, taking responsibility, going somewhere and being part of a team. All of these things could be learned. But these programmes don’t come cheap.

Chairman: Shaks, you know I like everything you’re saying, but I’m going to have to put you on hold, because Graham will be upset if he doesn’t get to ask some questions.

Q106 Paul Holmes: Could I just ask one more question, arising out of something Shaks said. She said we must have an A1 education system. Is an A1 education system one that drills children through SATS and through large numbers of external exams, such as 8, 10, 12 GCSEs and so on? Or is it like the Chairman’s and David Cameron’s favourite education system in Finland, where everybody attends the local comprehensive, there is mixed-ability teaching, almost no external exams and a huge emphasis on learning the soft skills that Sonia was saying are crucial to solving the problem of NEETs? What is an A1 education system?

Chairman: This is going to have to be brief.

Shaks Ghosh: We have to turn out young people from our school system who are rounded, creative, prepared to learn more and to continue their learning through their early years at work.

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Q107 Chairman: Shaks, I must come back on this because Paul knows of my disdain for comparing this country with Finland or any other Nordic or small country. I have recently, with other Select Committee Chairs, met leading people from the OECD. The truth is that if you strip away the Nordics and New Zealand and compare us with other large mature industrial countries, they all have the same problem and some have it worse. According to the OECD, France is worse and Germany is on a par with us. They all have what we call the NEETs problem. Something is going on that is deeper and more challenging. We are looking at our navel in the UK, but actually this is a big, mature industrial societies' problem, isn't it? No one who has given evidence to our Committee has given that dimension yet.

Shaks Ghosh: May I just throw one statistic at you which bears out your point about the big industrial nations and the OECD. In preparing for this Committee, I looked at the United States, which has this phenomenon. They don't call them NEETs, they call them drop-outs, which is much more direct. They have a mind-blowing statistic which is that 51% of their drop-outs come from drop-out factories, which are 13% of the schools. So 2,000 schools in the United States produce 51% of the drop-outs. We have not addressed the issue of geography, but if, with limited resources, you are trying to attack a problem, it is probably really important just to have a look at that data. I understand the Department for Children, Schools and Families has a lot of data that comes from the Connexions service. Are there hot spots, is it particular schools, like the drop-out factories in America, that are churning out these NEETs? That might give us some of the answers.

Chairman: That is very interesting.

Q108 Mr Stuart: I am about to come on to apprenticeships, but I should like to push you, Richard, on the more sophisticated policy response within schools. You said that having more vocational offers was not in itself the answer and that we need to look at the whole experience. Could you explain what you mean by that and how in policy terms we would effect that?

Dr Williams: Where I do not agree with Shaks is that I think the whole issue of providing personalised support in school should not be any greater a challenge than providing it post-16 out of school. Certainly, of the young people we meet, a lot of the factors that result in their disengagement from school are things like bullying, a continuous and reinforced sense of being a failure, having particularly dysfunctional relationships with particular teachers and, I guess, just lacking some of the coping skills needed to be in what feels like a large, quite authoritarian institution. If you go back through the transcripts of our workshops, there are many examples of young people saying that they were essentially bored. That is not an original thing to say. I guess that what those of us who were involved with this inquiry started to explore was whether some of the pressure to achieve at 16, say,

should be lifted and, in relation to some young people, schools should be much freer to innovate and to build relationships with, for example, the voluntary sector from the point of view of providing the personal support that may be needed to keep those young people engaged. This is a completely bizarre example but it is quite telling. On Monday I chaired a conference in Manchester on NEET and the people from the Gateshead 14 to 19 consortium were there. They are currently running an authority-wide initiative called "Spark" and at Key Stage 4, for example, they are exploring teaching Shakespeare through kickboxing, multi-media and scriptwriting. For example, in north Somerset we have a centre for excluded pupils, teaching science in partnership with a forest school. It is, in a way, trying to find innovative means of delivering the mainstream curriculum, rather than giving up on young people and letting them drift off, or simply diverting them to a diploma.

Q109 Mr Stuart: That was an interesting and sophisticated answer. I am making it less sophisticated so I will remember it. What you seem to be talking about was better schools with better teachers. Even within all the strictures of government, the best people transcend all that and manage to be innovative—

Chairman: Hang on, Richard. I have to bring some of the others in. Something Sonia said about tackling those children was important and Shaks talked about the immobility of children, never getting off their estate, never seeing the opportunities outside a very narrow horizon. Could somebody else come back to Graham on that question? I'll bring you back in in a minute, Richard.

Sonia Sodha: One of the important things, when we are thinking about the nature of curriculum, which isn't a written document but is what children actively learn, is that all children should have an entitlement to some of the broader forms of learning that Richard has been talking about. That is the only way that you can ensure that all children have access to a learning style that might suit them. We know that learning experientially—by doing, for example—and in different environments outside the classroom—Ofsted has done a lot of work on that—is very important. Chairman, you're nodding your head.

Chairman: I am shaking my head because it was this Committee that did the original report on the value of out-of-school learning. Ofsted came in our trail.

Sonia Sodha: My apologies for not realising that. You are obviously very well versed on the matter.

Chairman: It seems that it's teaching unions who have put the kibosh on out-of-school learning now.

Mr Stuart: As on so much else.

Chairman: Yes—sorry, I didn't say "yes" to that.

Sonia Sodha: That is a problem. One of the things that we have always argued at Demos is that all young people have an entitlement to learn in different ways through different forms of learning. The emphasis needs to be on ensuring that schools have the support they need to get in flexible forms of provision. The important thing to say is that in the

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21st century, it is not just schools that are our hot houses of curriculum and learning. We need to think about how we buy in organisations in the community as well. There are some examples of excellent initiatives, for example one run by the Helen Hamlyn Foundation, which was set up to encourage local organisations in the community—local chefs and agriculturalists, for example—to work with children in schools on different forms of learning. That has been very successful in the schools in which they operate.

Q110 Mr Stuart: Sonia, you talked about drop-out factories—

Chairman: It was Shaks.

Mr Stuart: Picking up on what Richard was saying, I wonder whether it's something that policy makers can drive other than by trying to raise standards of teaching in schools. If we have a poor institution, poorly led and with too many poor practitioners in it, it doesn't matter what brilliant curricula come up or what brilliant best practice we bring, the truth is that it is not going to work. To what extent is the problem that we have too many drop-out factories rather than thinking, "If only we had offered a bit more best practice and given a little flexibility on the curriculum, we would suddenly have a flowering?" How much of it is a lack of tools, and how much of it is a lack of people who can pick up the tools, whatever you give them?

Chairman: Richard, briefly. Then I will come back to Sonia.

Dr Williams: Rhetorically, how much of it is a function of the performance management regime within which schools work? That, in a sense, is a disincentive to experimentation. I am not legs-crossed-schooled by any means, but my overwhelming impression of the many young people whom I have talked to in the time that I have been at Rathbone is that there is a commonly shared experience that is close to humiliation, simply by being in school. A woman, whom I was talking to in the centre of Wigan, said that when she came to Rathbone, it was the first time that she felt she was being noticed. We often lose sight of the sophisticated discussion of the basic hygiene issues that surround a young person's experience of being in school. What I am really pointing to is a need, in some way, to think about that.

Q111 Mr Stuart: May I just push you further. I am trying to understand to what extent this is a general issue for which a general policy response is needed, and how much of it is particular. In other words, is the same group of people, with exactly the same experience and lack of support at home, in the right institutions, doing fine and not becoming NEET, notwithstanding labour market barriers? If they go to the right school, have the right teacher from reception onwards and are lucky, does one person do fine and not end up NEET, whereas another person with exactly the same characteristics does? I am trying to differentiate between the general situation and the specifics of particular institutions and

pathways that lead people. We then make it their fault when in fact it isn't—it is not their condition, but aspects of the system.

Dr Williams: Clearly, there will be individual differences. All that I am observing is that Rathbone works across the UK—as I said at the beginning, with 17,000 young people—and I think you can generalise that experience. There is a cohort of young people in the school system, almost irrespective of where they are geographically, who have profoundly unpleasant experiences of simply being in school. That is a fundamental feature of drop-out and disengagement.

Q112 Mr Stuart: Is it all schools, or is it drop-out in particular schools?

Dr Williams: I am generalising, because Rathbone has centres all over the country. You could go to any Rathbone centre and you would encounter young people who have had that experience.

Chairman: There will always be a percentage of children who hate school.

Dr Williams: It is not so much about hating school.

Chairman: I know people from our so-called finest public schools who say that they had nothing but a ghastly experience at school.

Mr Stuart: Thirty-one terms and I only enjoyed the last.

Dr Williams: But Chair, it doesn't make it a less real experience and it doesn't have less influence.

Q113 Chairman: That is true, but what this Committee is looking to you for, Richard, are solutions. We know that the problem is out there. People think that Ministers and politicians know about this stuff, but they only know it and can only find solutions because of good evidence, good research and because they are being well informed. Are Rathbone, Demos and other organisations coming up with the answers? If there is a group of people in every school who are not getting the appropriate stimulation, what are we doing about it in terms of targeting programmes? Sonia, you are not going to go through your list again, are you?

Sonia Sodha: No, I am not going to go through the list. I am going to come back to the issue that Graham raised about whether it is about the teachers or the system as a whole. Obviously, teaching quality is massively important. We know that. We also know that Government policy cannot ensure that particular things are happening in every school across the land. That is down to the quality of professionals on the front line. I think the other important question to ask is: to what extent is policy hindering those professionals in doing what is right for their children? If you look at the structure of the schools system at the moment, the structure of the accountability framework and the way in which things such as special educational needs and behaviour work, what do you do if you are a teacher at a school where a child is behaving very poorly? Too often, the answer is that you go down the punitive exclusion route, because as a school you do

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not have the proper support structures in place to deal with the root issues that are causing problems for that child. I know that you shun looking at Finland as an example, Barry, but I am going to point to it.

Mr Stuart: Well done, Sonia.

Sonia Sodha: One thing that Finland does well is that it has excellent multi-agency support for its schools. Yes, you could say that issues crop up less often there because of the nature of the population, and because there is less inequality there, so perhaps it takes less resource for them to deal with the issues. But when you look at what schools there do when a child has a behavioural issue, you see that they have a multi-agency team that comes around to discuss the case of the child and the kind of support that they need, and makes sure that they get it. That is the exception in this country rather than the rule.

Q114 Chairman: But Sonia, I thought that was exactly what Sure Start children's centres did for pre-school, and what the Government were trying to develop through extended school. That isn't happening fast enough, presumably, but there are elements of the provision that you mention, aren't there?

Sonia Sodha: There are definitely some elements, but I don't think we've cracked the nut just yet. We have had initiatives; for example, there have been behaviour and education support teams in schools, which, again, are multi-agency teams, but a lot of the funding to deal with these things is quite short-term and unsustainable. For example, in "Excellence in Cities", you had great initiatives, such as learning support mentors and learning support units. We know that they worked, and we know that behaviour and education support teams in schools work, but the problem was that the money was all siloed and short term, and given to schools for two or three years. When that funding stream comes to an end, schools are supposed to fund those initiatives from their own budget. If we want schools to do the preventive work and the evidence-based stuff with children who are right at the bottom of the attainment spectrum, we need to give schools much more flexibility and freedom over their funding—again, there are some systemic issues here—but we also need to hold them accountable for what is happening at the bottom. We need to give them more support in doing what works, and we need to build up the evidence base about what works with children with severe behavioural problems. For example, the National Academy for Parenting Practitioners is responsible for saying which programmes work and which ones do not. It has only five programmes—parenting programmes—on its database that attract the highest level of evidence-based standards. That is because we do not know very much; we do not know as much about interventions that work with children as we know, for example, about medical interventions. I don't think we can be complacent and say, "We've got Sure Start and extended schools—box ticked." We need much more strategic

thinking about how we spread evidence-based, effective practices in our schools, and in centres such as Sure Start.

Q115 Mr Stuart: Excellent. The apprenticeship schemes I have seen in my local area in east Yorkshire are very selective and highly competitive. What proportion of young people who are currently NEET, or at risk of being NEET, are actually in a position to take up a formal apprenticeship?

Chairman: John, you haven't been getting a fair crack of the whip here.

John Copps: I think apprenticeships are very competitive. I have spoken to employers who take on apprentices, and often they are not very patient. If a young person regularly does not turn up on time, or if they are rude to the customer, they will not last very long. For some of the young people we are talking about, at the bottom end of the bracket, that does not meet their needs. We need to think more in terms of gradations of achievement. Sometimes, with the really hard-to-reach young people, it is about getting them to shake someone's hand and look them in the eye—to do the simple things. Then there are basic skills—learning functional literacy and numeracy. You need to be ready to get a job before you go in. To go back to what Shaks said, if you go on a short, six-week course and come out not ready, it just demotivates you even further.

Q116 Mr Stuart: My question was what proportion of them, or how many, were not capable of a formal apprenticeship. You keep saying that employers are not very patient; well, they are not. If you do not turn up for work on time then you are out. That is the world of work, that is business; businesses are not going to change.

Shaks Ghosh: The whole national apprenticeship service needs to bed in a little bit more. It is wrong to criticise it at this stage; the systems are still being set up and so on. One of the programmes that I am very excited about, Mr Chairman, addresses your concern about where solutions are coming from within the voluntary sector. One of the organisations that we work with in Germany, Hamburger Hauptschulmodell, works with business people in a very close way, bringing them into the schools. That also speaks to your question about what we can do to make schools better at doing the things that schools have to do. At the school level, the relationship with the world of work is something that we see a lot more in Germany than here. That is because of the whole apprenticeship system. Hamburger Hauptschulmodell targets the Hauptschulen, the schools where students tend to learn vocational skills. There are problems with the Hauptschule system, as any German would tell you, but the Hauptschulen bring in these business people to work with their students, helping them to make that transition into the world of apprenticeships. You see business people walking around their schools.

Mr Stuart: I bet you they don't have to be CRB checked.

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Shaks Ghosh: They probably do; I am sure the whole German system is as obsessed with that stuff as we are. Those are technicalities. We can do it; there just has to be the will to do it. One of the things that I certainly found here was resistance from schools to having such relationships with employers.

Q117 Mr Stuart: Was it more from the schools than the employers?

Shaks Ghosh: Probably from both. Going back to what I said right at the beginning, helping people with their transition from one world to the next world means that those two worlds have to create the seamless systems.

Chairman: With the Young Foundation, Huddersfield will have the first studio school, where industry will work in the school with the children.

Shaks Ghosh: Again, that is a very exciting opportunity.

Chairman: It is one of only two pilots, but there are 3,500 secondary schools.

Shaks Ghosh: You've got to start somewhere.

Q118 Mr Timpson: May I take us back to current Government policy to try to tackle the whole NEETS issue, and in particular to the foundation learning pathways as part of the 14-to-19 curriculum reform. Richard, in your written response to our call for evidence, you raised a number of concerns about that. Could you explain your concerns, and may I then ask the other witnesses to give their view on Richard's opinion?

Dr Williams: Rathbone is currently part of the national pilot for the transition from "Entry to Employment" to the foundation learning tier. The essence of the concerns that we are feeding into the development of the pilot is that the full-time equivalent foundation learning programme is built around five qualifications: three functional skills, a vocational certificate at Level 1, and a personal and social development certificate. The key challenge is that many of the young people we work with aren't actually anywhere near ready to pursue five qualification-bearing programmes. The funding for their learning is linked to the qualification. If you have a young person who is able to engage with one qualification, nominally you would draw down a fifth of the funding, even though that young person may have very chronic personal and social development support needs. Moving from "Entry to Employment" to foundation learning—to a much more qualification-bearing approach to engaging with the learning needs of these sorts of young people—is potentially very problematic, unless the funding and the learning are decoupled. That is what we felt, and I know that the Young People's Learning Agency is also aware of that issue. Again, it is a classic perverse effect of wanting to enable more young people to have credit in the form of qualifications on the one hand, and creating structures that, in a sense, do not allow those who are most in need to participate on the other. That is the risk that we are drawing attention to in the evidence.

Q119 Mr Timpson: Just before the others answer, you said earlier that some Government policy development actually diminishes opportunity for people to learn, qualify and get a job at the end of it. Is this an example of that?

Dr Williams: I would say that this is an example of a case where there is a higher risk of a perverse effect. The objective of trying to enable more young people to have more qualifications could actually mean that fewer young people participate. The other side of this, of course, is that those involved in making this provision then become performance managed, in terms of achieving outcomes that link to five qualifications. That in turn inclines them to be more selective. There is a history of that through everything to do with apprenticeships. It has been the same history and the same pattern. So it is a bit of a problem, and there is a tension between how we fund a personalised approach to learning, particularly at the end of the spectrum where young people have the most complex needs, and performance managing to increase numbers of qualifications outcomes. That is the tension that we are pointing to.

Chairman: Shaks, what do you think of the points that Richard made? Edward wants your response.

Shaks Ghosh: There is an issue to do with qualifications that needs resolution, but I'm not sure I entirely have the solution to this. A lot of employers will look at qualifications and say, "They are meaningless to us. What we need are young people with the basic skills for work: people who can turn up on time, shake your hand, and give you the eye contact that you need. We completely discount these qualifications." Yet it seems to me—I think that some of this comes out of the work that Rathbone has done as well—that young people have to have some basic qualifications. It is very clear that those who are sitting out of the world of work have fewer qualifications—they just do. So something is going wrong in that discussion between policy makers, Government and those bodies responsible for producing the qualifications. We haven't got a qualifications system that employers recognise as a real facility for getting young people into the world of work, but I don't know what the answer is.

Chairman: A lot of people, such as City and Guilds, are complaining that very good, specific qualifications at an early level are being squeezed out because the Department wants to rationalise and put a framework around qualifications. A lot of employers know and trust a qualification that they have worked with for years and use it as the way in which they induce people to come into their industry.

Shaks Ghosh: I have spent many years trying to understand the world of qualifications, and it is a minefield.

Chairman: John.

John Copps: My reading of the foundation learning tier is that it is designed to keep people in school, and to ensure that they get a qualification at the end. As we said before, now, if you do not get a qualification, you are more disadvantaged than ever. There are two issues related to the learning tier. One is: does it tackle the real problem? Is the problem the curriculum, or is it the structure of being in school and not being able to

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cope with that? The other is: what do young people think of it? Do they hold the qualifications they get from the foundation learning tier in the same esteem as they do a normal GCSE? Those two points are really important to whether or not it will succeed.

Sonia Sodha: I don't have anything to add.

Q120 Chairman: You don't want to respond—you agree with everything John and Richard said?

Sonia Sodha: Well, I guess I could respond to something that John said about experiences of school and whether it is the curriculum or the structure of schooling that young people are not responding to. It might be interesting to point to an international example in Canada, where they operate a system of schools called outreach schools, or storefront schools. I do not know whether this is something the Committee is familiar with, but it is something I have pointed to in my research work. I visited a couple of these schools on a research trip to Canada. They are structured in a different way from mainstream schools. Children who find it difficult to benefit from a very structured system of schooling—a very structured school day—find it a system based round a flexible learning pattern. There are people working in the schools who have high levels of experience of working with young people with specific behavioural issues, for example, or with young people with additional learning needs. The key is that the staff are of high quality and are genuinely interested in working with those groups of young people. There is also strong accountability for those schools. It is interesting to note that some of them have graduation rates on a par with mainstream Canadian high schools. It is an interesting example of a case where alternative provision has done well, so I would urge the Committee to look at some of that evidence, which I can supply in writing, if you like.

Mr Timpson: Just one more question—

Chairman: If you want to get to Richard, he has to leave soon, so you have to get in now.

Q121 Mr Timpson: I am thinking about the need for ongoing engagement with learning throughout the whole of a child's life, from nought to 18. We talk a lot about the early years—nought to five; we talk a little more than we used to about the seven to 11s; and we obviously now concentrate on the 14-to-19 group, as it is termed for the curriculum reform. There is, though, that 11 to 14 group, those that move on to secondary education—which is a big leap for many—who often do not have the basic skills in place to engage in learning at that next level. Is there anything that you can recommend that the Committee should be considering to tackle that specific age group and ensure that it does not fall into the NEET category that we discussed?

Chairman: Very quick from everyone on this.

Dr Williams: One of the reasons that we changed our target cohort to 11-plus rather than 14-plus was to engage exactly this issue. There are now parts of the country—Bolton is one—where we have a very positive relationship with the schools at Key Stage 3, providing essentially additional support to young people with the kind of characteristics you described.

That is very much support in addressing young people's personal, social and basic skills needs, or helping young people to cope better with being in school. So we get that partnership between ourselves and schools. More than that, it is a great area for development.

Sonia Sodha: I think that you have highlighted a really important issue. The 11 to 14 age group is often an age group that gets missed out. There is obviously a lot of literature on the transition from primary to secondary school and on how difficult some children find that transition. However, that literature is sometimes focused too much on the move from one school to another, rather than on the exact structure of the school that the child is moving to and what that structure looks like. We know that secondary schools are much bigger institutions than primary schools. Children are moving from a system where they have contact with a very limited number of teachers—maybe two or three, and only one for most of their time in primary school—to a system in which, between the ages of 11 and 14, they are often taught by 13 teachers a week, in a revolving cycle of rooms, lessons and timetables. It is a very different system for children to get used to, particularly those who have not developed some of the basic skills in primary school. So some children adjust very well to secondary school; if you speak to teachers, you will find that some children adjust less well. There are some very interesting developments in this area. Some schools in the US and in England are experimenting with different ways of organising 11 to 14 schooling. For example, some of them are trying to ensure that 11 and 12-year-olds come into contact with a smaller number of teachers who teach a broader range of the curriculum. The evidence on the effectiveness of those approaches is still yet to be determined, but I think that they are very interesting case studies. So there is a very important point here, which is about the structure of 11 to 14 schooling and the fact that it seems a bit paradoxical that when you are very young you have one or two teachers who know you very well and who teach you for most of the time; as you become older and more specialised, for example when you are doing A-levels, you again have that very close relationship or bond with your teacher; but between 11 and 14 you are seeing a huge number of teachers every week. I think that there are real questions to be asked about how well any of those teachers can know you. So that is a very interesting point.

Chairman: Does anyone else want to speak on that point? Shaks?

Shaks Ghosh: Yes, a lot of our charities talk about the young people that they work with, the shock to the system that kids experience when they move to the big school, how they just get lost at that stage and how a lot of the input from primary school is this phenomenon called wash-out—how much actually washes out at that moment when children move to the big school. There are two practical examples. School-Home Support is one of the voluntary organisations that we are supporting, helping them to spread across the country. Where they identify young people who will have that difficulty in making the transition from

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primary to secondary school, they will ensure that that relationship with the significant other—the School-Home Support worker—actually moves from the primary school to the big school for a certain amount of time. The other practical example that I was trying to mention was about City Year, the national service organisation that I have talked about already. We have been talking to primary school head teachers about bringing City Year teams in. One of the things that has been really interesting is that head teachers of primary schools have said, “We are deluged with voluntary organisations coming and selling their services to us, wanting to work alongside us”. However, at secondary school level there isn’t any of that. So there is something, and I don’t know what it is, about the voluntary sector preferring to work with primary schools and less so with secondary schools. That is an issue that could do with an organisation like ours looking at it a little more and encouraging more of the social work-type organisations, which travel in parallel with the schools in supporting young people, to work with secondary schools.

Chairman: John?

John Copps: I think that the 11 to 14 age group is more of a neglected age group regarding this issue. I’m a governor of a secondary school in Eltham in south-east London. I do a lot of disciplinary committees there, and the young people who come are always in years 9 and 10, but the teachers know that there are problems before that. We’ve got limited resources and, often, you can see that we are not able to do enough for these young people. I think that there is no substitute for one-to-one support. It’s expensive, but there is no substitute, when you spot a problem at that age, for support with a learning mentor or some sort of outside agency that works with that young person, such as the School-Home Support example that Shaks gave.

Sonia Sodha: I just wanted to respond to what John said about the expense. We know that a lot of these interventions are very expensive up front. For example, we know that something such as Reading Recovery—intensive one-to-one tuition with 6-year-olds who are falling behind—is expensive. We know that the nurse-family partnership is expensive. We know that School-Home Support, on a per-child basis, costs money. However, when you look over the long term at how much can be saved by avoiding some of the problems, such as young people having experience of the youth justice system and being locked up in young offender institutions, and avoiding the issues and the costs to society, which we know are immense, associated with young people being NEET, we can see that the savings over the long term are really strong. There has been a lot of cost-benefit analysis, in the US, of early-intervention programmes, which shows that for some programmes, such as life skills training—a programme that is delivered in school—every dollar spent returns \$25 to the state over the long term. It is a question of finding the up-front investment now to

save money later. Of course, that is difficult because it doesn’t accord with political time horizons. It is very difficult in this fiscal climate to find money for up-front investment but we need to do it. There are a couple of really innovative examples where that has been done that I would like to draw the Committee’s attention to. One is in Washington state, where the state legislature commissioned a public policy institute in Washington state to undertake a cost-benefit analysis of the returns from early intervention programmes. Washington state decided to build fewer prisons now for 20 years’ time as a result of money that it is investing in early intervention work. The second example is from Birmingham, here in England. Birmingham local authority has invested a considerable sum of money into the Brighter Futures commissioning programme, which looks specifically at early intervention. I think that it is £50 million over five years, I can get you the exact figures.¹ It has struck a deal with the council that it will invest £50 million on the understanding that there is—I think—a £150-million return over the long term. Washington state and Birmingham are examples of very strong political leadership working against some of the structural and political disincentives to invest in these programmes that deliver very long-term gains. Obviously, there is not a lot that we can do about the politics—maybe scrap democracy, which no one would advocate. However, in terms of the structural disincentives, there are some disincentives at the local level, for example, we know that money is very siloed. It goes to health at the local level and to education, which means, too often, that one agency is reluctant to put up the up-front investment that is going to save another agency money. There is shared responsibility for outcomes across different agencies, across schools, the police and PCTs, which means that too often, no one is willing to put their hands up and take responsibility for a child’s outcome. Again, I am banging the drum for structural reform. There are some things that we could probably do at the local level, in terms of the siloed nature of local budgets, which would make it easier for some of this early intervention and prevention work to happen.

Chairman: Thanks for that. I have to pull stumps now because we’ve run out of time. We’d love to have gone on for longer because we have learnt a lot. We’ve really enjoyed the invigoration of discussion and debate, as well as the answers to the questions. Would you stay in touch with the Committee? We want to make this a really first-class report. You’ll go away and say, “Why didn’t I say that? Why didn’t they ask me this? Why didn’t they give me a chance to say some remarks at the end?”, because we ran out of time. Would you stay with it? That’s the way we write good reports. Thanks to the team for hanging in there.

¹ *Note by witness:* Birmingham City Council has invested £41.75 million over 5 years in its early intervention Brighter Futures programme on the expectation that this will return £102 million of cashable benefits over 15 years. The wider benefits—including those to the local authority, but also more broadly, are estimated to be £600 million over 15 years.

Monday 8 February 2010

Members present:

Mr Barry Sheerman (Chairman)

Annette Brooke
Paul Holmes
Mr Andrew Pelling

Helen Southworth
Mr Graham Stuart

Memorandum submitted by Barnardo's

INTRODUCTION

1 Barnardo's works directly with over 100,000 children, young people and their families every year. We run over 400 projects across the UK, including counselling for children who have been abused, fostering and adoption services, vocational training and disability services. About two-thirds of our services involve education or training, including:

- Vocational training and work-based learning for 14–19 year olds, including Entry to Employment (E2E) programmes and apprenticeships
- Specialist support services for vulnerable young people including teenage mothers, young people with mental health difficulties, homeless young people
- Alternative provision for young people excluded or at risk of exclusion
- Special schools for children with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties
- Children's centres and parenting programmes.

2 Every Barnardo's project is different but each believes that every child deserves the best start in life, no matter who they are, what they have done or what they have been through. We use the knowledge gained from our direct work with children and young people to campaign for improvements in policy and practice.

3 This submission draws extensively on our frontline work with young people who are (or until recently were) not in education, employment or training (NEET); and the findings of in-depth research carried out during 2008–09 with 75 young people across 19 of our services, published in our *Second Chances* report.¹

4 We would be delighted to provide further information on these issues, or to facilitate visits to relevant Barnardo's education and training services for Committee members.

1. SUMMARY

1.1 Barnardo's is most concerned about vulnerable and disadvantaged young people who are most at risk of becoming "long-term" NEET, because they face complex barriers to participation

1.2 Barnardo's would contend that the challenge is not so much to identify those at risk of becoming NEET—which is often just a transient statistical status—but to identify and support those who are having difficulties in school, helping them to get back on track in learning and to address their wider needs, as soon as possible.

1.3 The NEET strategy is only a small part of the jigsaw, which we are supportive of, in so far as it goes. Barnardo's would prefer to see a clear focus on ensuring all young people have opportunities to participate in meaningful education or training or a job with training, than on reducing NEETs, ie on ensuring all young people are constructively engaged in learning of some sort (including learning in the workplace), rather than a focus on what they are *not* doing.

1.4 Priorities within the wider programme of reform should include:

- "Re-engagement provision": to engage hard to reach young people and support their transition back to education, training or into work
- Alternative and vocational pathways should be available in every area as a positive 14–19 option
- A growth in work-based learning and vocational opportunities (including apprenticeships) for 14–19 year olds, with more supported opportunities for young people working at entry level or level one.

1.5 Barnardo's supports the raising of the participation age (RPA) in education or training to 18, because it represents an important opportunity to improve provision for the many young people who leave school at 16 with few skills and poor long-term prospects. However, "more of the same" will not work for young

¹ Evans, J. and Pinney, A. (2009) *Second Chances: Re-engaging young people in education and training*, Barnardo's http://www.barnardos.org.uk/10942_2nd_chances_report.pdf

people already disengaged and alienated by 11 years of compulsory schooling. We hope that RPA will provide the impetus for developing integrated approaches to support young people with specific barriers back to education, training and into employment.

1.6 Further research is needed to identify “what works” in supporting participation for young people who face “super-barriers”—such as young offenders, homeless young people and those with severe mental health difficulties whose education is often put on hold indefinitely.

1.7 Since the onset of the recession, Barnardo’s has been seeking to draw attention to the plight of 16 and 17 year olds trapped in unemployment. Experience from previous recessions shows that long spells of unemployment can do lasting damage to a young person’s future job and earning prospects.

1.8 There is an urgent need for greater investment in expanding work-based learning (WBL), including apprenticeships and Entry to Employment (E2E) programmes. Regrettably, apprenticeships remain beyond the reach of many of Barnardo’s service users, a situation compounded by the Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act 2009 (ASCL). This Act failed to recognise the valuable role that work-based Programme Led Apprenticeships (PLAs) have played in enabling disadvantaged young people, well suited to apprenticeship training and capable of success, into apprenticeships.

1.9 Widening access to apprenticeships is an urgent challenge which needs to be addressed. Women, Black and minority ethnic (BME) groups and disabled people are all under-represented. A failure to protect and build on the best of work-based programme-led apprenticeships will perpetuate such inequalities.

2. STRATEGIES FOR THE IDENTIFICATION OF YOUNG PEOPLE AT RISK OF FALLING INTO THE “NEET” CATEGORY

2.1 The NEET population is diverse and subject to much “churn”—most young people do not spend long periods being NEET, but move rapidly between short courses, work placements and jobs, with some periods of inactivity. The Government estimates that only 1% of 16–18 year olds are “long-term” NEET, meaning that they are NEET at each of the three surveys at age 16, 17 and 18.²

2.2 Barnardo’s is most concerned about vulnerable and disadvantaged young people who are most at risk of becoming long-term NEET, because they face complex barriers to participation. Groups who are over-represented in the NEET population and whom Barnardo’s work with extensively include:

- Teenage mothers—an estimated 20,000 are NEET
- Looked after children and care leavers
- Young people with mental health difficulties whose education has been disrupted by illness and time in hospital
- Young people with learning difficulties and disabilities—more than twice as likely to be NEET
- Homeless young people and those in temporary/insecure housing

2.3 In addition to young people facing specific barriers, like the groups highlighted above, our research points to larger numbers of disadvantaged young people who become NEET at 16 because of poor experiences in school—characterised by poor relationships with teachers, boredom, bullying and an escalating cycle of challenging behaviour, truancy and exclusion. The young people interviewed for Barnardo’s *Second Chances* research (2009) felt that they would have done better in school if lessons had been more relevant to future work prospects; if they had more support and encouragement; and if they had been subjected to less bullying and fewer rules.

2.4 White working class boys are over-represented in this group.³ The Longitudinal Survey of Young People in Education also points to a strong correlation with parental income and employment status; young people are more likely to become NEET at 16 if:

- They come from a low income household—children on free school meals are more than twice as likely to be NEET at 16.
- Their parents are unemployed, work in a “lower” or “routine” profession, or did not achieve A level equivalent qualifications.⁴

Improving outcomes for young people at risk of becoming NEET has a key role to play in breaking the cycle of intergenerational poverty.

2.5 Barnardo’s would contend that the challenge is not so much to identify those at risk of becoming NEET—which is often just a transient statistical status—but to identify and support those who are having difficulties in school, helping them to get back on track in learning and to address their wider needs, as soon as possible.

2.6 Relevant policies, which all have a contribution to make to reducing the risk of becoming NEET (which can be considered preventive strategies) include:

² Department for Education and Skills (2007) *Reducing the number of young people not in education, employment or training (NEET) by 2013*, DFES, p.3

³ Analysis by the New Policy Institute shows that white, working class boys outnumber every other group amongst young people NEET <http://www.poverty.org.uk/32/index.shtml#def> (accessed on 16 December 2009)

⁴ DCSF Statistical Bulletin *The Activities and Experiences of 16 year olds: England 2007*

- Roll-out of personal tutors—but they must support children across all *Every Child Matters* outcomes, not just academic work⁵
- Roll-out of catch-up tuition in English and maths⁶
- Strengthened focus on emotional well-being:
 - Statutory Personal, Social, Health and Economic Education (PSHE) including sex and relationships education through the current Children, Schools and Families Bill
 - Extending preventive mental health services to schools and promoting mental health through the SEAL programme (Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning)
- Improving support for young people with Special Educational Needs, including implementation of the Lamb Review.⁷

3. SERVICES AND PROGRAMMES TO SUPPORT THOSE MOST AT RISK OF BECOMING “NEET”, AND TO REDUCE THE NUMBERS AND ADDRESS THE NEEDS OF THOSE WHO HAVE BECOME PERSISTENTLY “NEET”

3.1 Barnardo’s provides two main types of service for young people who are—or have recently been—NEET:

- Support services for vulnerable young people facing barriers to participation—such as young mothers, homeless young people, care leavers and young people with mental health problems
- Vocational training and work-based learning services; working in partnership with local employers, schools, colleges and other charities, we train and support over 2,200 young people every year. We work across the UK in sectors including construction, catering and hospitality, vehicle maintenance, business administration, horticulture, retail, warehousing and hair and beauty therapy.

Support service—The Base in Whitley Bay is a Barnardo’s service for socially excluded and unemployed young people. It offers a wide range of drop-in services providing information, advice and support covering issues as diverse as housing difficulties, mental health and legal problems. The Base offers an E2E (Entry to Employment) programme providing flexible learning for the most vulnerable people.

Michelle says: “If it wasn’t for The Base helping me, if it wasn’t for my key worker sticking with me, I don’t know where I would be. It’s taken me three years to understand that when they were trying to tell me about life, they were trying to help me . . . I can see it now, it’s like the penny has dropped. I was so off the rails. I’ve now got a job on the rigs, I earn mega bucks!”

Vocational training—Dr B’s Restaurant and Coffee Shop in Belfast offers a real work environment for young people aged 16 to 24, many of whom have learning disabilities. Young people can gain NVQs in catering over one to two years, after which many move on to permanent employment. The restaurant is open every weekday to the public and can be booked out for dinner.

Dr B’s also runs a successful outside catering service allowing young people to experience a variety of different work environments before completing their course. As well as being able to gain qualifications that will help them to find work, Dr B’s provides an environment where young people can build their self-confidence and social skills whilst working, where necessary, on literacy and numeracy skills as well.

Ciaran who attends Dr B’s says: “. . . the staff really helped me understand a lot of things, not just about food. I learned about being a good team member, being reliable, keeping myself safe, improving my reading and writing. There was so much more to learn than I thought.”

3.2 Both types of Barnardo’s service combine elements of education and support. Some young people need much more individual attention to build their confidence and develop the interpersonal and life skills that they will need to take the next steps towards more formal learning or work; others cope well with just a little advice and support from project workers.

3.4 Underpinning these services is a set of values and approaches, which are key to our success in helping young people to turn their lives around. These are:

- Flexibility—including “open door” enrolment policies, frequent start dates and allowing more time to complete a qualification
- Positive relationships with project workers, working individually and in small groups to support and encourage young people
- Belief—building on young people’s strengths and “sticking with them” even when they behave badly, make mistakes or think about giving up

⁵ DCSF (2007) *The Children’s Plan* Para 14 and DCSF (2009) *Your child, your schools, our future: building a 21st century schools system* Para 2.24

⁶ The Making Good Progress Pilot provides up to ten hours of targeted one-to-one tuition in reading/writing and/or mathematics for 7–14 year olds who are falling behind. DCSF (2007) *The Children’s Plan* Para 3.72

⁷ Final report published on 16 December 2009 <http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/lambinquiry/>

4. THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE GOVERNMENT'S NEET STRATEGY

4.1 The NEET strategy is only a small part of the jigsaw, which we are supportive of, in so far as it goes. Barnardo's would prefer to see a clear focus on ensuring all young people have opportunities to participate in meaningful education or training or a job with training, than on reducing NEETs, ie on ensuring all young people are constructively engaged in learning of some sort (including learning in the workplace), rather than a focus on what they are not doing.

4.2 Following this logic, we believe that the wider programme of reform—to ensure that every young person has a meaningful learning offer, extending apprenticeships, rolling out diplomas, further developing the foundation learning tier etc—is more significant (in terms of moving towards the Government's aim of full participation of 16–18 year olds by 2015) than the NEET strategy. Based on the experience of our services users, priorities within the wider programme of reform should include:

- “Re-engagement provision”: to engage hard to reach young people and support their transition back to education, training or into work. To this end, local authorities should plan for an expansion in provision with the following characteristics:
 - A high ratio of staff to young people to enable 1 to 1 support from key workers and small group activities
 - Outreach capacity to engage young people and sustain their participation
 - Flexibility—for example, allowing more time to complete modules and occasional breaks in participation if crises occur
 - Informal learning opportunities to develop new skills and build confidence
 - Access to targeted support for young people who face specific barriers
- Alternative and vocational pathways should be available in every area as a positive 14–19 option, recognising that a sizeable proportion of young people (perhaps as many as one in five) are not engaged by traditional academic learning in a classroom environment, so fail to realise their potential in school.
- The Government should drive a growth in work-based learning and vocational opportunities (including apprenticeships) for 14–19 year olds, with more supported opportunities for young people working at entry level or level one. In particular, action is needed to generate more work-based learning opportunities in areas of economic decline. The current economic downturn makes this task all the more urgent, and we welcome the recent Employment White Paper's proposals for 16 and 17 year olds.⁸

5. THE LIKELY IMPACT OF RAISING THE PARTICIPATION AGE ON STRATEGIES FOR ADDRESSING THE NEEDS OF YOUNG PEOPLE NOT IN EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT OR TRAINING

5.1 Barnardo's supports the raising of the participation age (RPA) in education or training to 18, because it represents an important opportunity to improve provision for the many young people who leave school at 16 with few skills and poor long-term prospects. Young people from disadvantaged backgrounds are among the least likely to stay on, perpetuating the cycle of poverty from one generation to the next. These young people often lack the skills and confidence needed to impress employers so rapidly find themselves trapped in unemployment.

5.2 However, “more of the same” will not work for young people already disengaged and alienated by 11 years of compulsory schooling. Our research found that disengagement tended to be a cumulative process, starting with difficulties in primary school and becoming entrenched by negative experiences in secondary school. Young people who lacked confidence or struggled in class seemed to have lost their way in large secondary schools, where their difficulties were either not noticed or insufficiently addressed. A narrow emphasis on academic achievement and gaining A* to C grades at GCSE left many convinced they were failures. These young people felt they would have done better at school if lessons had been more relevant to future work prospects; if they had more support and encouragement; and if they had been subjected to less bullying and fewer rules.

5.3 Barnardo's would like to see a broader learning offer from the age of 14 to motivate and re-engage young people at risk of becoming NEET (see para 4.2). Expanding work-based learning and employment opportunities (with the requisite level of training) will be critical to engage and sustain the motivation of many young people currently lost to the education system at 16 (or earlier).

5.4 From our frontline work, we are also aware of the thousands of young people who are NEET because they face specific barriers, including: teenage parents; looked after children and care leavers; young people with mental health difficulties whose education has been disrupted by illness and time in hospital; young people with learning difficulties and disabilities; and homeless young people and those in temporary/insecure housing. We hope that RPA will provide the impetus for developing integrated approaches to supporting these young people back to education, training and into employment.

⁸ DWP (2009) *Building Britain's Recovery: Achieving Full Employment* (Cm 7751)

5.5 Lastly, further research is needed to identify “what works” in supporting participation for young people who face “super-barriers”—such as young offenders, homeless young people and those with severe mental health difficulties whose education is often put on hold indefinitely.

6. THE OPPORTUNITIES AND FUTURE PROSPECTS IN EDUCATION, TRAINING AND EMPLOYMENT FOR 16–18 YEAR OLDS

6.1 Since the onset of the recession, Barnardo’s has been seeking to draw attention to the plight of 16 and 17 year olds trapped in unemployment. The policy assumption is that they should be in education or training, but the reality is that many want to work or continue learning in the workplace, and this may be a good option for them in the short to medium term.

6.2 By 2013, young people in England will be required to stay on in education or training until age 17, and by 2015 until age 18; a job with the requisite level of training (equivalent to one day a week) will remain an option. Until very recently, employment has remained a neglected pathway in RPA policy, with unemployed 16 and 17 year olds appearing to fall between the two stools of DWP and DCSF responsibility. Barnardo’s therefore welcomes recent announcements in the Employment White Paper⁹ which includes several measures for 16 and 17 year olds, as we have been calling for.¹⁰

6.3 Experience from previous recessions shows that long spells of unemployment can do lasting damage to a young person’s future job and earning prospects. Youth unemployment of more than six months has been shown to leave an enduring “wage scar” equivalent to a reduction in wages of 23% at age 33 and 15% at age 42.¹¹ This increased chance of lower wages will not only have an effect on the current generation of young people, but also on their families. The Government has pledged to end child poverty by 2020, yet a failure to tackle soaring youth unemployment now is likely to result in more children growing up in poverty, as today’s unsupported 16 and 17 year olds become tomorrow’s unemployed parents.

6.4 There is also an urgent need for greater investment in expanding work-based learning (WBL), including apprenticeships and Entry to Employment (E2E) programmes. By the end of 2008, 90,000 fewer 16–17 year olds were on work-based routes than in 1995.¹² In this context, we welcome the recent announcement of “golden hellos” for employers taking on apprentices in this age group.

6.5 Regrettably, apprenticeships remain beyond the reach of many Barnardo’s service users, a situation compounded by the Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act 2009 (ASCL). This Act failed to recognise the valuable role that work-based Programme Led Apprenticeships (PLAs) have played in enabling disadvantaged young people, well suited to apprenticeship training and capable of success, into apprenticeships.

6.6 On work-based PLAs, apprentices spend nearly all of their time in the workplace, typically four out of five days. They do the same work, follow the same programme and gain the same qualifications as employed apprentices, but they are unwaged and most are supported through the Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA). They may undertake several placements rather than spending all their time with one employer, gaining wider experience and usually being employed towards the end of their programme. Charities like Barnardo’s and Rathbone support these young people, so that they have the chance to show employers just what they are capable of, as employers will often not take on the financial risk of employing someone from a chaotic background.

6.7 The Government made an amendment to the ASCL Act 2009 to allow a period of up to six months on a work-based PLA to count towards the completion of an apprenticeship, funded by the National Apprenticeship Service, and will work with Barnardo’s, Rathbone and others on the Regulations and guidance on this issue. However, the Minister stated that young people cannot be called apprentices during this period, which will be de-motivating to the disadvantaged young people we work with. Barnardo’s look forward to working with the Government to see how the best of the work-based PLA approach can be preserved under the new Act, to ensure that disadvantaged young people with chaotic backgrounds are given the chance of embarking on an apprenticeship.

6.8 More broadly, widening access to apprenticeships is an urgent challenge which needs to be addressed. Women, Black and minority ethnic (BME) groups and disabled people are all under-represented on apprenticeships. Although this is reflected in the wider employment pattern, apprenticeships are still more segregated by gender, ethnicity and disability than the rest of the corresponding sector’s workforce.¹³ A failure to protect and build on the best of work-based programme-led apprenticeships will perpetuate such inequalities.

⁹ DWP (2009) *Building Britain’s Recovery: Achieving Full Employment* (Cm 7751)

¹⁰ Smith, N. and Pinney, A. (2009) *Lost in Transition: The Urgent Need to Help Young School Leavers into Employment or Work-based Learning*—briefing for party conferences 2009

¹¹ Gregg, P and Tominey, E (2004) *The Wage Scar from Youth Unemployment*, CMPO Working Paper Series No. 04/097. These figures assume no further periods of unemployment.

¹² DCSF Statistical Bulletin *The Activities and Experiences of 16 year olds: England 2007*

¹³ DCSF (2009) *World-class Apprenticeships: Unlocking Talent, Building Skills for All*, Chapter 7

6.9 The 2005 Apprenticeships pay survey found a 40% average pay differential between male and female apprentices.¹⁴ BME apprentices are more likely not to progress to a related job after completion of their framework than other apprentices, and are less likely than other young people not to gain an apprenticeship after completing a pre-apprenticeship course.¹⁵

December 2009

Memorandum submitted by Mencap

Mencap is the leading charity working with children and adults with a learning disability, their parents and carers. We are fighting for a world where everyone with a learning disability has an equal right to choice, opportunity and respect, with the support they need.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

We welcome the Government's focus on NEETs but believe that the current strategy does not sufficiently address the specific needs of young people with a learning disability. The Government's strategy for reducing the number of young people who are NEET is based around 3 key components:

1. Careful tracking: Identifying early those who are NEET and those at risk of being NEET.

1.1 Issues:

- The focus of the strategy is on young people aged 16–18 years old. However, while at age 16 young disabled are twice as likely not to be in any form of education, employment or training as their non-disabled peers, this figure increases to 3 times as likely by the age of 19.¹⁶ Learners with a learning disability, who may take longer to progress, are likely to stay in the education system for longer and many young people with a learning disability will still be in school at age 18. A strategy that therefore only focuses on young people up to the age of 18 will miss the transition period from school to FE, training or employment (when many young people become NEET) for learners with a learning disability.
- Whilst Connexions can work with young people with a learning disability and/or difficulty to 25, they only have a responsibility to track and record destinations of young people aged 16–19. Given that many more people with a learning disability become NEET at age 19, resources need to be invested in monitoring and tracking young people aged 19–25 who are particularly vulnerable.

2. Personalised guidance and support: Ensuring young people know how to access education, training or employment and to enable them to overcome barriers to participation. The “universal offer” for all young people is high quality, comprehensive and impartial information, advice and guidance (IAG) to help young people make informed decisions. On top of this young people with particular needs should have access to targeted support to overcome specific barriers to become EET.

2.1 Issues

- There have been some concerns about how effectively the Connexions service—the main deliverers of IAG—have been able to support young people with a learning disability. Families often feel that staff do not have the necessary knowledge to advise on future options for this group of young people.
- In addition to IAG, there needs to be sufficient numbers of skilled staff who can support young people with a learning disability who need intensive targeted support which challenges the multiple barriers to their participation. For instance, staff may need to look at more flexible ways of supporting young people to access learning opportunities, eg through use of personal budgets, and to act as advocates to challenge providers to offer equality of access to disabled young people.
- Despite the legal framework around transition planning for young people with SEN, the experience of young people with a learning disability is poor, with many feeling that planning for transition is too late, the review process is not adhered to and that staff don't have the information or knowledge to provide good advice about the options for young people.

3. Provision of a full range of courses to meet demand: Sufficient provision at every level and in every style of learning. The Government is reforming the qualifications framework to ensure there is provision to meet young people's needs (through the Government's 14–19 education and training reform programme). This includes the introduction of Foundation Learning (for those at Level 1 and below), vocational and subject based learning and more Apprenticeship places.

¹⁴ Ullman, A and Deakin, G (2005) Apprenticeship Pay: A Survey of Earnings by Sector (DfES Research Report 834)

¹⁵ DCSF (2009) *World-class Apprenticeships: Unlocking Talent, Building Skills for All*, p.45–46

¹⁶ *One in Ten—key messages from policy, research and practice about young people who are NEET*, Tunnard et al, 2009

3.1 *Issues:*

- There is little reliable data about the numbers of people with a learning disability accessing further education or training (as distinct from the wider cohort of learners with a learning difficulty and/or difficulty (LLDD)).¹⁷ It is therefore difficult to establish a true picture of the numbers and type of provision being accessed by people with a learning disability.
- The evidence suggests that there have been substantial cuts to further education provision for learners with a learning disability.¹⁸ In some cases this has been as a result of poor and non-progressive provision. Whilst it is quite right that poor quality provision is ceased, it seems that there remains a gap between ending such provision and the roll-out of improved quality provision for learners with a learning disability. Where no alternative options are available, this is leaving many people with a learning disability with nothing to do.
- The transfer of funding from the LSC to local authorities (and the creation of the Skills Funding Agency and Young Person's Learning Agency) provides an opportunity to bring together systems of support in health, social care and education. However, it is essential that funding for further education and training for people with a learning disability is not threatened by potential pressures to divert it. The recent Skills Investment Strategy raises some questions in relation to funding for learners with a learning disability with the developmental learning budget set to halve in 2010–11.¹⁹ In addition, there remain a number of questions around the responsibilities of the local authority and the Skills Funding Agency in relation to provision for LLDD.
- Much has been made of the development of the Foundation Learning programme and increased opportunities for Apprenticeships. It is essential that these can be accessed by people with a learning disability and that they are sufficiently resourced. The focus on Level 2 qualifications in relation to Apprenticeships, for example, suggests that it is unlikely that many people with a learning disability will be able to access this option.
- There are a number of strategies and programmes specifically aimed at people with a learning disability around transition and employment. It is essential that there is a joined up approach in order to ensure that the Government's NEET strategy takes into account these other strands of work.

SUBMISSION

*Strategies for the identification of young people at risk of falling into the 'NEET' category*6 *Learning disability as a distinct group*

6.1 The Government's NEET strategy²⁰ notes that "young people with learning difficulties and disabilities are twice as likely to be NEET as those without". However, there is no specific data collection on the numbers of young people with a *learning disability* (as a distinct group) who are NEET. There is an issue generally in terms of the different definitions used across government departments and related bodies in relation to 'learning disability and/or difficulty'—and in particular in relation to *learners* with a learning disability and/or difficulty.

6.2 In education, Special Educational Needs (SEN) and statements of SEN are used to describe the needs and entitlements of young people up to the age of 16 (or 18/19 for some young people). In post 16 learning, the Learning and Skills Council use the catch-all heading "learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities" to describe and monitor a wide group of learners aged 16–19 and over (depending on when they enter LSC provision). This includes people with "mental health difficulties, autistic spectrum disorders, dyslexia, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, physical, sensory and cognitive impairments and other identified and non-identified difficulties in learning which may (or may not) have led to 'special educational needs' interventions at school".²¹ Such an all encompassing definition, as well as differences in terminology/definition between departments, presents a challenge in terms of monitoring learners with a learning disability specifically and does not recognise the particular exclusion of people with a learning disability in employment, education and/or training. It therefore limits any sort of accurate analysis of the particular barriers to participation facing young people with a learning disability.

6.3 We know that people with a learning disability remain the most excluded group from the UK workforce with fewer than 10% of people with a learning disability known to social services in paid employment. However, without robust data collection on the numbers accessing further education and/or

¹⁷ The definition of a learner with a learning difficulty and/or disability is taken from section 13 of the Learning and Skills Act 2000. A person has a learning difficulty if:

(a) he has a significantly greater difficulty in learning than the majority of persons of his age, or:

(b) he has a disability which either prevents or hinders him from making use of facilities of a kind generally provided by institutions providing post-16 education or training."

¹⁸ Impact on Adults with Learning Difficulties and/or Disabilities: Issues from the 2006–07 Planning Round, LSC, January 2007

¹⁹ Skills Investment Strategy, 2010–11, BIS, November 2009

²⁰ Reducing the number of young people not in education, employment or training (NEET), DCSF, 2008

²¹ Progression through Partnership, DfES, DH and DWP, 2007

training, we will never be able to get an accurate picture of the numbers who are NEET, the particular barriers to FE/training facing people with a learning disability or indeed whether existing provision is working to support people into paid work.

7. *Range of learners with a learning disability*

7.1 It is important to bear in mind that there are many types of learning disability, ranging from someone with a relatively mild learning disability to someone with profound and multiple learning disabilities. The “pathway” from school onwards for young people with a learning disability will therefore vary enormously, as will the support needs of the young people. Thus, it is important to acknowledge the possible different starting points of this group of learners and the different barriers to participation.

8. *Focus on those aged 16–18*

8.1 The Government’s NEET strategy focuses on those aged from 16–18—although it is worth noting that this focus clearly has a relative shelf-life given that the Education and Skills Act 2008 legislates for participation in learning up until the age of 18 (until 17 from 2013 and until 18 from 2015). It will be important to ensure that the raising of the participation age does not simply “blur” the statistics in terms of the numbers of young people who are NEET—thus, in the short-term it may appear that numbers are falling as the participation age increases; the reality, on the other hand, may well be that there is simply a shift from the 16–18 age range, to those over the age of 18. The key has to be about addressing existing poor provision and support services/processes (eg transition) and not about simply pro-longing engagement in unsuitable provision.

8.2 Mencap supports the raising of the participation age to 18. We believe this provides a real opportunity to ensure quality educational opportunities for young people with a learning disability who may take longer to progress and therefore need to stay in the education system for longer. However, given this, we would argue that the age range in terms of the Government’s strategy be increased up to 25 for learners with a learning disability in line with related policy. Many young people with a learning disability will still be in school at age 18. A strategy that therefore only focuses on young people up to the age of 18 will miss the transition period from school to FE, training or employment for many learners with a learning disability.

8.3 In addition, it is worth noting the fact that many disabled pupils and pupils with SEN are already out of school by the age of 16. DCSF figures published in 2007 to 2008²² show that:

- 33 in every 10,000 pupils with a statement of SEN were permanently excluded;
- 38 in every 10,000 pupils with SEN but without a statement were permanently excluded;
- 4 in every 10,000 pupils with no SEN were permanently excluded.

9. *Tracking/early identification of NEETS*

9.1 A key element of the Government’s NEETS strategy is the tracking of young people by the Connexions service, identifying as soon as possible those who fall out of provision. Whilst Connexions can work with young people with Learning Difficulties or Disabilities up to 25, they only have a responsibility to track and record destinations of young people 16–19. Given that many more people with a learning disability become NEET at age 19, resources need to be invested in monitoring and tracking young people aged 19–25.

9.2 Mencap welcomes the national indicator that focuses on reducing NEETS and the fact that 115 out of 150 local authorities have decided to include this as a key target in their Local Area Agreements. However, these figures are not broken down by impairment group. Without this, it is unlikely to act as a meaningful indicator for measuring improvements in relation to young people with a learning disability. There also needs to be an extension of the age range to 25 as outlined earlier. There is a clear opportunity to link this indicator with the NI146 on adults with learning disabilities in employment and to more effectively track progress of the Government’s NEETS strategy in relation to this group.

SERVICES AND PROGRAMMES TO SUPPORT THOSE MOST AT RISK OF BECOMING NEET AND TO REDUCE THE NUMBERS AND ADDRESS THE NEEDS OF THOSE WHO HAVE BECOME PERSISTENTLY NEET/THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE GOVERNMENT’S NEET STRATEGY

10. *Transition Planning*

10.1 There is a clear legislative framework for supporting young people with special educational needs to make an effective transition to continuing education and vocational or occupational training after leaving school and hence in theory for avoiding young people with SEN becoming NEET. Schools have a statutory duty to lead in the overall transition process. The Education Act 1996 and SEN Code of Practice 2001 set out the statutory process of transition for young people with special educational needs from Year 9 onwards.

²² Statistical First Release: Permanent and Fixed Period exclusions from schools and exclusion appeals in England, 2007/08, DCSF, 2009

10.2 The aim of the annual review in year 9 and subsequent years is to draw up and subsequently review a “Transition Plan” which draws together information from a range of individuals within and beyond school in order to plan coherently for the young person’s transition to adult life. The review should involve the agencies that may play a major role in the young person’s life during the post-school years and must involve the Connexions Service. With the introduction of the Education and Skills Act 2008, responsibility for information, advice and guidance has passed to the local authority although most authorities have continued with the “Connexions” branding. Furthermore, the Education and Skills Act 2008 sets out that local authorities have a duty to undertake a section 139 assessment for school leavers in relation to further education or training; a learning difficulty assessment.

10.3 Despite this legal framework, the experience of young people with a learning disability is poor, with many feeling that planning for transition is too late, the review process is not adhered to and that staff don’t have the information or knowledge to provide good advice about the options for young people.^{23,24} Young people living away from home can face the most problematic transitions.^{25,26} In addition, there are many young people who have a learning disability who don’t have a statement of special educational needs and therefore aren’t subject to the formal SEN transition planning process.

10.4 Alongside the legal framework, the Government has provided good practice guidance for key agencies that should be involved in the transition process.²⁷ However, evidence suggests that local practice is variable. Self assessment Survey of 147 local areas in England for Government’s TSP programme found that only 50% had a transition protocol and only 44% had a transition pathway—an operational plan that maps out what young people and families can expect when, and who is responsible for each activity.²⁸

10.5 *Improving Life Chances* (Cabinet Office 2005) found that poor transition planning was the key barrier to improving disabled people’s life chances. Families report that they are not aware of the process, that other agencies do not attend reviews and that Connexions services lack the skills to work with young people with learning disabilities.

11. Post college transition planning

11.1 It is important that young people have a clear progression route through college, with transition support both into and out of college. Whilst there is a statutory process for planning the transition from school, there is no parallel duty in relation to leaving college and yet this may be the most problematic transition for young people with a learning disability and the time when they are most vulnerable to becoming NEET.

12. Choice and quality in further education and training

12.1 Recent policy development around existing further education and training provision for learners with a learning difficulty and/or disability²⁹ recognises that there is a need to develop an infrastructure of good quality provision in a local setting. Families of young people with a learning disability often find that needs are not being met in local further education colleges, meaning that out of area residential provision is often the only option. Further, the quality of provision for this group of learners is variable, with some individuals remaining at college for years “sometimes repeating courses, or returning to the day centre from which they were originally referred, only to come back to college a few years later”.³⁰ It is essential therefore that there are effective outcomes and clear progression routes for individual learners.

12.2 As already noted, it is difficult to get a true picture of the number and *type* of provision being accessed by learners with a learning disability (and for what number of hours per week). It is also a challenge to establish what works and does not work for people with a learning disability—particularly in the context of *Valuing Employment Now* and the emphasis on preparing people with a learning disability to move towards and access paid employment. *Valuing Employment Now* states that the transfer of functions from the LSC to local authorities provides an opportunity to bring together systems of support in education and social care to improve supported employment provision. Another advantage could be a more streamlined service between health, social care and education. But there remain a number of unknowns. The evidence suggests that there have been substantial cuts to Further Education provision for learners with a learning disability. Mencap remains concerned that any funding of Further Education and training for people with a learning disability may be threatened by potential pressures to divert it.

²³ Access to Education: experiences of transition from school to further education—diversity and practice for young people with Down’s Syndrome in the UK, Beadman J, 2006

²⁴ Growing Up Matters, CSCI, 2007

²⁵ Help to Move On, Norah Fry Research Centre, Heslop et al, 2007

²⁶ Transitions to Adults Services by Disabled Young People living in out of authority residential schools Beresford and Cavet, 2009

²⁷ A Transition Guide for all Services, DH/DCSF, 2007

²⁸ Analysis of SAQ Year 1, National Transition Support Team, 2009

²⁹ See Inclusion for Excellence (“The Little Report”), LSC, November 2005; Learning for Living and for Work: Improving Education and Training Opportunities for People with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, LSC, October 2006; Progression through Partnership, DfES, DH and DWP, 2007

³⁰ Making the Jump: Transition to work, NIACE, Jacobsen, 2002

13. *Foundation Learning*

13.1 Mencap very much welcomes the NEET strategy focus on “sufficient provision at every level and in every style of learning” and further welcomes some of the developments around the qualifications framework, including the introduction of the Foundation Learning for those at Level 1 and below. The Foundation Learning programme could go some way to stopping the “revolving door” of study for entry level learners and there is a strong emphasis upon the importance of progression through “Progression Pathways” either on to Level 2 or to “meaningful destinations” such as supported employment or independent living. It remains in its early stages, however, so robust monitoring will be needed in order to ensure that it is being accessed by people with a learning disability. With the “driver” behind the development of Foundation Learning being the Government’s 14–19 reform agenda, it remains unclear what this means for adult learners who are over the age of 19.

14. *Apprenticeships*

14.1 *Valuing Employment Now*³¹ refers to opportunities for Apprenticeships for people with a learning disability. The introduction of a statutory entitlement to apprenticeships for “suitably qualified” learners (as outlined in the Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act) is in principle welcomed for people with a learning disability. Mencap further welcomes provisions within the Act around those “suitably qualified” to include alternative methods of demonstrating competence, giving those disabled people who have the appropriate competencies but not the qualifications, an opportunity to take up their entitlement. It still remains unclear to what extent this will enable learners who are not at the equivalent to Level 2 learning access to an entitlement. Ultimately, as an employer-led scheme, the single most significant challenge will be the extent to which employers will engage with people with a learning disability. Stigma and prejudice about people with a learning disability is still widespread and remains one of the biggest barriers to employment for this group of people.

15. *From education to employment*

15.1 The policy direction embodied within the LSC’s *document learning for Living and Work*, the previous report by Peter Little, *Inclusion for Excellence* and the joint departmental *Progression through Partnership*, is the right one. The focus on improving quality of provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities with progression routes into employment, including work-based learning, volunteering or involvement in mainstream activities within the community is without doubt a positive step.

15.2 Such joint-working will, in theory, ensure a more joined-up and holistic process for the individual. This should result in a smoother transition from education through to employment for people with a learning disability. Clearly though, links between educational providers and supported employment providers are key. This point must be addressed with a continued focus on the need for quality provision for people with a learning disability. The opportunity for a more integrated work/training approach in terms of people with a learning disability must be fully utilised and employment has to be viewed as a realistic option for people with a learning disability throughout the education system. The importance of the education service in partnership working in supporting people into work, has been identified as a key component of successful transitions from education to employment, but the evidence is that transition to work provision is rare and the funding fragile.³²

16. *Employment*

16.1 The Government’s recent employment strategy for people with a learning disability, *Valuing Employment Now*, acknowledges the lack of progress in this area since the original *Valuing People White Paper* was published in 2001. This document identifies a number of “key factors” that must be addressed in order for the goal of increased employment for people with a learning disability to be met. The underpinning principle is recognition of the need to challenge deep-rooted expectations and attitudes about the abilities of people with a learning disability.

16.2 The challenge is significant: only 10% of people known to social services are in paid employment (although recent data from the Information Centre for health and social care shows this number to be even lower at around 7.5%)³³. On top of this, we also know that many of those included within this 7.5% will be working very few hours per week. It is essential then, that due consideration is given to this group of individuals. However, in the context of the Government’s existing focus on employment and moving people off benefits and into work, we are concerned that such consideration is not taking place.

16.3 The Government’s NEET strategy seeks to address the needs of young people making the transition to JSA at 18 and who have a past history of being NEET. Changes to the New Deal have been made in order for these young people to be “fast tracked” to intensive support to find employment. Changes as a result of the Government’s welfare reform agenda mean that it is likely more people with a learning disability will be

³¹ *Valuing Employment Now: real jobs for people with a learning disability*, DH, 2009

³² *Making the Jump: Transition to work*, NIACE, Jacobsen, 2002

³³ *Social Care and Mental Health Indicators from the National Indicator Set—further analysis 2008–09*, The Health and Information Centre, 2009

on JSA, but the evidence suggests that such mainstream provision does not work for people with a learning disability. Many will need specialist support provided by trained staff with a knowledge and understanding of learning disability issues.

16.4 In addition, there remains a lack of clarity about how new arrangements under the welfare reform agenda (the introduction of the new Employment and Support Allowance and accompanying medical assessment (the Work Capability Assessment) and the roll out of Pathways to Work and Work Choice will work for people with a learning disability. While in principle we are not opposed to the “rights and responsibilities” approach to the reform of the welfare system, it is essential that increased individual responsibility is matched with sufficient and appropriate support for people with a learning disability—particularly where punitive measures are concerned. It is unfortunate that an increasing focus on “conditionality” and “sanctions” masks the fact that many people with a learning disability would very much like to work but have never been given the opportunity.

THE LIKELY IMPACT OF RAISING THE PARTICIPATION AGE ON STRATEGIES FOR ADDRESSING THE NEEDS OF YOUNG PEOPLE NOT IN EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT OR TRAINING

18.1 As already noted, Mencap supports the raising of the participation age to 18. We believe this provides a real opportunity to ensure quality educational opportunities for young people with a learning disability who may take longer to progress and therefore need to stay in the education system for longer. However, in order to deliver better outcomes for young people with a learning disability, their responsibility to participate in education or training until the age of 18 must be matched by a responsibility on government to ensure that there are appropriate courses to meet the whole range of interests and needs, with enough places for all.

18.2 As noted in previous sections, Mencap would like to see the Government’s strategy focusing on learners with a learning disability up to age 25 in line with related policy. We would further stress the need to ensure that the raising of the participation age does not simply “blur” the statistics in terms of the numbers of young people who are NEET. The key must be about addressing existing poor provision and support services/processes (eg transition) and not about simply pro-longing engagement in unsuitable provision.

THE OPPORTUNITIES AND FUTURE PROSPECTS IN EDUCATION, TRAINING AND EMPLOYMENT FOR 16–18 YEAR OLDS

19.1 The Government has initiated a number of programmes to address specific issues in relation to the life chances of young people with a learning disability. These are not explicitly included in the Government’s NEETs strategy but inevitably address some of these issues. However, whilst Mencap welcomes these as a step in the right direction, there is concern that their impact in terms of improving the opportunities for young people with a learning disability is limited.

20. *Transition Support Programme*

20.1 The Government has invested £19 million from 2008–11 in a Transition Support Programme. The expected outcomes are that disabled young people and families will be able to report improvements in their experience of transition, that support for transition provided by local areas is more consistent and will reach minimum standards and that professionals will show increased expertise in transition. Alongside this, *Valuing People Now*³⁴ states all young people with SEN will have personalised transition planning and person centred reviews by 2012. Whilst the focus on this area and the support offered to local areas to improve transition is welcomed, Mencap is concerned about the sustainability of this work after 2011. The programme lacks any statutory levers to ensure continuation of good practice in this area and there no specific national indicators to monitor this. In addition, whilst the focus on planning is important in order to improve the outcomes for young people, it cannot be seen in isolation. Improved investment and identification of greater opportunities for young people with a learning disability must go hand in hand.

21. *IAG/Connexions*

21.1 The Government has launched a new IAG strategy and this is welcomed. The strategy makes it clear that the IAG must maintain a personalised element and sets out a guarantee which will be embedded within new pupil/parent guarantees from September 2010. For this strategy to work for young people with a learning disability it is vital that this is well resourced with specialists who can effectively support and advise those who face more challenging transitions. Information, Advice and Guidance providers need to have access to specialist training that helps them to understand the needs of disabled young people.

22. *Getting a Life programme*

22.1 This 3 year project focused on transition and employment for young people with a learning disability is welcomed as an important part of the broader Valuing Employment Now agenda. However, Mencap is concerned that the focus is on such a small number of young people; just 30 in each pilot area and there is no clear plan about how implementation of the learning will be ensured across all local authorities.

³⁴ Valuing People Now: a new three-year strategy for people with learning disabilities, DH, 2009

23 *Valuing Employment Now*

23.1 Mencap very much supports the overarching principles and goals outlined in the strategy, but want to ensure that the focus on people “known to social services” does not mean that those with milder learning disabilities are left behind. Further, while it is right that people with “profound and complex disabilities” should not be excluded from the world of work, it is also the case that some people with profound and multiple learning disabilities will be less likely to work at all. We believe that it is important to acknowledge this. It is essential that this group do not miss out on the development of alternative meaningful day time opportunities, including in further education.

23.2 No additional funding has been made available to support the strategy. The emphasis is on more effective use of existing resources, including education, adult learning and employment support. It is right to look at how these resources can be used more effectively but we should also be cautious about overstating how far existing monies can actually stretch—particularly in the context of the focus on those receiving services. A number of existing strands of funding are identified in the strategy, including £660 million on day services at a cost of £291 per adult per week. While it is quite right to look at how this money can be used more effectively on supporting people to move into paid work, it is also the case that only a limited number of people receive these services in the first place.

December 2009

Memorandum submitted by The Prince's Trust

1. STRATEGIES FOR THE IDENTIFICATION OF YOUNG PEOPLE AT RISK OF FALLING INTO THE NEET CATEGORY

1.1 The Prince's Trust works with, on average 40,000 young people a year, all of whom at one stage or another have been or are NEET. The experience of the Trust is that young people most at risk of becoming NEET may well have expressed dissatisfaction in, or disengagement from, learning while at school, for example by truanting, disruptive behaviour or low educational achievement.

1.2 The Trust would emphasise that identification of young people at risk of becoming NEET should begin well before young people leave school, and that school records should be used in this identification process. This will allow for the possibility of alternative support and/or provision to be in place before young people reach school leaving age, thus limiting the numbers of young people becoming NEET when they reach the post-Year 11 transition stage. This is why The Trust's xl clubs were set up, supporting “at risk” young people during their last 2 years of mandatory schooling.

1.3 Effective information sharing between organisations can also allow young people at risk of becoming NEET to be identified and effectively supported. The Trust has a Memorandum of Understanding with Jobcentre Plus, helping to ensure that young people are referred to the Trust's “Team” programme before they become long-term NEET. Feedback from Team Leaders to JCP staff also ensures that young people at risk are known to JCP and that further strategies of support, informed by well-rounded knowledge of the individual, can be put in place if necessary.

2. SERVICES AND PROGRAMMES TO SUPPORT THOSE MOST AT RISK OF BECOMING NEET, AND TO REDUCE THE NUMBERS AND ADDRESS THE NEEDS OF THOSE WHO HAVE BECOME PERSISTENTLY NEET

2.1 The Prince's Trust has a range of programmes to support young people who are, or at risk of becoming NEET and those who have become persistently NEET. The Trust's programmes are designed to trace a learning journey, beginning with the informal “Get Started” for the hardest to reach right through to programmes for the job ready. The effectiveness of all programmes are measured by how many young people make the transition into education training or employment, three months after leaving the programme. See below for details on the % of young people who move out of NEET and onto ETE.

2.2 “Get Started” is aimed at young people who are persistently NEET. It is a short, motivating programme (generally 5–8 days in length), which engages young people using sport or the arts, and uses these activities as a vehicle for personal development. It culminates in a final challenge or celebration such as a performance or sports coaching session, when the group brings together the skills they have learnt. Participants then receive three months progression support to move into training, education, employment, further programmes such as Team or volunteering. 73% of young people finishing Get Started move into employment, education or training.

2.3 The XL programme runs in 569 schools and centres, 23% of which are in Pupil Referral Units and Young Offenders Institutions. This 2 year programme delivers five modules to under-achieving 14–16 year olds, including personal skills, citizenship, a community project, enterprise and entrepreneurship and preparing for the world of work. Young people involved in XL have shown great success in navigating the transition from school: 85% go on to employment, self-employment, education or training. 25 centres are currently piloting QCF units with the intention of developing a qualification which will sit within the Foundation Learning Tier—at either award, certificate or diploma level.

2.4 “Team” is a twelve week programme which supports 16–25 NEET young people to develop skills, motivation and confidence. Young people take part in team building activities, including a community project and residential, and are given work experience opportunities. Team delivers a QCF qualification in vocational skills and is currently piloting a QCF qualification in functional skills to be embedded into existing provision. From September 2010, personal and social development skills will be accredited with a QCF qualification. Young people on Team are helped to move into education, employment or training on completion of the programme. The effectiveness of Team is made clear by its outcomes, with 72% of young people who take part moving into education, training or employment.

2.5 “Get Into” allows NEET young people to experience and develop their skills in vocational careers. It is targeted at those young people who are job ready. “Get Into” programmes include construction, sport, catering, retail, social care and maritime and deliver Level 2 industry-recognised qualifications. The Prince’s Trust has developed relationships with prominent employers in each sector, thus ensuring opportunities which are both meaningful and desirable. Six months of ongoing support on completion of “Get Into” means that young people are able to access personalised advice from a single, consistent source as they look to move into education, training or employment. 75% of young people involved in the Trust’s “Get Into” programmes moved into education, training or employment

2.6 The “Business Programme” aims to support young people interested in self-employment to explore and test their business ideas, write business plans and start their own businesses or achieve alternative outcomes in education, training or work. 90% are employed or self employed three months after finishing the programme.

3 THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE GOVERNMENT’S NEET STRATEGY

3.1 *Tracking*

The Prince’s Trust has been supportive of the Government’s NEET strategy, and in particular its aims to ensure a more personalised approach and a broader range of provision. The Trust’s work with NEET young people means that it is aware that reducing the numbers of young people who are NEET is complex and requires a multi-faceted approach

3.2 Tracking to ensure NEET young people are highlighted and appropriate referrals are made is clearly extremely important. While Jobcentre Plus can effectively track many of those young people aged 18 and over who are NEET, young people under 18 may be more difficult to identify. The work of Connexions in tracking this age group is therefore extremely important. Connexions contact with young people during secondary school and beyond means that they are in a unique position to identify and refer 16 and 17 year olds who have become NEET.

3.3 Effective referral procedures which follow on from tracking can mean young people are prevented from becoming long term NEET. The Prince’s Trust has close working relationships with both Connexions and the Jobcentre Plus which allows swift referrals to the Trust’s provision from each organisation and effective feedback to Connexions and JCP from the Trust.

3.4 The Prince’s Trust has developed its own tracking procedures to follow up young people who have taken part in programmes. A range of systems allow for effective tracking, including progression mentors who support and follow young people’s progress, outcome forms and text surveys. Quality of service is measured by the Trust’s “Matrix” system which gathers feedback from young people on quality of delivery. The Trust is piloting differing tracking systems using mobile phone technology as not all young people have access to the internet.

4 PERSONALISED GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT

4.1 The Trust views personalised guidance and support as essential in order to deliver effective provision to young people. A 14–19 prospectus in each Local Authority must ensure that all provision is accounted for and is current. It also needs to be easily accessible to young people, both available online and as hard copy for those young people who don’t have access to the internet at home.

4.2 The development of targeted youth services is positive and recognises that some young people will need more intensive input in order to progress positively. The Trust believes that the role of mentoring in ensuring the best quality outcomes for vulnerable young people is also essential.

4.3 The Prince’s Trust is working with Clinks, Catch 22, St Giles Trust, Mentoring & Befriending Foundation and Innovation Exchange to deliver “Gate Mate”. The Trust believes that all young people should be met by a positive role model on their release from custody who can deliver high quality mentoring in order to help ensure that they do not return. Entering education, training and employment is shown to be a key factor in reducing re-offending and mentoring will play a vital role in guiding young people towards opportunities and offering ongoing support following take up of opportunities.

4.4. The Prince’s Trust mentoring project for young offenders on release is called the One to One project. It is currently being piloted in HMP Guys Marsh and HMP Eastwood Park. The project is also being developed in the South East (Reading YOI) and Northern Ireland (Hydebank Wood).

4.5 The Trust is also currently delivering progression mentoring. Progression mentoring focuses solely on helping young people into a positive outcome on completion of a Trust programme, and in supporting them to sustain this activity. Mentors are matched to young people and work with them to determine goals and steps towards their achievement, allowing young people ownership of their progression pathway.

4.6 The Trust also offers targeted support to care leavers via mentoring. Our “Leaving Care Mentor” projects enable mentors to support young people through the transition from leaving care to independent living. They operate in partnership with social services in the East of England, South East, East Midlands, Wales and the North East of England.

5 PROVISION OF A FULL RANGE OF COURSES TO MEET DEMAND

5.1 The Prince’s Trust has a long history of providing courses to young people who are underachieving and supports the Government’s recognition of the need for a full range of courses to meet the needs of all young people. Many of the young people the Trust works with have been long-term NEET and have benefitted from being able to access courses which sit outside of mainstream provision. Young people working with the Prince’s Trust have subsequently been motivated to return to more mainstream provision and work, as well as developing their own enterprises with support from Prince’s Trust grants.

“I’m Lindsay Lyall. I’m 21 and have dyslexia and borderline learning difficulties. I lost myself in an education system that let me fall through the cracks. With support from the Trust I found myself again. The course gave me much more than experience and qualifications—it helped me find myself. The placement I did on the course is where I’m now working—Essential Drug and Alcohol Services. I’m studying Criminal Justice at university as I want to work with young offenders and excluded people.”

—Young person who participated in “Youth Steps”

5.2 Prince’s Trust programmes are available throughout the year, allowing young people who have not enrolled in, or have dropped out of, Further Education to access courses before January or September start dates. Young people are able to access tasters and work experience prior to making decisions about mainstream education, training or employment, thus reducing the risk of repeated drop out which can be significantly detrimental to motivation and progression.

5.3 The Prince’s Trust agrees that enabling and accrediting achievement is essential for all young people, and so welcomes the potential of Foundation Learning to cater to those young people working below Level 2. It also supports the possibility of Foundation Learning to give young people ownership of their programme of study. What is absent from the QCF in England (although present in Wales’ QCFW) is more informal development opportunities. Informal learning can be especially useful for young people who are particularly hard to reach. The Trust’s “Get Started” programme is an example of a successful informal programme, which acts as a stepping stone towards more formal learning.

5.4 The three strands of Foundation Learning—skills for work and life, vocational and subject based learning, personal and social development—are included throughout Prince’s Trust programmes. It is important that as the curriculum develops in line with 14–19 reform, organisations which have had long-term success in delivering Entry Level and Level 1 accreditation are embraced by delivery partners and embedded into options available to young people.

5.5 Key Stage 4 engagement and its potential to prevent young people becoming NEET has long been recognised and practised by the Prince’s Trust via its XL programme. Early engagement can be essential in preventing NEET outcomes for school leavers.

6 RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

6.1 The fast-tracking of 18 year olds to the “gateway” stage of Flexible New Deal means that JCP staff will need to make immediate referrals to programmes which have been key in engaging young people. Opportunities may be missed if this is not the case. The Prince’s Trust’s Team programme, for example, successfully motivated 72% of young people into education, training and employment last year. The course is twelve weeks long and, as a result, will be inaccessible to young people if referrals are not made swiftly by JCP staff.

6.2 The Prince’s Trust supports developments within the Young Person’s Guarantee. With a history of offering vocational training, work-based taster opportunities and work experience, it recognises the value of work experience, internships and apprenticeships. Young people, particularly in the current climate, may well struggle to find suitable employment, and the potential of the Future Jobs Fund to aid young people into work is a welcome development.

6.3 The Trust is a keen advocate of volunteering as a means of helping young people to gain vital skills and knowledge, as well as an opportunity to give back to the community. There needs to be clear guidance on benefits for young people who choose to access unpaid opportunities in order to ensure that they do not miss out on financial support when they are entitled to it. Furthermore, it is essential that young people who do have to claim benefits do not miss career development opportunities that work experience and volunteering can offer. The potential for a gap developing in terms of skills, experience and career development between young people who are financially supported by parents or carers, and young people

who are claiming benefits, must not be realised. While the Trust recognises the importance of young people moving into available paid employment, this needs to be meaningful, in line with their career goals, and not at the expense of skills which they may be gaining in an unpaid capacity.

7 THE LIKELY IMPACT OF RAISING THE PARTICIPATION AGE ON STRATEGIES FOR ADDRESSING THE NEEDS OF YOUNG PEOPLE NOT IN EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT OR TRAINING

7.1 The Prince's Trust works with large numbers of young people who have underachieved in mainstream education. Its programmes help enable young people to gain skills, qualifications and experience in key skills and vocational areas. Experience has enabled The Trust to develop programmes which are both attractive to young people and which put them in a position to move forward.

7.2 While the Trust would support moves which help to ensure that young people achieve their potential and do not become 'NEET' at 16 and 17, it would urge the Government to look to organisations such as the Prince's Trust in order to determine best practice for engaging hard to reach young people. Emphasis on vocational skills, enterprise and motivation has proved very successful in moving young people into positive outcomes. Rather than "criminalising" young people who fail to comply with compulsory education, the Trust would recommend that those young people who don't engage are referred to programmes that fall outside of the mainstream which not only develop motivation, but may also offer accredited outcomes which may be used as Foundation Learning credits.

7.3 Courses offered to young people as part of the raising participation age strategy should have a strong vocational element. The Prince's Trust has supported young people to achieving real success via programmes with a vocational focus. Young people are able to access practical, hands-on experience which can help pave the way for take up of pre-apprenticeship programmes, further education courses and work.

8 THE OPPORTUNITIES AND FUTURE PROSPECTS IN EDUCATION, TRAINING AND EMPLOYMENT FOR 16-18 YEAR OLDS

8.1 The Prince's Trust has conducted research on potential areas of growth during the recession in order to feed into vocational programmes which will most benefit young people.

8.2 Areas of potential growth identified by the Trust include environmental industries, elderly care and domestic tourism. It would advocate exciting, vocationally based programmes and work experience opportunities for young people to access in these areas. A focus on accredited outcomes will be advantageous for young people seeking to improve their employability within these areas of potential growth.

8.3 The Leitch Review emphasised the need for highly skilled workers within the changing economy and the Trust would support efforts to address this. With regards to hard-to-reach young people, "skilling up" needs to be embedded in vocational training opportunities with clear structures, dedicated support and regular recognition of achievement to inspire ongoing motivation. Organisations such as the Prince's Trust can offer these opportunities and could deliver as part of Foundation Learning.

8.4 The Trust has a history of encouraging enterprise via grants, its XL and Business programmes. Supporting enterprise is vital in order to develop a dynamic and innovative work force. Young people who may have under achieved at school are given the opportunity to develop business ideas, fostering their potential and allowing them to utilise their own unique sets of experience and skills.

8.5 Volunteering delivers extremely positive results for young people. Not only does it develop skills and work experience, but it can also allow young people to give back to their communities and to develop lasting positive relationships within them. The Prince's Trust would support any moves which help to promote well-supported, carefully structured volunteering. It would be concerned by moves which might discourage take up and/or continuation of volunteering, for example compulsion to move into paid employment for young people claiming JSA.

December 2009

Witnesses: **David Congdon**, Head of Campaigns and Policy, Mencap, **Peter Lister**, Senior Head of Strategic Partnerships, The Prince's Trust, **Chris Murray**, Team Manager, Hackney, Fairbridge, and **Anne Pinney**, Assistant Director, Policy and Research, Barnardo's, gave evidence.

Q122 Chairman: I welcome Peter Lister, David Congdon, Chris Murray and Anne Pinney. We are always very grateful to people who help us with our inquiries, especially those who have such a high level of knowledge. I particularly want to thank David, who does not need any reintroduction to this place. Have you given evidence to Committees very often?

David Congdon: Just a few times.

Chairman: How many times?

David Congdon: About six times.

Chairman: So, you are an old professional.

David Congdon: Professional, yes, but less of the old.

Q123 Chairman: Has anyone else given evidence to a Committee before?

Anne Pinney: Yes, me.

Chairman: Which Committee?

Anne Pinney: Education and Skills Bill Committee.

Q124 Chairman: Oh, a Bill Committee—well, I suppose that is a proper Committee. Some of the people from that Committee might be here now. Let's get on with it. We're looking at NEETs. Every time I use that term, people say I shouldn't, but then they proceed to use it. When we went to the Netherlands we talked about NEETs and they talked about NEETs, so it is difficult to escape from it, although we are now sophisticated enough to know that there is a very sophisticated relationship between NEETs and other groups, such as young people in employment without training, so we are getting a good picture. The two days we spent looking at how the Dutch are dealing with their youth unemployment situation certainly opened our eyes, as these trips do, not only to what they are doing, but to how it reflects back on our organisation. Peter, let's start with you. We are really getting into this inquiry, and we do not do inquiries unless we can add value. What is your feeling about where we are? The percentage of NEETs seems to be quite high in this country, compared with countries that are like ours.

Peter Lister: You mentioned the phrase "NEETs"—someone in our marketing team came up with PWUPs last week.

Chairman: Who are they?

Peter Lister: People with untapped potential. Personally, I think that whatever we call the group, it is inevitable that sooner or later it will still have the same connotations. From the point of view of the Prince's Trust, we have seen a dramatic increase in the number of young people coming into our programmes who are NEET, so the demand far outstrips supply. There are three main issues for us. The first is that there needs to be a range of solutions for young people who are NEET because it is not a homogenous group, as I am sure you will have heard before, and because there are many different needs within that NEET category. Having a range of programmes that are flexible enough to meet personalised needs is important. The second point is about the whole area of partnership working, as any one organisation cannot possibly have the answers

for situations across the country. We were talking outside about collaborations that can work; in Scotland, for example, there is a project called "The Junction", where four national charities, including the Prince's Trust and Fairbridge, come together and offer an opportunity for NEET young people who are leaving custody. Individually, we could not possibly do that on our own, but collectively we have the capacity to be able to offer something meaningful. The third point is about the importance of accreditation that offers informal learning and allows young people to go at their own pace. It is about having enough rungs on the ladder and recognition of small steps of progression. Finally, there is a point about tracking and ongoing mentoring. In our experience, many of the hardest to reach NEET young people need a long time to reach the level that mainstream young people may achieve. Therefore, it is important to have support for longer than age range 19, for example. One of the most unhelpful things, in our view, is artificial age barriers, such as the age of 19 for the Connexions service 14 to 19 agenda, when in fact many of the young people we support require the same form of support until their early 20s, and maybe up to 24 or 25.

Q125 Chairman: The Dutch go to 27. Do you suggest that would be a better age?

Peter Lister: We work to 25 or 26 in most cases, so I suppose it is around that age.

Q126 Chairman: On the other hand, people say we are missing the plot and that when they get to age 14, the people who are likely to become NEETs should have been identified between 11 and 14, and that is when you should be working with them.

Peter Lister: I fully accept that early identification is critical. I work for an organisation that focuses on 14-plus. We have recently reduced the age on one of our programmes to 13 to try to pick up some early intervention, but essentially we work with young people who have already faced difficulties. There will always be that category who need that additional support.

Q127 Chairman: I'm going to surprise you by asking Anne to come in next. I usually riff across, but I thought I would be radical.

Anne Pinney: Hello, I am Anne Pinney. I am Assistant Director in Barnardo's policy and research unit. Our interest in this whole agenda comes from the fact that we work with about 2,500 young people who are called NEET, or who have recently been NEET, across the UK. Typically, they are young people from disadvantaged backgrounds, often from unemployed families, who face a range of barriers to participation, have drifted out of education and need quite a lot of help to get back on track. Very often they have left school because they are motivated to work, but of course they get out there and they lack the skills, qualifications and confidence to find a job so they rapidly become

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trapped in unemployment. Your question at the start was, “What do you think of NEETS?”, or something like that.

Chairman: Yes, where are we in NEETS? This is your chance, without any really pointed questions, to say come on, what do I want to tell this Committee?

Anne Pinney: Where are we? I agree that NEET is not a great term. It tries to define young people by what they are not doing when, of course, they are doing so much and they are such a diverse population. Our interest as a charity is really in the hard-to-reach end of that population—the young people who have been very alienated by their school experiences, and the young people who face barriers to participation. In terms of where we are, successive Governments have made good inroads in getting more young people to stay on in education or training; but, increasingly, those who aren’t face specific barriers because, for example, they have already had a child, they have mental health difficulties, they are in insecure housing and so on. We need to sharpen the focus on the young people who face those barriers. The other thing we need to sharpen the focus on is young people who want to work, or continue learning in the workplace. There are simply not enough opportunities for them at the moment. Over the past 15 years alone, there has been a fall of about a third in work-based learning places and youth employment opportunities, mirrored by a big rise in education. Many more young people might be able to do something constructive if only there were more places for them in the youth labour market, with appropriate training opportunities.

Q128 Chairman: Why do you think that has diminished?

Anne Pinney: It reflects changes in the economy, really—structural changes in the economy, and the decline of unskilled job opportunities. It is harder to take on young people now as well, because of health and safety considerations, a changing labour market, shrinkage in the unskilled end of the labour market and growth in the high-skilled end of the labour market.

Q129 Chairman: Is it partly, too, that, if you look at my own constituency, the number of jobs in manufacturing has just declined enormously, as it has in the rest of the UK? The number of jobs employing lots of people in manufacturing has declined, but most of the people in my constituency work in the university, followed by the local authority and the health service. They don’t actually provide many places, do they?

Anne Pinney: There are pockets of structural unemployment from the decline of manufacturing heavy industry—mining and so on.

Chairman: Yes, but I am not in a mining area, yet we are not above the national average for unemployment; it is just that the structure has changed.

Anne Pinney: Yes.

Chairman: There aren’t those sorts of employers to take people on.

Anne Pinney: And young people still often want to follow the pattern, the same path, that their parents took and leave school at 16. Overwhelmingly, it is disadvantaged young people who take that decision and who are then, too often, trapped in unemployment.

Chairman: Chris, back to you.

Chris Murray: We have become very target driven about NEET young people. Hard outcomes is how we are measured now.

Q130 Chairman: What’s wrong with that?

Chris Murray: What is wrong with that is that we should allow every young person to work at their own pace. At Fairbridge, we work with the hardest to reach; that is what we claim. We look at the majority of the sustained NEET groups—the people who have been long-term NEET as opposed to just being made redundant and looking for a job. To engage with young people takes time. There is an element of trust that needs to be built up, a bit of respect and rapport. The way we do that is by having fun and engaging young people. I am the team manager for the Hackney team, and I can boast here today that we are fully funded this year. We have a good income stream coming in. A lot of that money comes from the LSC.

Chairman: That’s the Learning and Skills Council, not the London School of Economics.

Chris Murray: Yes. To engage a young person in a one-to-one and for them to sign up to our programme is a huge achievement for someone who has not been engaged in any kind of employment or training in the long term. It is a huge commitment just to get out of bed and make that appointment. We get £20 for a young person coming to that one-to-one. If we get a young person for an accredited course, such as an OCR Level 1 literacy qualification, we get £1,500, so you can see where my focus and drive as a team manager is for my team. That is taken away from their valuable work on personal development with those young people. It is often a lack of self-belief and confidence that stops a young person achieving in mainstream education, employment or whatever they want to do. These kids—the long-term, sustained NEET group—do not have, and never have had, the right support or structure in their lives. We offer that, but it takes time. Sometimes, I am very critical—I put my hands up—of my staff team to hit targets in relation to outcomes, because that is what pays.

Chairman: We’ll drill down into that a bit later.

David Congdon: My name is David Congdon and I am head of campaigns and policy at Mencap. May I put some of the issues that have been raised in context in terms of learning disability, because that is obviously our focus at Mencap. We know from the data on NEETs that disabled young people are twice as likely to be NEET as other young people. What we do not know, because the data are not disaggregated, is exactly what the same percentages are for people with a learning disability. Actually, it almost gets more difficult, because the way the Learning and Skills Council monitors its provision is just to have a big group of those with a learning

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difficulty and those with a learning disability. We had a problem a few years ago, when funding was particularly difficult for some of the further education provision, knowing exactly what was going on. What we do know in terms of employment is that people with a learning disability generally do not get into jobs. That has not changed much over the past 10 or 15 years. For instance, of the smaller group of people with a learning disability—those known to social services—well under one in 10 gets into a job. If you take those with a mild or moderate learning disability, under one in three gets into a job, and if you aggregate them all together, it is less than one in five. It means that most are not going to be in employment, and raises all sorts of issues around why not and what can be done. Further education is interesting, because most people with a learning disability who are known to social services are likely to still be in school of some form until the age of 19. We do not know much about the broader group. I suspect the broader group often falls into the NEET category, but we do not know the numbers. I would really like to support what Peter was saying about the age differentiation. It really is important not to focus simply on the 16 to 18-year-olds, because a lot of people with a learning disability will come out of school at 18 or 19 and it is then that they need provision. So one of my pleas to the Committee would be that anything you can do to encourage the relevant government bodies and agencies to better monitor what is going on for those different groups of people would be helpful in order to see what needs to be done moving forward. Those are my main initial comments.

Q131 Chairman: Is “people with learning disabilities” interchangeable with “people with special educational needs”?

David Congdon: As far as one can ascertain, most of the group that ends up with a severe or profound learning disability are likely to have a statement of special educational needs. Some in the broader group will, but the distinctions get blurred in the middle. So yes, you would expect virtually all of those known to social services—the smaller group—to have statements of special educational needs. It might help the Committee to know that we dug out some figures for the numbers in the group of 15 to 24 known to social services and in terms of a broader figure. The number known to social services is probably around 47,000 to 48,000, and the bigger group is 160,000. That gives you an order of magnitude.

Q132 Chairman: What proportion of the total number of NEETs are in that age category?

David Congdon: I am not sure. We could probably do the calculation.

Chairman: It is important to know. One of my great regrets is that the innovative and good report on special educational needs by the predecessor of this Committee had to finish at 16. I always regretted that we couldn't have gone from 16 to 19 and beyond, when so many problems begin for SEN children and their parents. Getting a handle on what

percentage of the NEET population fall into that category would be quite useful. Does anybody else know?

Anne Pinney: I don't know off the top of my head.

David Congdon: It is likely, as I was saying at the beginning, that those known to social services are more likely to have been in education up to the age of 18 or 19. It is the broader group who are more likely to be NEET. As I said, the overall figure is that about 20% of disabled young people are classified as NEET. That gives some indication, but I do not think that the data are collected at that sort of level.

Chairman: Right. Let's get on with the questioning. Graham's going to start us off.

Q133 Mr Stuart: Why has the proportion of young people who are not in employment, education or training not moved significantly for the last 15 years?

Anne Pinney: It has moved. It has changed beneath the headline statistics. Although the headline stats since 1997 have shown that about 10% of 16 to 18-year-olds have been NEET, there is a clear upward trend in participation in full-time education and a clear downward trend in participation in work-based learning and employment. There is a changing picture beneath the headline trend. That means that the NEET population is changing in composition. Many more young people now want to work and have had enough of classroom learning, and many more young people now face barriers to participation.

Chairman: Okay. Does anyone else want to come back on that one?

Peter Lister: Chris mentioned earlier the need for hard outcomes. The time scale of outcomes is such that the demands are too high. Many young people who remain NEET could have come off being NEET if we'd given them longer and more intensive support. Quite simply, sometimes funding isn't there for long enough to give the right sort of support to enable them to see through a particular course of action. That is one of the reasons.

Chris Murray: I was going to say a bit of what Peter said. To add to that, a lot of opportunities are coming up, but they might not be what young people want. Most of the young people we work with do want to go back into education and to get a top job. They don't want to be labelled as someone who's going to be a mechanic or work on a farm. The issue is how we support young people. Apart from Fairbridge and the Prince's Trust, what else is out there at the next stage to take over and support them through that journey?

Q134 Mr Stuart: Anne's answer suggests that if it hadn't been for some of the measures taken by Government, particularly increased participation in education, things would have been far worse. We are already one of the worst in the OECD in terms of people who find themselves NEET. That is the central question for this Committee. We are trying to work out, first, whether things have gone wrong. You could interpret Anne's answer as saying, “Oh, no, it would have been terrible and it is only thanks to the excellent actions of the Government, through

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listening closely to people such as us, that we have got ourselves into a less bad situation than we might have been in.” Some people sitting here think that we are not doing a very good job. We are hearing about churn and the fact that there are too many short-term courses. People are dropped, picked up again and might have a little period of employment, but it’s all short-term and they drop out again. Our big question is, “What do we most need to change?” There has been the will from Government and there has been money. What there hasn’t been is any significant improvement in numbers, even if there has been some movement beneath the surface. Does anyone have a big answer to the big question? If you were Secretary of State, what would you do to turn this around?

David Congdon: Probably the starting point is to recognise it’s not a homogeneous situation. I can say that, because coming from a Mencap point of view, we are dealing with people with a learning disability, so obviously we do not represent all young people. We run employment schemes to try to get people into employment and we deal with a lot of other organisations that do the same thing. All the evidence shows that most young people with a learning disability—probably about 65%—actually want to work. There are all sorts of barriers to getting them into work, but we know what would enable them to get a job. Anne mentioned work-based learning or a variation on that. People with a learning disability generally are unlikely to get a job if they go through the normal interviewing process, for all sorts of obvious reasons. What does work is giving them a work trial where the employer says, “We’ll let you come into our business or local authority or whatever and see how you do for six weeks,” with the expectation that, if they perform reasonably, they will get a permanent job. That is actually the best way of getting someone with a learning disability into work. We know it works, but it is a matter of trying to reach a situation in which more employers are willing to do that. That is the demand for labour side. We also need to put in place more support for people with a learning disability in the workplace. We are very pleased that access to work is doubling over the next three or four years, but we need sustainable long-term funding to enable the organisations—many of them in the voluntary sector—to provide the preparatory work to get people into jobs, and to make inroads into those figures. That is a very narrow answer to your question, but an important one from the point of view of people we are dealing with on a day-to-day basis.

Q135 Mr Stuart: It is a very fair answer. The term may suggest that it is one problem but in fact there is a series of discrete issues, some of which may interlink, but we need to solve each one. To stick with you, David, for a second. On the discrete issue of people with a learning disability, how do we compare internationally and what can we learn from elsewhere in providing opportunities for people with learning disabilities?

David Congdon: I can’t really comment on the international situation. The most important point would be that we know from experience what works, and that the model of supported employment—where someone is supported in the workplace, sometimes for a limited period, sometimes permanently at quite a low level of support—is the best way of doing it. It does work. There are organisations out there wanting to do it, but they need sustainable funding. You still have to work on the other side of the equation, which is trying to get employers able and willing to recruit people with a learning disability. In passing, the policies that the Government have laid down in documents such as *Valuing Employment Now* are excellent. They really are good. The challenge is to make them work on the ground. The policies on paper are fine. Making them work on the ground is important. Further education has a role to play in that, but also supported employment has an equally important role to play.

Q136 Chairman: Chris, do you have a view on this? What sort of jobs do your guys consider to be top jobs?

Chris Murray: Top chefs. Business. We run courses now in Fairbridge that give that aspiration. We work a lot with corporates, some big companies.

Q137 Chairman: Would they regard a tube train driver as a top job?

Chris Murray: No, I wouldn’t think so. It’s quite hard work, long hours and is quite dull to a lot of our young people.

Chairman: It’s £40,000 a year and eight-and-half weeks’ holiday.

Chris Murray: A lot of the young people we work with are very talented and want to use their creative mind. They want to be able to do it in the way that works for them.

Q138 Chairman: Could you arrange for us to meet some of them?

Chris Murray: Yes. They would love to do that. That is very much what we do. Everything that we do at Fairbridge is about learning by stealth. If we want to introduce a young person to the corporate world, we would take them to see it.

Chairman: The Committee would like you to bring a few of them in to meet us.

Q139 Mr Stuart: Does anyone else on the panel agree with David that we should perhaps break this down? Do we need to get it into seven categories? Do we need to have people with alcohol and drug problems, people with learning disabilities, and so on? Do we need to sub-divide it? However you sub-divide any category will be subject to assault by all and sundry, not least academics. Would we be more likely to come up with more useful policy responses if we had a better understanding of different delineated problems?

Anne Pinney: I want to come back on your earlier point as well, when you said that I was saying, “Yes, the Government have got it all right”. I don’t think

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they have got it all right, but I welcome the much-needed attention that is being paid to this group. I endorse what my colleagues have said about the importance of looking at things such as supported employment opportunities and supported routes into apprenticeships and the like, because it is the work-based learning route and the employment route that have lacked attention and that will really enable us to make better progress in getting more young people participating in something that they want to do.

Q140 Mr Stuart: The Government claim that they have transformed the world of apprenticeships, that there is a massive—I forget what they claim—trebling or quadrupling. It seems to be about what type they are and about being programme-led, but it gets very confused. Ministers insist they have transformed the landscape and there are zillions more than there used to be, so surely you should be here telling us how great it is.

Anne Pinney: From a very low start, good progress has been made, but that progress has stalled on level 2 apprenticeships for 16 to 18-year-olds. We are not there yet by any means, and sadly apprenticeships remain beyond the reach of many of our trainees because they do not have those five A to C grades at GCSE, nor unfortunately the social skills to impress employers. So they need some support, and to be given the opportunity to show just what they are capable of, and then they go on to become very good apprentices. You need to support those transitions for it to work. Coming back to your other question about whether it is worth looking at all the different groups in the NEET population, the answer is yes and no. We did some research to try to answer that question in the *Second Chances* report. We work with a lot of young people who are NEET, some of whom face specific barriers, for example teenage mothers and young people with mental health problems, and some of whom are just really alienated by their experiences of education, have not had many opportunities and have just got a bit lost and need an opportunity to be brought back in. There are two things really. For young people who have already spent months or years outside the education system there has to be a supported transition back in. You need provision with a really good ratio of staff to young people so they can build up those relationships. You need informal learning and the opportunity for young people to grow in confidence, broaden their horizons and so on.

Q141 Mr Stuart: Chris talked about the difficulty with the money. For a course, they receive 1,500 quid, and for the hardest to reach—one-to-one—20 quid. Is it possible, without leaving targets behind and having a benevolent trust in government, to tailor a target system that is a lot better than the current one at helping you reach the hardest to reach and rewarding you for doing so?

Anne Pinney: You have to work very flexibly. I think this is where it is useful being a charity and being able to use your charitable funds to do a little bit more than the statutory funding allows, so that you can

allow that young person to stay on a bit longer if that is what is going to get them to complete their module successfully. You can give them those extra enrichment activities—for want of a better word. Being a charity lets you work more flexibly.

Q142 Mr Stuart: What about trying to get government cash channelled? Is it the fundamental nature of the targets that it will be too distorting to do other than a lot of harm, or have we not quite got it right yet and need to change where the rewards come and get a better understanding of the incentives?

Chris Murray: Looking around the table, a big answer here is that the people who are here could do so much joined-up work in working together with one young person. One young person could come through all our doors. However, funding could get better at allowing us to communicate and at allowing us to work more in a consortium way, as opposed to competing for pots of money. That is what I'd like to see a lot more of, working with these guys and girls and seeing how we can get little Billy from A to Z, working together. Communication is key. I'm finding that Fairbridge can't do it all on its own. We are very good at what we do, but there are other people around who are very good at what they are specialists in. As opposed to trying to do everything, let's do what we're good at and move young people on to that next stage.

Chairman: Graham, are we going to move on?

Q143 Mr Stuart: How will the transfer of responsibility for funding and delivering education and training to 16 to 18-year-olds from the LSC to local authorities affect provision for that group?

Chairman: Peter, do you want to have a go at that?

Peter Lister: Yes, it certainly will affect us dramatically. First, as an organisation working over two age ranges, which will be dealt with by separate agencies in future—those up to 18 and those over 18—we'll have to, somehow, join two lots of funding instead of one. The other level is that up till now we have been dealing with a national organisation and have protocols in place with it to ensure that there is a set fund amount that's drawn down where we're successful. In future, that will be entirely dependent on relationships with, instead of one organisation, 151 organisations, as in the local authorities. This is a huge logistical issue for all national organisations. Nevertheless, we would accept that there is something very good about having devolved decision making at a local level and about local authorities having that ability to find the right solutions for young people on that patch. Yes, it is a huge structural challenge. I think that the biggest concern is the age range that I mentioned earlier—the fact that LSC funding will be split and we're again reinforcing that artificial barrier at 19 years old. That's the bit that we've yet to see just how we are going to be able to maintain it.

Q144 Chairman: Does anyone else want to come in on the LSC changes? Are they going to help or hinder?

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David Congdon: Could I make two points. I think that it is very difficult to judge. You can certainly argue that putting more money into local authorities, which have other responsibilities, such as social care, could work better for people with a learning disability by giving a co-ordinated approach and putting the budget all in their hands. On the other side of the coin, only the other week I gave evidence to the Health Committee on social care and the difficulties of very stretched social services dealing with growing numbers of old people and people with a learning disability. I am very cautious as to whether it will end up being a good or bad thing in practice. There is no doubt that there is some uncertainty as to how it will work out in practice and what numbers, in particular, the Young People's Learning Agency will be responsible for. As we understand it, it is responsible primarily for 16-to-19 learners, and those up to 25 who have a learning disability or difficulty who are subject to a learning difficulty assessment. When you look at what the skills investment agency has been saying about the numbers who will come under the YPLA, it says that the majority of such learners will have placements in specialist institutions for those with LDD, but there are only about 3,000 in those institutions. Therefore, there are questions that need to be addressed and some concerns, which may be premature—we just don't know—about the funding situation, which has come out of the recent skills strategy by the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills. The budget for developmental learning has reduced dramatically from £331 million in the current year to £187 million next year. We've been trying to disentangle that because it may simply be part of the result of the movement of the money from the LSC to the two agencies but, equally, it might not. There are some concerns that that uncertainty about funding may end up having some unintended consequences. It is not a full answer because we just don't know.

Chairman: Let's switch tack for a moment to look at the reform of 14 to 19 education.

Q145 Paul Holmes: You've already touched on this in various comments but does the emphasis on reforming 14 to 19 education, with diplomas and all the rest of it, mean that when they reach 19, they fall off the edge of cliff and there is nothing after 19? Is there no clear continuation into a new programme from 19 to 25, or 27 as we recently saw in the Netherlands?

David Congdon: That's a difficult question to answer, because for the group that we deal with—people with a learning disability—we know that significant numbers continue education post-19 in the FE sector, but we have no accurate figures. They do courses primarily below Level 2, which is part of the problem with funding. We suspect that quite few do courses for a limited time weekly in life skills training and the like. We hope that the changes won't lead to a reduction in that provision, but that is our concern.

Anne Pinney: It could cause problems for certain groups—those who have tended to carry on in education or training for longer, and those who have

had to take breaks, such as teenage mothers, who might be ready to resume their education only after a year or two of caring for their baby. There are certainly issues there, but we hope that with the machinery of government changes that earlier transition at 16 will become less bumpy than it has been historically, so there is some potential on that front.

Peter Lister: I agree with Anne and David that, for example, the foundation learning element of 14-to-19 reform is positive in that it recognises that progression to Level 2, but it is important that that will also be available for people after 19, as well as up to 19.

Q146 Paul Holmes: On foundation learning, the Prince's Trust has said that there were some potential problems. If someone offering foundation learning has to show that there is a Level 2 outcome and that that is the end objective, that might put off many people who are just not ready for such formal learning and target setting.

Peter Lister: That goes back to the point I made earlier about small steps. I think many of the young people we support are not ready to think about Level 2 or Level 3. They are ready to engage with something at entry level—perhaps Level 1—but not to face something that may put them off in terms of ambition. We can get them to Level 2 and Level 3, but it may take some time, and again we need a system that allows small steps on the ladder, so that they can take them at their own pace and not at a pace that a funder or the Government require.

Q147 Paul Holmes: That comes back to a point that Anne made earlier, and which I have heard before, about welfare to work and taking over from Jobcentre Plus—charities, because they are more flexible and have some resources of their own, can do it, whereas if they have to meet hard and fast central targets, they can't. Can anyone elaborate on that?

Peter Lister: The extra bit that charities often put in is additional support, such as a trusted adult, a mentor or volunteer who can work with a young person and stay with them for as long as it takes, which might be years, to provide additional motivation and encouragement. It is often those little things that make all the difference. They may not be provided in a statutory service, but we may be able to provide them in the voluntary sector. Flexibility is important, and I return to Graham's point about that. It is important that what we provide is suited to the individual. I do not agree that it is better to split up a NEET category into lots of categories. What is important is that we recognise that people need different intervention, and to be able to progress at their own pace to maximise their potential.

Q148 Paul Holmes: How do you satisfy that from central government's point of view? They hand out large sums of money, and they want to be able to measure that they are achieving something. Local FE colleges such as mine in Chesterfield will say the trouble is that they are being paid on outcomes and

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on people completing courses, which causes huge problems with students, but if you are in the NEET sector where there are even more turbulent learning lifestyles and problems to overcome, it causes even greater problems. How do we get round that? If the Government must have some measure, as they insist, to show that their money is being well spent, money and time, and still satisfy their own accountants that they are delivering value for money?

Anne Pinney: It's horses for courses, isn't it? You have to work with each individual young person. We've essentially got our services working with young people who are NEET. There are two broad types. There are the big vocational training services that work with much larger numbers of young people who don't need as much support and who will do very well given the right kind of learning opportunity and a bit of mentoring and so on. Quite rapidly, they will make the transition back to college, on to an apprenticeship or into a job. We then have much smaller services that work much more intensively with young people who have more complex issues, for example, they have been kicked out of home, have just had a child, have mental health problems and so on. We need to work intensively with those young people and find different funding pots and different outcome measures, because what constitutes progress for one group is not the same as what constitutes progress for the other. Ultimately, you need to keep your eye on doing the best for that young person and helping them to progress towards adult life, employment and independent living.

Q149 Paul Holmes: During my time I've worked in schools and a number of colleges and it was very easy to say, "We'll double the number of people on these courses. If there's no measure of outcome, we'll just take government money and get people to fill those seats." There was no measure of outcome. But now the argument is that it has gone too far the other way, with lots of very hard and chronologically-tied measures of outcome. The Government are spending huge sums of money. How can you hold to account and establish whether that is good value if you don't have targets?

Anne Pinney: You need the right kind of outcomes measures. We haven't cracked it, really. It is something that we work on very hard with our services. Yes, there is statutory funding and you have to report against those statutory measures, but they weigh against working with some young people. So if you know that you can't get someone through a course in 26 weeks, you're not going to enrol them on that course; you're going to direct them somewhere else. You have to use voluntary funding to top it up if necessary.

Q150 Paul Holmes: Partly in the same way, the Prince's Trust talked about the January and September enrolment dates and what happens to somebody who just doesn't fit into that category. That will be more the case with somebody who is in a NEET category.

Chris Murray: We get a lot of referrals of young people dropping out of college. They are pushed into college far too early, they drop out and within a month, they're with us. We do some work with them for three or four months until they can go back to college when it's the right time. Often we are measured on whether we got them back into college as a tick-box. We are not measured on the soft skills we have developed in young people, such as self-belief and the confidence to say, "You know what? I can actually do this now—I can stand on my own two feet." Something else we offer is one-to-one support once they are back in college. It is not just about saying, "Right, you're at college. We've done our job. We've ticked a box;" it's about giving that emotional support while they are there for however long they need.

Chairman: We can come back to this. I want to bring Helen in on work-based learning.

Q151 Helen Southworth: Anne, you said that you think a considerable amount could be done to focus more on work-based learning for young people in terms of getting larger numbers of young people into work-based learning and better outcomes for them from it. What practical steps do you think need to be taken to get that to happen?

Anne Pinney: It has to work at a local level in partnership with employers. How we make it work is at local level, building up partnerships between our vocational training services and local employers. You can do a lot of hand holding—for want of a better word—to build trust, so that young people are given an opportunity to show what they are capable of. They can then stand on their own two feet afterwards.

Q152 Helen Southworth: Do you think this is something you need to focus on smaller employers—if it is local and it is going to be a local partnership—or should it be larger employers with a local facility? Or do we need a mix of both?

Anne Pinney: A mix of both, really. We work with the whole mix. Very often, we work at national and local level. For example, at the moment we have a partnership with Royal Mail Group. So far, 60 of our young people have been on its placements and 30 have progressed to permanent employment from that, which is just fantastic. That is a big national organisation, but those partnerships are working at local or regional level. At a national level, the Government have to look at what they can do to make it easier to give employers incentives to help with training costs and so on, and to address some of the bureaucratic burdens that put employers off taking on younger people.

Q153 Helen Southworth: We've had in Parliament, if not in this Committee, a lot of evidence about the impact schools have on the ability of young people with long-term conditions to participate educationally and socially. Is there an equivalent that we need to be aware of for young people who are going into apprenticeships? In a school where a head teacher is aware of the support needs of young

people with long-term conditions, their outcomes are better. Is there an equivalent, and what is your experience of it?

David Congdon: More generally, in answer to that, we know from experience that too many schools and FE colleges make very little effort to encourage people with a learning disability to go into work, so there is an expectation that they will not go into work. If those expectations are formed at that age, the chances are that they will never get into work. Raising the expectations of people with a learning disability is a very important role for schools and FE colleges. The challenge is that if you raise expectations, you must ensure there is something to go on to. That is where, as Anne was saying, the work-based learning, or the work trials that I mentioned earlier, come in in a very big way. Under a scheme we call WorkRight, we work with large companies to try to do just that—to get people with a learning disability on a work trial in their organisation and have a job. We do the same with some local authorities, but none of it is on a scale that will make a big enough difference. After many years of doing that we have reached the conclusion that you need some infrastructure and some funding—not a massive amount but enough to provide some support for the individual in the workplace—which gives confidence to the business to employ someone with a learning disability. But you have to start young with raising expectations. Too often people with a learning disability are told that they are never going to work, and that prophecy is then fulfilled.

Q154 Helen Southworth: Do you have any other comments on other long-term conditions? I have had representations from organisations working with young people with epilepsy and diabetes, in terms of employers understanding risk assessment, risk management and proper support?

Anne Pinney: Not just long-term conditions, but life events. I am talking about young offenders. The model is about supporting transition so that a young person can show that they are trustworthy, and the employer knows that there is a training provider who, effectively, reduces the risks for them. That helps a young person to progress to an apprenticeship or a job when otherwise they would not get a look-in.

Q155 Helen Southworth: I was going to go on to young offenders. Perhaps we could go back to the long-term conditions.

Peter Lister: I agree that there should be some form of recognised support once a person is in the workplace, to maximise their chances of keeping that role and the job. In a recession, it is very difficult to motivate employers to put in that extra resource. The education is needed for employers as much as in preparing the young person to go into the workplace. I have no direct experience of the long-term conditions that you mention. None the less, dealing with young people who have had a chaotic life experience—family break-up, offending or a care background—is an equivalent situation. Lots of

different things impacting on a young person's life often need to be taken into account when they go into employment, if they are to hold down a meaningful job in the long term. Too often, we find that the placements we secure for our young people are in short-term, casual contract jobs, which put them back into the cycle of coming back out in a few months and needing to start again.

Q156 Helen Southworth: Do you think it's important in terms of young offenders? I have a young offenders institute in my constituency. The staff there are excellent at helping young people to develop skills, including transferable skills, and at encouraging employers to provide training opportunities and working to find employment at the end of those opportunities. Do we need to replicate that elsewhere so that there is a way out?

Anne Pinney: Yes.

Chris Murray: Yes.

Q157 Helen Southworth: How much do we need to do it?

Chris Murray: How much? A lot of the young people, especially the ones who have gone to prison and so on, have chaotic lifestyles, as you said. Support and structure has been the biggest issue for them—not having the right support and structure in the family home or work, or whatever it may be. Some of them have never even worked. So to go from that and suddenly get a job and have rules and boundaries in respect of what you're supposed to do in the job as well is quite professional. It's quite difficult for a young person who has never been in that situation. Having someone to support them through that and rationalise why your boss might be saying "You've got a 10-minute break" as opposed to having a 20-minute break is constantly needed. Because these young people have had that self-fulfilling prophecy of negative messages they start believing that they're worthless and no good. They are more likely to sabotage as well, because all they know their life to be is just crap, basically. So it's really important that they have that support worker constantly for however long it may be.

Q158 Helen Southworth: Can I ask about the role of volunteering and unpaid work in the processes of young people getting skills together, getting relationships and understandings sorted out and getting role models to show them how work is. What are the barriers to making that work effectively and what do the Government need to do about it?

Anne Pinney: Where to start? This is not really my area of expertise. If we are talking about 16 to 18-year-olds, most of them won't be entitled to benefits anyway, but if they are, there can be blocks in terms of benefits eligibility.

Helen Southworth: This is something the Prince's Trust is particularly keen on.

Peter Lister: Yes, there are extremely important opportunities through volunteering, particularly with jobs so few and far between at the moment. It is a critical way of ensuring that work-based skills are being developed. Barriers, yes. One is definitely to do

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with potential benefit barriers with Jobcentre Plus. We have some national protocols with Jobcentre Plus to try to ensure that where there are volunteering opportunities we negotiate with the local district and ensure that there is room for the placement to continue without any of the benefits being interfered with. They need constant attention and constant negotiation, but it can be done. So I think there is a method there.

Q159 Helen Southworth: Is that attached to the fact that you have such a structured approach?

Peter Lister: Yes, I think it has to be structured. It has to be managed in terms of making sure that, for example, Jobcentre Plus knows exactly the sort of volunteering role we are offering, the reason it's there and the fact that it will help that individual ultimately get into employment. So it's in Jobcentre Plus's interests to support that. The other barrier is about still making the link between the volunteering role and a real job, because there has to be that transition, otherwise you're reinforcing to a young person that, actually, they're not going to make it into that employed world. That is the bit we struggle with most, I suppose, because we can get some extremely effective and good valuable volunteering opportunities together and young people enjoy them, learn a lot and can sometimes get accreditation through them, so they are immensely valuable. But they will only have a lifespan of so long before they need to turn into something more meaningful.

David Congdon: I agree with what Peter said. Volunteering is important in offering an opportunity to do things and get experiences. I think the hesitation we would have is that there are too many examples of people with a learning disability being long-term volunteers and never actually getting a job. It may sometimes be entitled work experience, but it is work experience followed by more work experience. The crucial thing, as Peter said, is that it must end up leading to a job of some form, because that then changes the life of the individual concerned. That would be my health warning.

Q160 Helen Southworth: What takes you along the way? Is it accreditation?

David Congdon: No, I do not think it is. I think it goes back to the difficulty I was talking about at the beginning of getting employers able and willing to take on someone with a learning disability, because that can be difficult. There is sometimes a temptation to get the employer to agree to take them on as a volunteer.

Q161 Helen Southworth: Sorry, I meant specifically the transfer from being a volunteer to being paid. What, in your experience, makes that happen? Is it that the volunteering has accreditation, that people get effective careers advice during the volunteering or that they put a CV together?

David Congdon: I think it is more to do with employer attitude, to be perfectly honest. It is about wanting to take that individual on permanently in their workplace.

Peter Lister: It is certainly to do with experience, from an employer's point of view. You can see that somebody has been committed to something in a volunteering role, and they may have got some accreditation as well. You can see that they have the attitude to do something and stick to it, and that they are capable of timekeeping. Volunteering can demonstrate all those life skills we take for granted. That is what makes an employer look at such people in a different light. The fact is that there aren't enough jobs to go around at the moment, so it is still an uphill battle.

Q162 Chairman: Peter, is that entirely true? According to employment statistics, in some parts of the country there is a juxtaposition of NEETs and jobs. You are the leading lights of the third sector. You are giving us a lot of analysis of the problems, but what are your positive programmes for getting people into volunteering, small businesses or jobs? Haven't you, as good third-sector organisations, come up with ideas that the Government should introduce? You are the people who do these programmes. Or have you just become such clients of the Government that you can't think for yourselves?

Peter Lister: There are certainly jobs around that have been created by the third sector, such as through the Future Jobs Fund.

Q163 Chairman: We know that. You're all handing out your money. You were charities, but now you're dependent on the Government for your money, aren't you? Some of you are, although the Prince's Trust less than some of you other guys. What I'm trying to say is that you know about this problem. What positive programmes would you bring through, whether they are about volunteering, work or the national service schemes we are told are emerging in the United States—although it is not national service as we know it. What schemes have you guys come up with that could inspire this Committee to write a different report?

David Congdon: In the context of the Department of Health's development of *Valuing employment now*, along with others in the voluntary sector we encouraged the Government to look at the experiences in the United States. That led to Project Search, which gives an individual the opportunity to start as an intern for a period of time with the expectation that they will get a job. That is being done in the NHS. It builds on what I was saying earlier about the supported employment model. *[Interruption.]* I would argue that the voluntary sector does know what will work. Such things can only be done if they are funded. They are not done as charitable activities.

Chairman: It shows what an old hand you are that you carried on right through the Division bell. We have to go and vote, so we will suspend until we are quorate again.

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*Sitting suspended for a Division in the House.
On resuming—*

Q164 Chairman: Annette, you're going to ask about transitions, but before that we will come back to the witnesses on a previous point. I was giving you a bit of a push because I was getting worried that, as you are taking Government money and doing programmes, you were becoming a bit client minded. Where are the radical ideas such as, "Come on, Committee, make a report that says we should have a national system for paying every person who is classified as a NEET to do something interesting in the environment or the community"? Where are those ideas? Are you just worried that you would upset the Government or the political leaderships?

Peter Lister: We were talking about employment. We do a "get into" programme, for getting into retail, logistics, farming and even dry stone walling in the Pennines.

Q165 Chairman: You're from the Pennines, aren't you?

Peter Lister: Yes, I'm from Halifax. The exciting things can be part of the solution, and of course to make those things work we need employers who are willing to put their money where their mouth is—in other words, to offer real jobs and real work experience. We find such employers, such as DHL, Marks and Spencer and the National Trust, but they then have to be able to offer some longer-term employment opportunities, and that is where the difficulty lies. However creative we are, at the end of the day we are still looking for those opportunities for real employment.

Q166 Chairman: But Peter, you come from Halifax, which is just down the road from Huddersfield, so you know that the wide diversity of manufacturing employers has gone. The big employers there, as in my patch, will be health and the local authority. When we looked at the apprenticeship programme, we called for the biggest employers in many parts of the country to take an active role in taking on apprentices. Is not that the same situation?

Peter Lister: You're right. One of the things we tried to do at the end of last year was a "get into" programme for hospital services, and that was because we know that there are real jobs to be had in that sector, and we have successfully worked with the Hertfordshire hospital trust, for example, and created some jobs there. There are opportunities to be had, but we need employers who will almost ring-fence some job opportunities for the NEET young people and those in the categories we are here to talk about. In a climate in which there are lots of other unemployed people who perhaps have a higher skills level, that is a challenge for an employer.

Q167 Chairman: Chris, what about you? Where is the radical voice in Fairbridge? Your guys don't even want to be train drivers. I thought every little boy and girl wanted to be a train driver, and yet you say that £40,000 is not enough.

Chris Murray: Don't come and say that in our centre. Some of the young people would jump at that chance. They have aspirations and visions.

Q168 Chairman: What do they aspire to do then, if it is not to be a train driver?

Chris Murray: We're working with the hardest to reach, the sustained NEETs—the 38% sustained NEETs in the 16 to 18 category. To be honest, we are not in a good position to get those young people into employment. We are about engaging them in education, apprenticeships or re-engagement back into mainstream school. That is what we want to do: to give them aspiration so that they can say, "Actually, it's not too late for me to become a top chef, or a high flier in the business sector." Those are the kind of aspirations a lot of them have, but they don't feel that they have been given the opportunities because people want them to be train drivers or to push them into positions they don't want to be in.

Q169 Chairman: Maybe the people around them have unrealistic assumptions about their talents and skills. We can't all be pop stars and famous architects.

Chris Murray: No, but what we do is listen to the young people. If a young person said that they wanted to be a train driver, we would support them on that journey, and put in the steps needed to get them to that stage. We know that we cannot do that overnight. We may have to refer them to the Prince's Trust so that they do the next stage and take part in the more consistent 12-week programme that the Prince's Trust does before going on to become a train driver.

Q170 Chairman: Anne, do you want to come back to my allegation? Are you all going soft and rolling over for the Government, and not coming up with any new ideas?

Anne Pinney: Not at all. We will try to work with and encourage the bits that are good, and challenge the bits that we think need to be challenged. One bit that I want to challenge is the focus. So far, there has been a lack of attention to the employment route, to jobs with training, to getting young people into employment and supporting them.

Q171 Chairman: So should we ban all jobs that have no training? They're going to do that. The participation age is going up to 15.

Anne Pinney: I was going to say that you've already done it.

Chairman: We haven't done it yet.

Anne Pinney: What must not happen is young people not being able to go into employment because we haven't sorted out the accreditation of training. We have to make sure that employment with training remains a valid option for young people who want it. On apprenticeships, my colleague talked about supported employment opportunities. We need to make sure that young

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people who face barriers are able to access apprenticeships. There are real access challenges that have not been solved.

Chairman: Yes, because most apprenticeships are highly desirable. There is competition for them, so there have to be barriers to jump over.

Anne Pinney: Sure, we all understand that, but think of the university sector. We all understand that a child who has not had the best education might still be very bright and might be able to do well in university, which is why there are access initiatives. You need the same kind of thing for apprenticeship schemes. Some young people might do very well once they overcome the specific issues that they are facing at that time.

Chairman: That's a fair point. Annette, we are moving on to transitions.

Q172 Annette Brooke: Yes. I'd like to ask about the Connexions service. First, how effective do you rate it, as a whole? Perhaps I could address a question specifically to David: do you feel that the staff are trained adequately to serve the needs of young people with learning disabilities?

David Congdon: I think, in general, that the experience over the years of transition, whoever has been doing it, has been a poor one. I know the attitude of most parents to their sons and daughters moving through the transition period: they always say that it feels like falling off the edge of a cliff. Transition has been one of those things that has bedevilled talk in the learning disability and other fields for many years. The thing that I find very odd is the research that was done a few years ago by the Norah Fry Research Centre. It said that transition planning did not take place very often—I forget the exact percentage figures, but they were very low—but, incredibly, even when it did take place, it made very little difference. That is a salutary warning about the whole process, which has to be realistic. We have to think about what will make a difference to the lives of young people going through transition. Often, you find that the real concern of parents is the support that their son or daughter gets. When they are going through the education system, they get some support, but when they reach adulthood, they get no support at all. Very little thought is given to what will happen to people with a learning disability post school. All the evidence shows that this certainly does not work well. It is not just a question of having systems and processes; you've got to have something that is geared to outcomes. What are you actually going to do to make a difference to people's lives? I hope that that answers your question.

Q173 Annette Brooke: And specifically on Connexions?

David Congdon: Connexions, obviously, is part of that. I was not deliberately evading the subject of Connexions. In a way, however, whoever has had responsibility over the years for transition, it doesn't seem to have made much difference. That is what we hear anecdotally from parents and from people with a learning disability.

Q174 Annette Brooke: If I can just broaden the question out to Connexions in general.

Chairman: Who wants to come in on Connexions? Who feels strongly about Connexions? Anne?

Anne Pinney: I don't feel strongly about it. From local experience, we would say that it's a very mixed picture. In some areas, young people don't rate Connexions at all; in other areas, we have seen really good examples of Connexions collaborating with our services, facilitating placements and so on. So it's a mixed picture. I would agree with the thrust of reform; we need to get more careers expertise to young people. Equally, however, there is a place too for what Connexions was trying to achieve—having that more holistic approach. That is necessary for most of the young people we work with. I hope that, in bringing the matter back under local authorities, it can be better joined-up with—

Q175 Chairman: It wasn't before, when it was under local authorities—it was abysmal. Anne, why do you think that? In many places, it was abysmal under local authorities. That's why we got Connexions in the first place.

Anne Pinney: My point about bringing it back under local authorities is the potential of joining it up better with youth support services and linking it with the whole—

Q176 Chairman: So you're totally happy that local authorities—this is the new localism, is it?

Anne Pinney: I'm saying there's potential to join up those different agendas. You can align things better, so that Connexions advice is pushing in the same direction as youth—help me with what I'm trying to say here! *[Laughter.]* Connexions could be joined up better with youth support services.

Mr Stuart: The Chairman wasn't trying to bully you, Anne.

Chairman: I couldn't bully Anne. She's far too formidable a person to feel bullied.

Chris Murray: We get a lot of our referrals through Connexions. We get very little coming through the social services or local authority providers. They mainly go to Connexions and Connexions will refer them to us.

Q177 Chairman: Is Connexions good, though, in your experience?

Chris Murray: At referring young people to us. Moving them on or supporting that type of transition to the next stage is very much left to us to do, and we very much do that. Also, we do very little communication back with Connexions, which is a bit of a shame. But in terms of the referrals process, the relationship is positive.

Q178 Annette Brooke: I have recently had a young man write to me who told me that school was rubbish. He said that he had had a job for five months, but he said that was rubbish because it was cleaning in a school.

Mr Stuart: That wasn't the word he used, though, was it?

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Annette Brooke: No, it was stronger than “rubbish”. Finally, he said that Connexions was rubbish as well. And that’s pretty sad really, from someone aged 17. Where can he go to now?

Chris Murray: Come to Fairbridge if he wants.

Chairman: Do you work in deepest Dorset?

Annette Brooke: My question is really this: is there adequate signposting to the voluntary organisations that might just pick this young person up?

Peter Lister: No.

Chairman: Who said no? Peter?

Peter Lister: I think that Connexions is in a position to be that signposting organisation. Unfortunately, in most areas I do not think that it achieves that. I think that the principle of having personal advisers—the PA sort of role—is very good in theory and in some areas it has worked extremely well. We could point to examples where we have very good referral routes from Connexions, which refer young people at the right time to our programmes. However, Connexions tends not to do well for those young people who have dropped out of the system and lost touch with it. It is not good at getting those young people back into the mainstream. In some areas, we have successfully run programmes with Connexions. So we have run a programme to get started with football, or music—just something to engage young people, excite them and get them interested. Connexions’ personal advisers run with us on that programme; they pick the young people up at the end and we have got them back on to a relationship. So it can work.

Q179 Annette Brooke: I will just place on the record that my local Connexions service is actually very good, but it is quite disheartening when you realise that someone can just fall out entirely. Very quickly, Peter, could you tell us a bit more about the scheme in which you have worked with Marks and Spencer and other employers and organisations? Surely there must be more scope for this, even in the current economic conditions?

Peter Lister: I am sure there is, yes. The Marks and Start one is a good one to cite. We have been running it for about four years, so we have had plenty of experience. About 677 young people have gone through the scheme in that time. It is a two-week work placement, so they come from our programmes—either our “get into” programme or our personal development programme—and are referred to Marks and Spencer for two weeks. Some 80% of our harder to reach young people complete those two weeks—so it is not 100%—and have positive outcomes. About 50% have gone on to work for Marks and Spencer, and the other 50% have either gone into training or employment, or to other employers. What works about the scheme is having a good structure. Marks and Spencer offers some of its own internal accreditation during those two weeks, and that helps a young person going into other jobs. They can say that they have done those two weeks and that they have some initial training under their belt. They have a buddy scheme, so that a Marks and Spencer member of staff sticks with them. The challenges are that it is small scale—it is

still only a drop in the ocean—and that matching young people to local stores is administratively demanding. The other thing, which I hinted at earlier, is that a lot of the jobs in Marks and Spencer are short term so the placements do not necessarily get them into long-term work. About 150 of the 677 are still working for Marks and Spencer, which is pretty good.

Q180 Annette Brooke: I think that we have commented before that there are retail jobs around, but that they do not meet young people’s expectations. Could you comment generally on the skill gaps that this group of people who find life difficult have? What are employers looking for that they cannot offer?

Chairman: Who is that directed at? Anne, do you want to have a go at that?

Anne Pinney: Chris might have been about to speak.

Chairman: You took a deep breath there, Chris.

Chris Murray: I was just thinking about the skills gap. A lot of young people want to feel supported and loved. That is missing a lot of the time. A lot of the young people that we work with are ready to take that step into employment, which needs to be recognised. It is very much about giving young people the time that they need, and recognising that each young person is unique.

Anne Pinney: I agree that social skills are important. Obviously, young people need the basic skills; the literacy, numeracy and ICT skills that they will need in pretty much any job, but the social skills—expressing themselves, being able to deal with a challenging situation such as explaining that something has happened and that therefore they will be late for work, dressing appropriately and not swearing at an employer—are a prerequisite. Those trivial things can get you kicked out. Most young people learn such social skills in their homes, but some do not, and services such as ours have to work on those skills with them. Then there are the vocational skills that can help them into specific occupations, but the social skills are the prerequisite.

Q181 Chairman: What is the age range of the people with whom you work, Chris?

Chris Murray: We work with people from 13 to 25. A huge part of our success is that we work on a 1:4 ratio as well. If you want to work with some of the hardest to reach young people, we need to be able to recognise that that level of support is needed. We cannot have 30 young people with chaotic backgrounds in a room at once and expect two members of staff to deal with them. Our groups contain around six young people, so we are able to give that support that they need and pick up on body language before an incident happens. That is the key. You’ve got to be able to deal with an issue before it happens.

Q182 Chairman: Chris, you sound enormously gentle in your approach to these people of 16 to 25. What about the Dutch method, where you say, “Come on, you don’t get any benefit until you’re between 18 and 27 unless you’re working at

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something or training, or educating. Otherwise you get nothing. And if you don't turn up, we take 10% off this week. If you don't turn up next week, we take another 10% off."? What about a more rigorous approach? Some of my constituents would be in favour of that much more rigorous approach and would say, "Well, this Fairbridge chap was being too nice about these people who would turn up their nose at driving a tube train at £40,000 a year." Don't you recognise that the people we represent might say, "Come on, there ought to be more discipline around all this"?"

Chris Murray: First of all, young people who come to us—

Chairman: They're not very young at 25, at your top end.

Chris Murray: A 13-year-old would be a young person.

Chairman: Okay, let us consider those who are somewhere in the middle: 21. People are adults and vote at 18.

Chris Murray: They come to our services because they want to come and because they choose to come. They're not part of any order from probation and are not being told to be there. They want to come here. The things that we can pull them up on include not getting to a session starting at 10.30 am, which is pretty late for a 21-year-old. For them to get out of bed and make it into Fairbridge at 10.30 is quite a difficult task, believe it or not. If they're late, the consequence is they miss that session and don't end up going away on a fun activity, which is about developing their personal social skills. The effects of that are dramatic, as opposed to saying, "We're going to take £10 or £20 off you." It's something they want to be a part of. They want to be part of a team and want to feel part of a family and to be involved, but they've missed it and that's their own doing. That kind of consequence has much more of an impact than taking away £20 or £30 or giving them a longer sentence, or whatever it may be, because that's part of the whole self-fulfilling prophecy where a young person goes, "I don't care" and then storms off. But actually they do care and they want to be there.

Q183 Chairman: Would David and Peter dismiss the Dutch system as being much more draconian?

David Congdon: We've deliberately and consciously supported the Government's welfare reform agenda primarily because the employment record of people with a learning disability is so poor—they've not got jobs and we don't think it's particularly through a fault of their own—that we support anything that made the system try to get people off benefits into work. The jury is out on whether the latest proposals

or the system, which has changed quite a lot, will deliver. However, we would say that the quid pro quo has to be giving enough support to people to enable them to get into work, because if they don't get the support, they're not going to achieve the goal and it would be wrong to penalise people who are really trying very hard. That's why we've said that you have to work on both sides: supply and demand. We're under no illusion, given that the track record of getting people with learning disabilities into work has not been historically good. There's a lot of work to do on the supply side of getting people with a learning disability ready to be able to work, but you have then to do work on the demand side so that employers are able and willing to employ them. The missing ingredient—most people in supported employment would say this—is providing proper sustainable support in the workplace to people, then you'll get them into jobs. That builds on what I was saying earlier about our own WorkRight and Pathways schemes and the scheme that has been started comparatively recently in Leicester and Norwich, called Project Search, which I mentioned. There are things that will work—people know they will work—but they need to be replicated on a larger scale. That sort of approach to people with a learning disability will work. There clearly is a role for sanctions where you've got a situation where people are clearly unwilling to do things. But it has to be balanced with that quid pro quo of support.

Peter Lister: I don't know about the Dutch method, but I certainly support challenge. As Chris says, a lot of the programmes we run are extremely challenging for the point at which young people are starting. The other thing is that there is still evidence that the benefits system works against encouraging young people in certain situations. We still come across individuals for whom it is not in their interest to move into work. That still needs to be addressed. There was a very good report produced by the social exclusion unit a few years ago that demonstrated that whole thing about the transitions to adulthood. I still think a lot of that is relevant and hasn't been addressed. Definitely, there is an increased challenge. We can be tough on these things, but we need to recognise where young people are starting from and make sure that the support is there to move them along.

Chairman: Thank you for that. We've run out of time. I thank all four of you for your contribution. Stay in touch with the Committee, and if you go away and say, "Why didn't I answer that silly question that the Chairman or one of his esteemed colleagues asked me in a different way?" do communicate with us, because we want to make this a good report. Sorry for the late start and the disruption of a vote.

Memorandum submitted by the Trades Union Congress (TUC)

INTRODUCTION

1.1 The TUC welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the Committee's inquiry into young people not in education, employment or training. The significant impact of the recession on the wider youth labour market and the repercussions of this for the 16–18 age cohort makes this a very timely inquiry. In addition, the raising of the participation age over the coming years is a significant policy measure and it is essential that transition towards implementation is underpinned by positive progress in increasing the proportion of 16–18 year olds involved in education and training.

1.2 Whilst this submission does on occasion make reference to policy development relating to the wider youth labour market (ie 16–24 year olds) it assumes that the Committee's inquiry is focused on 16–18 year olds not in education, employment or training (commonly referred to as the NEET group). Throughout this submission the abbreviation—NEET—is used to refer to 16–18 year olds not in education, employment or employment.

IMPACT OF THE RECESSION

2.1 The recession has undoubtedly had a significant negative impact on the NEET group and the wider youth labour market. Very recent labour market trends may now be indicating that employers are ceasing to shed labour at the same rate but that they are counterbalancing this by continuing to curtail their recruitment of young people. For example, the latest TUC analysis of the Labour Force Survey (LFS) employment data shows that employment for 16–24 year olds fell by 89,000 between the April–June and July–September quarters last year whilst employment for those aged 25 to state pension age increased by 67,000 during the same period.¹ At the same time the TUC has published an analysis concluding that the government's policies to combat youth unemployment will help to ensure that long-term joblessness among this group will not be as severe as in the 1980s.²

2.2 The latest annual analysis of the NEET group undertaken by DCSF³ shows that the proportion of 16–18 year olds not in education, employment or training increased from 9.7% at the end of 2007 to 10.3% at the end of 2008. However, this was more than explained by reduced employment opportunities for this age group—56% of those not in education or training were in work in 2007 compared to only 49% in 2008. During the same period there was a further welcome increase in the proportion of 16–18 year olds in education or training—up from 78 to 79.7%—but this was not enough to tackle the overall increase in the NEET rate due to the declining employment rate.

2.3 Unpublished analysis by the TUC of the latest LFS data shows that the ILO unemployment rate for 16–17 year olds not in full-time education is currently 32.6%, and has been rising since early 2008. However, between quarters 2 and 3 of 2009 it fell 4.5 percentage points from 37.1%. The employment rate among young people aged 16–17 who are not in full-time education is 40.2%, and has been falling since early 2006. This rate has been falling since the late 1990s, with a sharp increase in decline since the recession started. There was a small increase of 2 percentage points in the employment rate between quarters 2 and 3 of last year of this year, but this seems unlikely to be a longer-term trend.

2.4 However, on an internationally comparative basis it is clear that the UK is still performing very poorly as regards the proportion of young people that are in some form of education or training. According to recent data published by the OECD⁴ comparing the proportion of 15–19 year olds in some form of education or training, the UK rate of 62% is the second worst performance among all the OECD countries. All the other countries (bar Turkey) have a much higher rate of participation for this age group compared to the UK, ranging from 73% to 96%, with an OECD average of 84% and an EU19 average of 87%. These statistics highlight the continuing gulf between the UK and most of the rest of the OECD when it comes to participation in education and training among young people in this age group.

RECENT POLICY INITIATIVES

3.1 The TUC has welcomed the priority that the Government has given to tackling youth unemployment. In the 1980s recession too many young people who lost their jobs were not given adequate support and over two million of them were unable to find work even after the recession had ended. The TUC has therefore welcomed the commitment set out in the recent White Paper⁵ to provide over 100,000 new opportunities to guarantee a job, training or work experience to every 18–24 year old who has been out of work for 6 months.

3.2 It will be important that this new *Youth Guarantee* operates in such a way that it will offer early support to the NEET group, especially those who have had NEET status for an extended period between the ages of 16 and 18. One of the key challenges facing policy makers is that, compared with many other countries, participation in education and training in the UK declines at a very rapid rate during the later teenage years. A central thrust of the *Youth Guarantee* should be to tackle this trend, including empowering young people transferring onto the benefit system from the NEET group to access suitable education and training that will help them achieve sustainable employment over the longer term.

3.3 It is also very welcome that the White Paper gives due recognition to the need for more help for 16–17 year olds, especially those who fall within the NEET group. It reiterates the Government's aim "for all young people aged 16–17 to be in education or training, including work-based learning options such as

apprenticeships” and also includes a number of new measures to support this policy aim. The TUC supports the thrust of these new measures which aim: to increase the number of education and training opportunities that are made available to this age group; to develop a more co-ordinated response by Connexions, Jobcentre Plus and other agencies; and to expand the number of young people that are eligible for Education Maintenance Allowances.

3.4 As well as announcing these new policy measures the Government published two new documents in December, one setting out a strategy for increasing the proportion of 16–24 year olds in education, employment or training and another setting out a strategy for supporting local areas to implement successfully the Raising the Participation Age policy. These two strategy papers are to be welcomed in that they set out a clear strategic direction for achieving the overall aim of tackling the UK’s lamentable record in retaining young people in some form of education and training beyond the current compulsory school age of 16.

FUNDING AN INDIVIDUALISED APPROACH

4.1 The TUC has repeatedly called on the Government to invest in a comprehensive strategy to tackle the scourge of unemployment and to ignore the calls from some quarters to accelerate cuts to public spending. This is particularly important in relation to youth unemployment as all the research in this area highlights that the scarring effects of unemployment on young people are especially severe. The decision by the Government to increase investment in programmes to tackle youth unemployment, such as the *Youth Guarantee*, and to increase spending on education and training for 16–18 year olds is exactly the right approach at this point in the economic cycle. Over the longer term this will significantly boost the proportion of young people who will be able to benefit from the economic recovery as it strengthens rather than repeating the experience of previous decades when too many young people remained unemployed for a long period after recessions ended.

4.2 The Pre-Budget Report and the two recent White Papers on employment⁵ and skills⁶ have included additional funding in a number of areas for 16–18 year olds, in particular by expanding and strengthening the apprenticeship route and the range of options included in the September Guarantee. It is imperative that this funding is sustained in order to further develop the education and skills system for this age group by ensuring that all 16–18 year olds can access a choice of options that will enable them to pursue one that best meets their individual needs. As essential as this is in supporting the existing cohort, it will be even more significant as the phased introduction of raising the participation age (RPA) approaches. In effect the RPA will virtually eradicate the concept of the NEET group as it will become compulsory for all 16–18 year olds to be in education or training. The major risk to this policy is that the compulsory element will become unpopular among a core of young people whose needs are not being adequately met and who feel they are being forced into unsuitable options.

IDENTIFICATION AND SUPPORT SYSTEMS

5.1 The Government has recently published a welcome strategy paper⁷ on its wider aim of increasing the proportion of 16–24 year olds in education, employment and training. In addition to a range of new policy approaches and a boost to funding, a key feature of the new approach is to build better partnerships at the local and regional levels to tackle unemployment and support more young people to stay in education or training. Local authorities are quite rightly at the heart of these partnerships and this role has been strengthened by the previous policy decision to give them the lead remit for education and skills provision for all 16–19 year olds.

5.2 Empowering all LAs and partner bodies, such as RDAs, to develop a coherent and effective strategy to reduce the NEET group in specific localities must be a key priority of the new Young People’s Learning Agency. There is already evidence of pioneering local authorities who are fulfilling this ambition and bucking the national NEET trend. A recent article in the Financial Times highlighted, among others, the example of Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council which through an innovative approach has reduced its NEET rate from 15.6 to 11.8% in less than three years.⁸

5.3 The Government’s new strategy also highlights the crucial importance of strategies for early identification of young people who are likely to fall within the NEET group well before they reach the age of 16. Constructive partnerships between agencies such as the Connexions Service, schools, Jobcentre Plus and others are vital in this respect. Ongoing reforms such as the development of more personalised learning and one-to-one tuition in schools and the closer integration of employment and skills provision will also support a more collaborative approach to supporting more young people to either avoid falling into the NEET group in the first place or to achieve a speedy exit if circumstances force them into this position.

APPRENTICESHIPS

6.1 The TUC has strongly supported the Government’s ongoing commitment to raise the number and quality of apprenticeships and to make it a viable option for many more young people. It also makes sense for Government to use all the levers at its disposal to increase the number of apprenticeships available to 16–18 year-olds in order to counter the impact of the recession on this age group. The TUC has welcomed

a range of initiatives on this front over the past year, including a more proactive use of government procurement to require contractors to recruit apprentices and also committing to expanding apprenticeships across all parts of public services.

6.2 However, in spite of these initiatives it is evident that the recession has had a disproportionately negative impact on the ability of 16–18 year olds and other young people to access apprenticeships due to limited take-up by employers. The latest official data⁹ show that although the total number of apprenticeships increased in 2008–09, this was due to a significant increase in the number of adult apprentices (25 years+) whilst the number of young apprentices declined. The sharpest fall (–7.5%) in apprenticeships was among 16–18 year olds whilst 19–24 year old apprentices fell back by 5.9%.

6.3 In its employment White Paper the Government announced a new employer subsidy of £2,500 linked to the recruitment of apprentices aged 16–17. While the TUC acknowledges that this may prove a positive incentive for some employers to take on younger apprentices, it also needs to be recognised that the reasons why many employers are reluctant to employ young apprentices are varied and complex and will not be wholly resolved by a cash incentive of this nature. For example, many of these young people require mentoring and support in the workplace and this is an area where unions, especially union learning representatives, are playing an increasingly important role. It will also be important to ensure that this new subsidy does not simply function as a “golden hello” and that employers are obliged to support these young people through to the completion of a high quality apprenticeship. It will also be important for the Government to consult closely with relevant stakeholders about the remit of this new subsidy and how it will be monitored (eg to ensure that employers are addressing equality and diversity issues when recruiting).

6.4 Procurement has proved to be a useful tool in incentivising employers at all stages of the supply chain to invest in apprenticeships and training more generally. The TUC has strongly welcomed a number of positive policy measures in this area over the past year culminating in the commitment by government in the recent skills White Paper to use its spending power to require contractors to recruit 20,000 apprentices over the next 3 years. If the recruitment of apprentices aged 16–17 continues to fall back the Government may need to give consideration to whether its procurement strategies could be used in a more targeted way to encourage employers to take on apprentices in this particular age group.

EMPLOYMENT STANDARDS

7.1 Over and above the NEET group, there remain a significant number of young people aged 16–18 who are in employment but who are not receiving any accredited training. The research shows that the longer-term outcomes for this group are only slightly better than those belonging to the NEET group. One major benefit of raising the participation age is that all young employees will in the future be engaged in some form of accredited training. However, as highlighted in the subsequent section of this submission on the RPA, the TUC is concerned that there needs to be a greater onus on employers to ensure that they are meeting their obligations within the RPA framework. However, the reality at present is that too many 16–18 year olds in employment are not receiving any training and too few eligible employees in this age-group are making use of the right to time off for study or training and this should be addressed by Government.

7.2 The TUC is also concerned that the urgent need to tackle youth unemployment should not lead to the weakening of other key employment rights as a result of lobbying by employer bodies. This particularly applies to the National Minimum Wage (NMW) and in particular to the position of apprentices aged 16–18 who are currently not covered.¹⁰ The Government has asked the Low Pay Commission (LPC) to consider establishing new rates in order to protect those apprentices that are currently not covered. The TUC submission to the LPC¹¹ has highlighted that, on past evidence,¹² giving all apprentices coverage under the NMW is likely to improve standards and completion rates without impacting on take-up. The TUC is recommending that apprentices currently not covered should be protected by three new age-based hourly rates (linked to specific age-groups) based on a discount of 10 to 15% from the existing NMW rates.

7.3 The TUC acknowledges that properly structured work experience plays an important role in preparing young people for the world of work, especially for the NEET group. However, due care needs to be taken to ensure that this complies with the NMW Regulations, working time limits for younger workers and other employment law where applicable (eg health and safety), since young people can be particularly vulnerable when it comes to dealing with unscrupulous employers. Younger workers are entitled to the same employment rights as other workers with the only exceptions being rights to statutory redundancy pay. There is also a need for all employer bodies to heed the Government's call to engage a wider number of employers in supplying quality work experience placements for young people.

RAISING THE PARTICIPATION AGE (RPA)

8.1 The TUC has supported the policy of raising the participation age to 18 over the coming years on the basis that economic and social change makes it increasingly imperative that all young people continue in some form of education or training at least to the age of 18. The internationally comparative data showing the UK lagging behind other OECD countries on this indicator is another reason for justifying the new policy approach. However, the TUC is concerned that this policy change should not lead to the

establishment of a highly compulsory approach which could lead to young people being forced into inappropriate options or being penalised for non-participation when they are not being offered an adequate range of options.

8.2 For this reason it is important that the ongoing expansion of vocational pathways for young people, especially apprenticeships and the new diplomas, are well established by 2013 when the participation age is raised to 17. It is welcome that the Government is working closely with all stakeholders to prepare for the roll-out of RPA and that they recognise that local authorities are at the heart of this. In line with this it is crucial that RPA is not seen as a means of “solving” the NEET problem. As the Minister indicated in the recent strategy paper,¹³ “Legislation is not enough to end the phenomenon of 16 and 17 year olds NEET”. The priority for Government in the run-up to the RPA implementation must be to put in place an education and training system that meets the needs of all 16–18 year olds so that the full implementation of RPA in 2015 is viewed as the accepted norm by all young people.

8.3 In its submission to the Government’s consultation on RPA14 the TUC stressed that the “primary focus [of the new system] should be on support, encouragement and an attractive offer.” To achieve this it will be necessary to ensure that there is a greater onus on employers to meet their RPA obligations regarding young people in their employment rather than focusing compulsion wholly on the individual. In addition, RPA will require many more employers to “step up to the plate” by taking up the Government’s support for apprenticeships, work experience placements and vocational training in the workplace.

8.4 The Government also needs to clearly acknowledge the key role of trade unions in supporting young people in the workplace, including bargaining with employers to expand training opportunities. Unions, and in particular union learning representatives, also have a significant role in mentoring young people and providing them with information and guidance on learning and skills. The Government highlighted this in the recent skills White Paper, in particular relating to the revitalised union role in supporting apprentices in the workplace.

8.5 Appropriate financial support is also crucial to empower many more 16–18 year olds to remain in education or training and the recent announcement to increase the numbers eligible for Education Maintenance Allowances is to be welcomed. A highly individualised approach under the RPA needs to be accompanied by a financial support system that tackles the economic barriers that face too many young people from disadvantaged backgrounds.

December 2009

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- ¹⁰ Apprentices aged 19–24 are also exempted from the NMW but only for the first year of their apprenticeship
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- ¹³ DCSF (2009) *Raising the Participation Age: supporting local areas to deliver*
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Witnesses: **Alison Ashworth-Brown**, Head of Engineering Academy, NG Bailey, **Andy Palmer**, Head of Skills, BT, **Richard Wainer**, Head of Education and Skills, CBI, and **Tom Wilson**, unionlearn Director, TUC, gave evidence.

Q184 Chairman: May I welcome Richard Wainer, Alison Ashworth-Brown, Tom Wilson and Andy Palmer to our deliberations. Sorry it was a late start today for all sorts of reasons, such as votes in the House of Commons. I shall start by saying that this is a very serious inquiry. It is a short, sharp inquiry in the sense that there is an election coming and we want to get the report out before the election arrives—it is coming quite fast, as you know. I want to riff through the four of you. If you could briefly introduce yourselves and say how, if you were Secretary of State, you would solve the NEETS problem. Let's start with Richard.

Richard Wainer: My name is Richard Wainer. I head up the CBI's education and skills policy team. We put out a five-point plan to tackle youth unemployment in the summer, which focused on apprenticeships and providing incentives to encourage employers to take more young people on. The plan also focused on the provision of more work placements—there is a real responsibility on the business community to provide those opportunities for young people—and looked at minimum wage rates for young people to ensure they are not priced out of employment opportunities. In effect, we want to ensure that young people have opportunities to develop employability skills and experience the world of work. We put out a five-point plan and we are pleased to see that the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills took up one particular aspect around providing incentives, particularly for small employers, to take on young apprentices.

Q185 Chairman: Alison, I know your company well. I am a great admirer of its skills and apprenticeships work and all that. I have met some of your senior management to talk about that in the past. What are your solutions for this?

Alison Ashworth-Brown: We have to stop treating the NEET group as one distinct group. It is currently made up of three different groups. The first part of the group includes youngsters who would not normally be there if it was not for the economic climate. Those youngsters would normally have gone into an apprenticeship or employment. However, given the current economic state and the fact that apprenticeships were probably down about 50% last year—I definitely know they were in our sector, so they probably were in every other sector and the situation will probably be the same this year—those youngsters have gone into the NEET group through no fault of their own. The quickest way of moving them out of the NEET group is to get the economy and the contracts that are held up going again, which is not as easy as it sounds. You cannot deal with the other two groups in the NEET group with one solution. Youngsters in that group who have probably been failed by the education system are not ready for work and need something between that and employability. They need employability skills and skills topping-up so that they are ready for employment. The other group, which we could refer to as disenfranchised or something similar, are

probably capable of going to work in some cases, but can't be bothered. Obviously some of those youngsters are disenfranchised, but not capable. Those are the hard-core NEETs we used to have when I worked for a training enterprise council. They will be the most difficult to shift. The other two groups can be moved by different sets of things that Richard has talked about with the economy, but the hard core will be the most difficult. There are several ways of dealing with the hard core. You could make them go on a training course and so on, but whether it would work is another matter.

Q186 Chairman: Thank you for that. Tom, we in this Committee have heard some nice things about unionlearn in the past. We have a long collective memory, and when considering some of the best pathways to advice about what training is good and so on, unionlearn often comes up trumps. What is your view of the NEETs problem? What Alison said is interesting. I am sure she is right about the economy booting up, but this was a persistent problem even when the economy was at the top, wasn't it? The percentage was about the same as now.

Tom Wilson: Roughly the same, yes. I think what the recession has done is to displace many people into the NEET group who might otherwise have had a chance of a job. You are right that it is roughly 10%, and seems to have been around that for some time, or even higher depending on how you measure it. Where I might take issue slightly with Alison is on apprenticeships because our reading of apprenticeships as a whole is that it's true that in some sectors, including yours, Alison, they have dropped a lot, but overall I think they have held up not badly, certainly compared with previous recessions. I think there is a slight increase overall and a slight dip in the number of younger apprentices. That is interesting, because it shows that they are finally beginning to take a bit of purchase and a hold. They are a genuine route out of NEETHood, for which the Government should take a lot of credit. They have managed to turn around a failing educational vehicle that is now largely successful. Having said that, our worry about apprenticeships is that there is a large cohort of people for whom an apprenticeship is not yet right, and they are often in the NEET group. For them you might need something such as perhaps a pre-apprenticeship, or some kind of recognised structured system of delivering a range of skills that would equip them for an apprenticeship, and would help to distinguish and protect the apprenticeship brand, which otherwise might be at risk of being diluted a bit. That is the first point. Otherwise, the TUC's view is that much of what the Government are doing is broadly on the right lines. There is the young person's guarantee and, as Richard said, we strongly supported investment in young people. The sort of analysis that Professor Blanchflower made of the long-term scarring effects of unemployment on young people has been very persuasive and has had

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a lot of influence. There is broad consensus that we need a big investment programme for the NEET group to stop that happening. Something that is distinctive about the UK, and shows why we have a particular problem, is that when you compare us with the rest of the OECD it is striking that we have a much larger cohort, which is endemic over many decades. I think the TUC view is that it is partly down to the lack of a social partnership approach to education, learning and skills and the fact that we still have a rather fragmented, individualised, short-term approach to skills so that group inevitably loses out. It takes a sustained, long-term approach to turn that round.

Q187 Chairman: Could it be anything to do with the fact that we had a dramatic decline in the manufacturing sector?

Tom Wilson: Enormously, yes. I think that was a big source of potential Level 2-type apprenticeships, particularly for a lot of young men. That has all gone now.

Q188 Chairman: Andy Palmer, it is very good to have you here because we feel that we have the complete set in front of the Committee. Perhaps I can make amends because I had a long conversation with someone from BT, only to realise after talking with him about skills for half an hour that he was from VT, not BT. Perhaps I can compensate this evening. What is your solution?

Andy Palmer: If I were Secretary of State for a day, my first focus would be information for young NEETs to ensure that they had a better awareness of the world of work and, through that awareness, greater choice and aspiration than they have now. I would expect employers to play a significant role in awareness of the world of work through the provision of work placements and information about what it is like to work in specific organisations and sectors. I would also expect them to use their strength and power to get into the NEET groups and help people with CV writing, general employability and so on. I would then take a close look at the curriculum young people are following between the ages of 14 and 19. I would ensure that that curriculum prepared people for whatever choice they decided to make, whether it was to go into work or on to further and higher education. Regardless of whether someone made an academic or vocational choice, I would ensure that there was parity of esteem between the two and that people had equal opportunities to follow those routes. Before even starting on my first day, I would suggest looking at the term NEET, which feels very passive. Instead of talking about individuals who are not in employment, education or training, we should talk about individuals who are seeking employment, education or training. I would therefore change it from NEET to SEET.

Q189 Mr Stuart: Except that it doesn't describe a certain percentage of those who are in that condition, who would fail immediately. We heard Tom talking about the need for a social partnership

model, and if only we had that, we would be like the other OECD countries. Can you explain what that means?

Tom Wilson: Broadly what it means is that there is much more of a consensus between employers, unions and the state about vocational learning for that group of 16 to 25-year-olds, to take a broad cohort. To see that in practice, the apprenticeship programme in Germany has a much stronger link between employers, colleges, schools and the careers advice system so that people are channelled early on into an appropriate route for them.

Q190 Mr Stuart: Isn't that what Connexions was supposed to do?

Tom Wilson: If you compared Connexions with the German equivalent, it would be instructive. As Andy says, social partnership works in a deep and wide-ranging way because it can influence the curriculum. It means that even at the age of 14, when young people are beginning to make choices, they can see that it is a route that has real content, meaning and status because it carries a decent wage. The employers are clearly supportive. It is strongly supported by community organisations. It works on a number of levels. It is not simple and it would take a while to turn things around. To their credit, this Government are beginning to make some moves in that direction. Many leading employers would strongly support that kind of approach.

Q191 Mr Stuart: But we're 13 years into this Government. I know the TUC is obviously the chief cheerleader for them—in fact the final funder left—so it is perhaps not surprising that you give such a benign view of their failure to make any dent in NEET numbers in good times or bad. A big question we are trying to understand is why from 1997 to 2007, when we were in benign economic circumstances, we didn't make any progress. We have touched on deindustrialisation. It has been said that the rate of loss of manufacturing under this Government is three times what it was under Margaret Thatcher. I do not know whether that is true, but we want to understand why the progress we had expected on the surface headline figure was not made during those 10 years. We have struggled so far to get from academics and NGOs a real understanding of what matters.

Chairman: Richard will tell us.

Richard Wainer: Tom was talking about much stronger partnerships between employers and the education system. We at the CBI are big supporters of that. We are part of the new Education and Employers Taskforce, which wants to develop much more productive partnerships between schools and businesses. There is a real opportunity for employers to raise attainment and aspiration among young people and give them much better advice and guidance about what is available. As Tom and Andy were saying, we want curriculum development to ensure that they are developing the skills and knowledge that will be valuable to them in the labour market. We have seen some good

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developments over recent years, such as the sector-specific diplomas, and some of the progress around education and business partnerships, but there is still a long way to go before we have the strong partnership between the education system and the world of employment afterwards.

Q192 Mr Stuart: So you basically agree with Tom that the problem is one of co-ordination between different bodies—schools, FE and employers—and that we have so far failed to achieve that linkage.

Richard Wainer: Stronger links between the world of employment and the world of education have to be a better thing in ensuring young people are much better prepared and better able to succeed in work.

Q193 Mr Stuart: Is that the answer to our question? Failure to get those links right is why the 10 years from 1997 to 2007 did not seem to go anywhere—on the surface.

Richard Wainer: Potentially. There are other issues around being NEET—not a nice phrase. There are a lot of reasons for it. It is not just about education, but social, health and a multiplicity of issues. It is about how we can better join up the services. Connexions has not delivered particularly well, but how has it joined up with health, social and housing services to ensure that we are addressing all the sorts of problems experienced by young people who are out of education, employment or training?

Q194 Mr Stuart: We have had huge investment in all those areas, and we do not see any movement. Perhaps Alison can give us a better understanding of where we have gone wrong.

Alison Ashworth-Brown: One of the great problems is with what we term as the hard-core NEETs, which we have had since Training and Enterprise Councils have been in operation. We are probably on the same figures. Trying to pick them up once they have left school is probably not going from a standing start. You really need to pick them up while they are in school. If you think you can change them from what they were like in school just because they are out of school, and get them back into either education or training, you're probably on a hiding to nothing. One of the missing links is that you have to pick them up much earlier in school—you have to do something about the hard-core disaffected youngsters there and carry on with it when they leave school. Most of the group who don't like school or don't go to school usually end up in the hard-core NEET group. Telling them they have to go into education or training will not really work 100%.

Q195 Mr Stuart: Thank you, Alison. The only trouble I have with that is that if we were sitting here 10 years ago—and other people probably were—we would have had exactly the same answer. One of the troubles and frustrations in this job is that we think we are getting better now, but here we are five years on and the position is unmoved. We are trying to work out what has gone wrong. I do not think there has been a radical change. It is not as though what

you are saying now is different from what they were saying 10 or 15 years ago, yet we have not managed to make these things work properly.

Chairman: Tom wants to come in.

Tom Wilson: With respect, although the overall headline figure might look not that different, the composition of the NEET group is very different, as Alison was saying. Credit where it is due, the Government have achieved a great deal on apprenticeships. That money is working. The National Apprenticeship Service is doing a pretty good job. The fact that the overall number of apprenticeships is actually slightly up in total, despite what has been an absolutely acute recession—unprecedented in the history of recessions in this country—must show that some of that investment is reaching that group. It gives us some pointers as to what we can do. I am not saying that everything has succeeded, but some things clearly have.

Q196 Mr Stuart: I'm sorry for drilling away on the same point, but I'm just trying to understand why that is, because genuine effort was made and there was political will, money and co-operation, and there were people like you 10 or 15 years ago, yet it did not change. One of our responsibilities, and yours too, jointly, is to make sure that we don't find ourselves in that position in eight years' time, when we might all wisely agree with each other in a common-sense way but won't actually have changed anything. We have heard academics say, "We don't understand the youth labour market the way we perhaps did 20 years ago", so maybe the change is there. Until we understand what the reality is and what the causes are, we are unlikely to get the policy response correct.

Chairman: Andy wants to come in on that.

Andy Palmer: I'm interested in the idea of partnerships that we talked about earlier. I certainly think that over the past 10 to 15 years there have been significantly better partnerships between employers and the various groups that can make a difference here. The issue, as I see it, is that there are various places that employers can make a difference, some at a national level, and sometimes that isn't what gets the headlines. What gets the headlines is when at a regional or a local level there is a breakdown in the partnerships. Certainly, for a large national employer the concept of working at a regional and local level, with heavy regionalisation and things done differently in the north-west than the north-east, for example, is a great challenge. We can engage at a national level very easily in attempting to address some of those issues. It is when it is taken to a local and regional level that it becomes significantly more challenging and the networks break down.

Q197 Mr Stuart: Okay. Is there enough incentive and opportunity for young people transferring on to the benefits system to enter suitable education and training? We recently came back from the Netherlands, and they have far better numbers than we do. The trigger there is that they froze local

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authority funding for social security, so suddenly if it went up they would have to pick up the tab, and suddenly Amsterdam initiated compulsory educational training for anyone with benefits up to the age of 27, and that has now gone national. Is there a role for more compulsion to ensure that young people enter training or education if those opportunities are provided for them?

Alison Ashworth-Brown: One of the big problems with compulsion is that putting people in education and training does not always make them learn. With young people who are heading for the NEET group, you have to get in early. We have done some work with schools that are local to our head office, and they have taken the incentive and said to us, "Can you come in and do some things around parts of the curriculum, but showing the kind of things there would be in the world of work." If we can get them interested, we can tag on other things and say, "Well, you can only come in to do that kind of job if you now start to re-engage with education." That's worked fairly well, so in that kind of partnership with employers we can say, "This is what you can do in schools." Where there are good schools that want to do that kind of thing, that works quite well. When you compel youngsters to do something, it is like telling a teenager that they can't go out.

Q198 Mr Stuart: Do you oppose compulsion then, because otherwise we have people sitting around doing nothing useful at all?

Alison Ashworth-Brown: Well, I can see why we use it. However, once they had been on the scheme or whatever we put them on, would it actually make them employable, or would they just fall back into the NEET group?

Q199 Mr Stuart: Perhaps Richard can comment on that. I would like a quick answer from everyone on compulsion—yea or nay?

Richard Wainer: I think that those sort of requirements should go hand in hand with good advice and guidance to ensure that those young people understand the sort of courses they are on and ensure that those courses are developing the sort of skills that will get them jobs in their region or locality. Compulsion is fine, but only if you have that advice and guidance alongside it.

Tom Wilson: The TUC is strongly in favour of raising the participation age but strongly against compulsion. In our view, it would be a mistake and a failure. As Alison said, if you talk to lecturers who try to teach students who are in a classroom because they are forced to be there, they will tell you that they are impossible to teach, unsurprisingly. You simply cannot have any kind of meaningful teaching experience in that kind of relationship. However, it clearly makes absolutely no sense at all to encourage a system in which people can basically do nothing much with their lives. Our view is that the great strength of the raising participation age approach is strong incentivisation. If it's not working, find out why it's not working, rather than just resort to compulsion.

Q200 Chairman: Tom, has the TUC done any work on—we're getting quite close: I asked a question in the House only on Thursday; it's only three years—the kids who are well into the system who are going to be part of this raising participation age generation? We'll know some of the things that are on offer to our 16 to 18-year-olds, but there's certainly a class of NEETS-plus young people in work without training. Has the TUC thought about the sort of programmes that would have to come in at that stage, because that is compulsion, isn't it? There's no alternative. You've got to do one of those things.

Tom Wilson: Well, we wouldn't describe it as compulsion. We haven't done the research ourselves, but we have relied—

Q201 Chairman: You're not going to be able to get any benefit if you don't go on one.

Tom Wilson: It depends, if you drill down into the depths of it. We haven't done the research ourselves but other organisations—notably, NIACE—have done, or have commissioned research in turn on the sorts of programmes that might work. Even if you take the most intractable group of, say, serial ex-offenders with all sorts of drug abuse problems and family breakdown histories, there's always something you can do to try to incentivise and motivate people like that. We're convinced that, with the effort, you cannot take the easy route of compulsion, and if you do you've failed, because you aren't going to teach people through that route. It may be that the benefits system has a part to play in strong encouragement and incentivisation to help people through that. That's all to the good. We're strongly in favour of linking together the benefits system and the education system, and great strides are being made on that, which are long overdue in our view. But that's the route. Yes, you're right: more research would be useful, but a fair amount has been done.

Andy Palmer: Similarly, I believe that if we get to the point of compulsion it would be a declaration of failure in many ways. Certainly, before that point, I'd want to see a significant effort made to raise aspiration and ambition and give young people the option of choice. As long as that choice can then be backed up by opportunity, following that choice, if we try to exhaust that—

Q202 Mr Stuart: Have we not done that? Is that not what we've been doing for the last 20 years? Tom's been doing fantastic work for the last 13 years. There might even be some credit for the Government before that to some extent. There has been a regular effort—

Andy Palmer: A personal view is that I still don't think we are doing enough to show people the opportunity and the benefit personally that being at work and being in education gives them, as opposed to taking what may be seen as easier options. I think we still have a generation of young people who hope

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to become famous or to take the easy route and not realise that, actually, work gives them other benefits and aspirations.

Chairman: Right, can we move on?

Q203 Annette Brooke: Actually, I can't understand why we're not doing these things now. Can I ask a more generic question of everybody. If you were writing a report for the new incoming Government, however that turns out, what would be your top priority policy areas to turn this situation round?

Richard Wainer: I guess it depends on whether you're talking about prevention or cure, really. Are we talking about those within the NEETs group now or are we talking about ensuring that we perhaps break the cycle and break that stubbornly high level of NEETs we've got at the moment? In the long term, we've got to look more at the cure side of things and ensuring, as I said earlier, that we've got much stronger links between education and employment. We must ensure that, at the very least, all young people come out of the education system functionally literate and numerate and have the broad base of employability skills. That's got to be the No. 1 priority. Yes, if you're looking at a cure, there can be much more done around joining up services—whether education, careers, housing or social care—to ensure that we're addressing the range of problems that many of these young people have. But as I said, the focus has got to be on preventing that from happening in the first place.

Annette Brooke: Any additions?

Alison Ashworth-Brown: We have to focus on it, as Richard said earlier on, so we need to do more in schools. We need to stop being able to turn out of schools some youngsters who can't read and write properly. We need to pick that up much earlier and stop leaving it to the post-16 education area. It needs to be a lot more joined-up. There needs to be better careers advice and guidance and parity of esteem across all the different areas—apprenticeships, university, college, those types of things—so that youngsters can truly make an informed choice of what is best for them at that point. We also need some stability and simplicity in the system. We have had lots and lots of change in the education system, in the qualifications system—in everything that we do. So I think that a bit of stability and a bit of simplicity would be useful for everybody, including the young people.

Annette Brooke: Right. If we've reached the end of the line on that one, I'll move on.

Tom Wilson: Just one more point: the people who often learn most about the particular needs of NEETs are the colleges. To some extent, schools learn but it is often colleges—local big FE general colleges—because they are the ones that, for years, have been providing the kind of very basic level introduction or entry to employment skills. If there was a system whereby some pot of money could be allocated to colleges, tied to their success in lowering the NEET rate in their locality, and leaving it to them to work out the best way to do that, which would vary enormously by locality—by region and all the rest of it—that might be worth trying.

Q204 Chairman: I want to come back to Alison on the point that you made about the ability to read and write. Does anyone know what percentage of NEETs just do not have the facility to speak English? It came up in Holland, very loud and clear, that there was a problem with new immigrants not being able to speak Dutch, which was a tremendous barrier. So the compulsion either to be in work, in education or in training gave them a pretty good way of encouraging people to learn the Dutch language. Does anyone know the figures for the UK? Has there been any research on it? No?

Witnesses indicated dissent.

Chairman: Oh well, perhaps we'll ask some of our other witnesses.

Q205 Annette Brooke: I wonder if you could answer my next question fairly briefly. What contribution do you think the new diplomas will make to some of the problems that you have identified and have employers been sufficiently involved in devising those courses?

Richard Wainer: From a broad employer perspective, I think that diplomas in the sector-specific areas that we were talking about—IT and areas like that—are a positive development. They increase the range of options that are open to young people. As Andy said, if it came to compulsion, it probably would be a declaration of failure. We have got to ensure that young people see value in staying on, and that means catering for a wide range of needs and interests. I think that if we can have high-quality diplomas that provide a different type of learning opportunity for young people who will value that sort of thing, then great. I think that lots of employers have been involved. Andy, through e-skills, has been involved in the IT diploma. There has been strong employer involvement in designing those qualifications. I think that the issue arises regarding delivery and how effective our schools, colleges and employers are at working together to deliver the work experience elements that are so vital to ensuring that the diploma is a success.

Q206 Annette Brooke: How far have you got involved with the delivery, Andy?

Andy Palmer: With a significant amount of diplomas, BT has been very involved with the initial design of the curriculum for the diploma in IT and now going through to delivery. I think that there will be a great opportunity for people to mix both the academic and the vocational. I think that part of the issue at the moment is that there is not the parity of esteem between the diplomas and the more traditional route, and young people who are viewed as being less academic are being encouraged to undertake the diploma. Having said that, some of the young people we meet who are undertaking the diploma are superb young people. They are extremely talented and will be hugely beneficial to the IT sector in the future. We have obviously been involved in the development of the diploma and now, through provision of work-based projects and engaging with the young people who are undertaking the diploma, we want to support the

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delivery of the diploma. The key for us is once again going back to the parents and back to the teachers. For the parents, it must be an acceptable programme for their children to undertake and for the teachers they must not drive “less academic” people towards the diploma.

Q207 Annette Brooke: Graham’s not here, so I can’t wind him up about what appears in league tables and what doesn’t. I’ll move on. There is a great deal of concern from certain quarters that currently there are young people who are in a job that isn’t taking them anywhere other than having a commitment to get up in the morning. How do you think the Government could encourage you—perhaps excluding Tom from this, but employers—to provide more training for 16 to 18-year-olds in this bracket?

Richard Wainer: The last time I think I looked at the figures, we have about 60,000 16 to 18-year-olds who are in employment without recognised training. It doesn’t mean that they are in employment without training, but it means that they are not working towards a nationally recognised qualification, for example. Yes, in an ideal world, we would want those young people to be working towards a high-quality qualification that will be a good start to their career. But what we don’t want to do, with the legislation raising participation age coming in, is to discourage employers from even providing those employment opportunities in the first place through requiring them to put their young employees through training programmes that might not be particularly relevant to their business. What we certainly encouraged the Government to do as they worked through their plans to raise participation age was to ensure that apprenticeships remain fit for purpose, that national vocational qualifications fit what employers want and, where possible, that employers’ existing training programmes can be easily mapped across to recognised qualifications. It is about ensuring the qualifications system better maps on to what employers want and our delivery, rather than the other way round.

Andy Palmer: For a number of small and medium-sized enterprises, the idea of taking on a young person and engaging them in a development programme—perhaps an apprenticeship—is daunting. The Government’s work to reduce complexity of the system for SMEs that are engaging with apprenticeships would be good alongside the bureaucracy and ensuring that employers could be absolutely sure that the training provided by a training provider was in line with the need, and not simply the easiest thing that the provider was able to deliver, or what it has been delivering for the last three years.

Q208 Chairman: Andy, couldn’t someone like BT do a tremendous job here just by looking down your supply chain and saying, “We will not deal with people who don’t train.”

Andy Palmer: We certainly encourage our supply chain to train, and recently we’ve become involved in group training associations. Over in the east of England, there are a number of companies that fall

within our supply chain around our research path. We are part of a group training association there, where small companies that have never—

Q209 Chairman: Where in the east of England are you?

Andy Palmer: At Adastral Park by Ipswich. Small companies that have never considered taking on apprentices before are now taking them on, supported by BT, which supports them in engaging with colleges and funding providers, and giving the young people working in those companies the opportunity to come to BT sites and experience what it is like to be an apprentice in a large company. So we’re giving them the complete, rounded view of employment.

Q210 Annette Brooke: I’m still a bit concerned about the young people who are not ready to go on an apprenticeship—those without the basic skills. Is there not more that we can do right across the board with employers? They may employ young people who are lacking in literacy skills, for example. Is there no more that we can do than we are doing now to encourage that type of training?

Andy Palmer: It depends on whether it is viewed as training. A number of employers have outreach into local schools and colleges where volunteers are able to go in and work with young people. I don’t think it necessarily needs to be through programmes that are specifically focused on basic skills. I think there are other opportunities for employers to engage in programmes that are taking place in schools, which build basic skills at the same time as doing other things that are attractive or interesting to young people. I think employers have a role through volunteering to go in and work with the schools and colleges.

Q211 Chairman: Let Tom and Alison come in. Some of the employers might well say to me, in my constituency, “We want to train people. Why the hell should we teach them literacy and numeracy skills?”

Tom Wilson: Well, I can see that. On the other hand, these sorts of young people have had many, many years of school and possibly college and it hasn’t succeeded. The notion that by just giving them a few more years they are likely to somehow crack it is implausible. For those sorts of young people, the status, regular occupation, peer group pressures and all the things that go with employment are crucially important. Typically, for example, these are the sort of young people who in previous years went off and joined the Army. I am not suggesting that the Army is the right route for every young person, but there are lessons to be learned from the success that the Army has in dealing with people who often lack the basic skills. A very high proportion of the Army’s recruits these days come into that category. Within a short time, the Army is able to give them pretty good skills. So there are issues, lessons and inferences that can be learned from that for employers. But I take Barry’s point: you need to incentivise employers to do that and make sure that whatever is being offered is appropriate to those young people. That is why I

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come back to the notion of some kind of pre-apprenticeship programme that gives a decent, structured framework within which you can give them a meaningful, decent job with appropriate pay and conditions, and the right skills.

Q212 Annette Brooke: So do we need a subsidy for employers with a few strings attached to take on young people?

Tom Wilson: Well, if we're offering £2,500 to some employers to take on apprentices, why not offer similar levels of subsidy for pre-apprenticeships?

Alison Ashworth-Brown: I take the point about why employers would want to spend their time training youngsters to read and write because, in most apprenticeships, they are really looking for those kind of skills to start off with—that they can read and write, get up and come to work and things like that. You are really talking about a different programme, like a pre-apprenticeship programme, which would have to be done with employers as a separate programme and would have to be incentivised, because you are putting a whole different skill set in to train them to be able to read, write and come to work on time, before moving on to do the next bit. The challenges will be around the types of employers who are geared up to do that kind of thing, if you want them to do it in-house. Very small employers will struggle with being able to do that, so you are then back to your training providers when actually you probably need to make this an employment-type programme. As Tom said, you need to give them that kind of experience of going to work.

Q213 Chairman: So in your experience—you are very experienced in this—would you trust the FE sector to do it or would you look to the big private trainers such as BT, Capita and others who have given evidence to the Committee?

Alison Ashworth-Brown: I know who you mean.

Chairman: Are they good people? In the past, they have gone into local authorities and turned them around.

Alison Ashworth-Brown: If I was doing it for our company, I would probably treat it the same way as our apprenticeship scheme, but do it in partnership with somebody who was used to doing numeracy, literacy and things like that. You can't farm it out completely to a training provider or college, because you've got to have that employer input. It is really going to be a partnership programme. It can't just be a matter of the employers paying them and doing bits and pieces, and a training provider coming in once a week. You need a much stronger programme than that.

Q214 Chairman: What I am saying is: who do you trust as a provider of those services?

Tom Wilson: As I said before, I trust FE colleges because they have a long experience of doing it.

Q215 Chairman: I had the Fairbridge group giving evidence just now and I asked about its young people who might want to train to be tube drivers. I think I

heard on Radio 4 that tube drivers earn £40,000 and have eight and a half weeks' holiday. The person I was questioning said that that was not an exciting enough job for the young people of between 16 to 25 with whom he is working. I cannot remember the expression he used but, obviously, it was not a glamorous enough job. What do we do about the people who want to be soccer players, film stars or pop idols? I would have thought that for this category of NEETs, £40,000 a year and eight weeks' holiday would be a great incentive. Is that not the case, Tom?

Tom Wilson: If those figures are true, but I am not entirely sure that they are.

Chairman: They were not corrected by the trade union members of yours who appeared on the Radio 4 programme. They seemed to be quite proud that they had built up their members to that sort of level.

Tom Wilson: It must be true in that case. There are plenty of young boys who imagine that somehow they will be playing for Manchester United. The answer to that is to take them to Manchester United, or the local team, show them round, give them a flavour of what it really means—the hard work, the graft and the skill that you need to get to the level. For 99 out of 100, the scales will fall from their eyes and they will begin to think a bit more practically and realistically. Ditto with girls. Many of them want to be, say, a top hairdresser, because it can be a pretty well paid job and it has a lot of style and glamour about it. If you take them to the local hairdressing salon and show them what they need to do to work their way up inside that profession, they get a much more realistic image. That is what you have to do, and it is what FE colleges are good at. They do that, then build on that and find ways of using those vehicles to teach the kids the skills that they need.

Q216 Paul Holmes: A couple of weeks ago, we went to the Netherlands to look at NEETs, which for them is 18 to 27. We saw a sort of one-stop shop, which comprised Jobcentre Plus and a medical assessment there and then, within half an hour—rather than people having to come back in four or five weeks. There was also a direct line to housing; people there said that they could get a young person into emergency housing accommodation within 20 minutes. There was a training restaurant in the basement. Richard, in the CBI report *Towards a NEET solution* you said that what we need in this country is more one-stop shops that offer health, housing and all sorts of advice. Why do we not do that? If the Netherlands can do it, why don't we?

Richard Wainer: We do it in pockets. Since that report, we have published another one as well, which I can circulate to Committee members. Organisations such as A4e and Working Links take an individual's budget and, working in consultation with that young person, identify the services from a variety of sources that they will need to get them back on track. Therefore, it happens in pockets, but what we are calling for in our reports is for more of that to happen, because those sorts of organisations can demonstrate good success rates.

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Andy Palmer: Obviously, from an employer's point of view, a single point of co-ordination is probably what we would be looking for. Our lives would be far easier if we could have our engagement with a single point of contact that could then draw on resources of a large organisation through that single point. It will be much easier to engage with than the multiple points that we currently have.

Q217 Paul Holmes: There are lots of calls for employers to be more involved in schools and for schools to be more relevant to employers. I thought that academies and specialist schools were supposed to have solved all that. Why are people saying that we need to do it?

Richard Wainer: I think that it is improving, but it will not change overnight. We must recognise that developing partnerships with schools is not a business's core activity—I do not think that it is for the vast majority. What we need to do is make a much better business case for them to get involved. We in the CBI are certainly keen to do that and to advocate much better partnerships with schools among our members, which is based around the business benefit—that of developing their staff and a good local and regional reputation. I do not think that small employers recognise the business case for doing that. We need to be articulating it much more effectively.

Alison Ashworth-Brown: It takes a lot. We have a schools strategy with quite a lot of schools, but it takes a lot of time, effort and money for a company to do that. It takes people away from their core activity. You do it because it helps to develop your staff. It helps if outside networks develop young people, and you do it as part of your corporate social responsibility as well. The small employers, however, do not have that kind of time to call upon. If there are only two or three of them, it is hard for them to do that kind of thing.

Richard Wainer: Unfortunately, it has to be fairly easy for those sorts of employer. They do not want to have to go into a school and develop a whole programme themselves. Initiatives such as the Education and Employers Taskforce, which I mentioned earlier, are helping to provide that advice and guidance for companies and schools. This is a partnership. Schools have to understand what businesses can offer and the employers' perspective. It is about ensuring that there is support for employers to do this because, as I said, it is not their core activity.

Q218 Chairman: Tom, do you want to come in? What is the TUC doing? These are all possible members of yours if you can get them interested in joining the work force and getting the skills, aren't they? You had some innovative programmes in the TUC. Are you doing anything new in this area?

Tom Wilson: Well, we'd like to think we are. We are doing two things. The first is our network of union learning reps, which now includes 24,000 in workplaces up and down the country. Many of them, with their employers, have developed pretty good links with their local schools and colleges. Either

they will go to the school or college, or, more often, the young people will go to the workplace. That is much more effective in our view. They are shown around and given an idea of what it's like to work there. That is a very good way of opening up links, and so on. Conversely, we have a new programme to go into schools and, through the citizenship curriculum, teach young people about trade unions. We have an interesting pack, which I am happy to circulate to the Committee, which includes a range of materials that people can use, whether they be tutors or teachers, with children of all levels. Primary school kids can learn about the Tolpuddle martyrs or there is much more advanced stuff about the role of the unions in the Second World War. We find that that is growing rapidly. Lots of teachers are seizing on it because it is an interesting and effective way of ticking the citizenship box on the curriculum. Also, because it is a bit novel and interesting and it brings in people from the workplace, it works well with the young people.

Andy Palmer: For employers to engage with schools and the like, there is actually a requirement that the employer voice is truly heard. The curriculum development for the diploma is one of the first times that the employer voice has really been heard and flowed through to the curriculum in the school and college area. We certainly hope that we can have a similar influence when it comes to the reform of the GCSE in IT, for example. There is a constant battle for the employer voice. It is not about a requirement for oven-baked young people, but just about being very articulate about what the skills are that we as employers are looking for from our young people. There is a constant battle between that and the education profession. At a local level, we can engage with schools. We can go in and support extra-curricular and curriculum activities. It comes back to the difficulty of the co-ordination at a regional level. Employers at a regional level aren't co-ordinated to work with schools or colleges.

Q219 Paul Holmes: Are British employers up for being involved in training and education in the way you often see in European countries? Over the years, the Committee has been to Germany, Denmark and the Netherlands to look at colleges, apprenticeships and NEETs. It has always struck me that in those countries there is an expectation that employers will work with schools and colleges, and that they will offer apprenticeships and training places. That expectation is on a level that we don't have in this country.

Richard Wainer: I was—

Chairman: Alison, go on.

Alison Ashworth-Brown: I think that there are many employers who are up for working with schools and colleges. You will find it is stronger where you have had traditional apprenticeships, such as in our industry and in BT, because we have been doing it for a long while. You have to start bringing on board employers in newer industries to have that kind of involvement.

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Chairman: Anyone else?

Tom Wilson: Our answer in the TUC would be no, absolutely not—there is nothing like the same tradition in this country. There are some leading employers that, as people have said, are good at leading the way. On the whole, the average employer in this country does not do anything like the level of engagement with the education system as those in Europe, or indeed America. This is not a European thing. We are almost unique in the OECD in this respect. Richard might say that, actually, that is a bit unfair, and that compared with the rest of the OECD, UK employers invest as much in training, if not more, but we would say that that is often in very different kinds of training, and that, even if they do, it is not necessarily an indication of the extent to which they are engaged at all kinds of other levels to do with curriculum, encouragement and so on. I think that we have a long, long way to go on this.

Andy Palmer: Part of the issue is this: I am not convinced that employers are aware of the alternatives that are available to them when it comes to recruiting young people. I don't think enough employers are aware of the benefit of recruiting, for example, a higher apprentice who goes on to undertake a foundation degree, as opposed to recruiting a graduate. I think that employers need much greater awareness of the opportunities that apprenticeships and vocational education can offer, as opposed to the traditional routes that they follow at present.

Richard Wainer: Tom did a bit of my job for me. Employers invest their time and £39 billion a year in training, but only one third of that actually goes towards recognised qualifications. If this is the kind of engagement that we want, perhaps we have to look at the qualifications system. If we want more of our young people to get high-quality, recognised qualifications, we have to ensure that the qualification fits with what employers want in terms of training and skills development, rather than forcing them to take on an apprentice through a framework that does not quite fit their business

needs. We need to look at the qualifications system and ensure that it reflects what business and private sector employers want, rather than the other way round.

Q220 Chairman: It is interesting that most of you seem to be very much in favour of the carrot rather than the stick, except, perhaps, Alison. I think you got close to saying that some of these young people should be taught a lesson about working, and that they should be pushed a bit with a stick, rather than seduced with a carrot. Is that fair?

Alison Ashworth-Brown: I am not in favour of complete compulsion, but I am in favour of dealing with young people much earlier. They really need to understand what work is all about.

Q221 Chairman: So you would be pushing not at 14 to 19, but at 11 to 14.

Alison Ashworth-Brown: Yes, if you've started to lose them at 11, once they go into secondary education and are starting to truant and so on, you're not going to get them back at 16.

Chairman: You can pretty much predict whether children will become NEETs quite early on in their school career.

Alison Ashworth-Brown: Unless you can get them back on track, yes, they will end up at some point either not in a job that you would want them to end up in, in the NEETs group or disappearing.

Chairman: So the special attention and extra resources are much better placed earlier, because it becomes much more expensive later, doesn't it?

Alison Ashworth-Brown: It does.

Chairman: We've run out of time because we had all kinds of interruptions today. This has been a very good session and we've learned a lot. Will you please remain in contact with the Committee? Normally, people say to us that they get on the bus or the tube and think, "Why didn't I say that to the Committee?" or, "Why didn't they ask us that?" If you remained in contact, we would be most grateful. Thank you.

Wednesday 24 February 2010

Members present:

Mr Barry Sheerman (Chairman)

Annette Brooke
Ms Karen Buck
Paul Holmes

Mr Andrew Pelling
Helen Southworth
Mr Graham Stuart

Memorandum submitted by the Association of Colleges

SUMMARY

- Flexible solutions are needed to meet the different needs of young people who are not in education, employment or training (NEET).
- Education and training for those who are NEET is often more costly, requiring small group sizes and additional one-to-one support. Colleges often have to subsidise this work.
- Funding should follow students with a NEET “premium” to cover these additional costs.
- Improved choices for 14–15 year-olds should include the right to attend College full time where this is in the best interests of the young person.
- Independent careers information, advice and guidance (IAG) is vital, so that young people choose the right route for them, with Ofsted and local authorities checking that it is impartial.
- Colleges could do more to help reduce the number of young people who are NEET if they were given earlier access to those young people identified as being at risk of disengagement in school, starting in Years 8 and 9.
- The £30 Education Maintenance Allowance and transport support should be continued and better targeted.
- The funding system should encourage imaginative partnerships with the voluntary and charitable sector.
- Where local circumstances dictate, Colleges should be able to offer complete Diplomas.
- Existing vocational options should be retained for those requiring smaller, more flexible and more practical programmes.
- Colleges and Sector Skills Councils should jointly be able to lead on apprenticeships, where employer reluctance is reducing access during the recession.
- Institution based measures of performance which mitigate against collaboration and impartial IAG, should be replaced with consortia wide measures which will encourage a more collective approach.
- Colleges provide pastoral support and enrichment for students which are particularly needed for students who are NEET and this should be adequately funded.

1. The Association of Colleges represents and promotes the interests of Further Education and Sixth Form Colleges and provides members with professional support services. Our 356 Colleges in England educate 60% of 16–18 year-olds in education.

2. Colleges provide a range of courses for young people, including A-levels, vocational courses, Diplomas and Apprenticeships. The 356 Colleges include 93 sixth form, 4 art and design, 16 land based and 36 tertiary colleges. Colleges also provide education and training to 82,000 14–16 year olds, usually for part of the week.

3. Colleges play a particularly important role in educating young people from disadvantaged backgrounds and those that have not achieved their potential in schools. 13% of 16–18 year olds in Colleges are from a deprived background compared with 8% in school sixth forms.

STRATEGIES FOR THE IDENTIFICATION OF YOUNG PEOPLE AT RISK OF FALLING INTO THE “NEET” CATEGORY

4. The proportion of 16–18 year-olds who are NEET has risen recently, despite a significant increase in the proportion of young people in education. The latest Labour Force Survey suggests that 13.4% of this age group are NEET. While the proportion of 16 year-olds who are NEET had fallen to a low of 6.3% in the first quarter of 2008, it reached 8.8% in the third quarter of 2009. Among 17 year-olds, the proportion is now 14.6% and among 18 year-olds it is 16.7%, though the latter figure is lower than earlier in 2009.¹

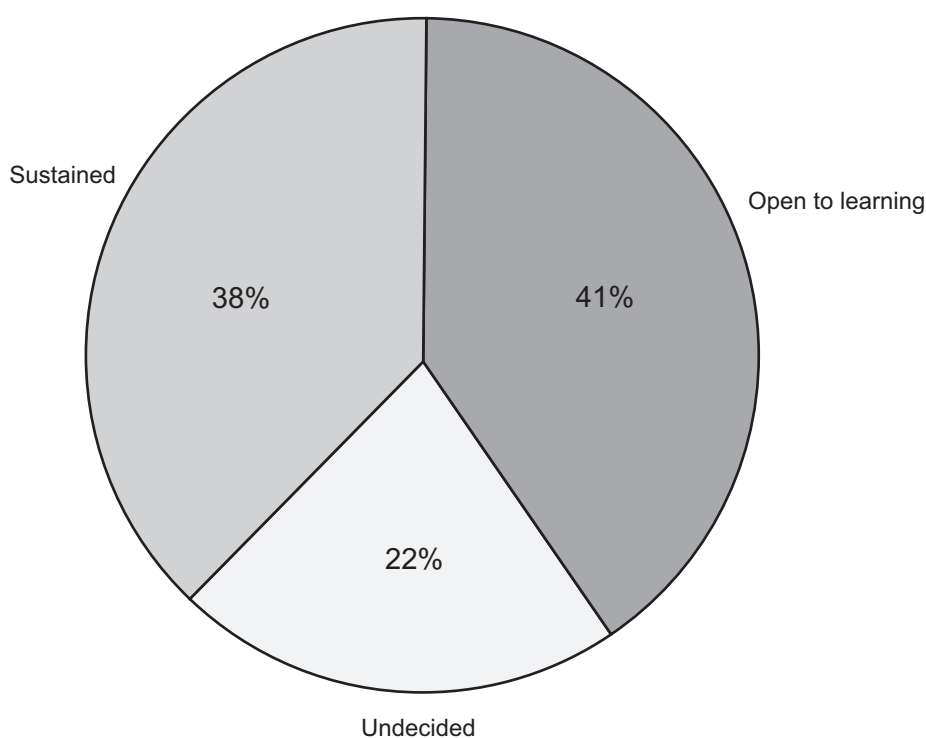
¹ NEET statistics, *Quarterly Brief* (DCSF, November 2009)

5. Overall, while there has been a shift from work-related training to education, improved participation rates have not been fully reflected in the NEET data. Indeed, the Government's target of reducing to 7.6% of the age group being in this category seems increasingly elusive. Meanwhile, the latest OECD data places the UK 7th out of 33 countries for the proportion of 15–19 year-olds not in education or training, nearly twice the EU average. Among 17 year-olds, only Mexico and Turkey have lower participation rates.²

6. There are real differences within the NEET group. As the Government's "Raising the Participation Age" strategy³ puts it, they "are not a homogeneous group and must be treated as individuals." As the chart shows, the strategy breaks the NEET group into those who are "open to learning", many of whom already have five good GCSEs or other level 2 qualifications, and some of whom may simply be on gap years; the "undecided" who don't face significant personal barriers, have some GCSEs but are dissatisfied with existing learning opportunities; and the "sustained" group, many of whom have had a negative school experience and lack qualifications.

7. The Government publishes quarterly NEET bulletins providing some welcome extra information but we need to know more about why young people become NEET. The reasons often includes a family history of leaving school early, boredom and disengagement that has led to truancy and exclusion from school, homelessness and care needs, teenage pregnancy, drug dependency and often combinations of these problems.

How the NEET group is split



8. Understanding these reasons better can ensure more tailored and personalised learning programmes—and should ensure that problems are addressed early on in secondary school. Our experience suggests that unless these problems are addressed in Year 8 or 9, alienation from education and learning will grow and it is much harder to re-engage such young people.

² Education at a Glance 2009 (OECD, 2009)

³ http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/14-19/documents/neet_strategy_0803.pdf

SERVICES AND PROGRAMMES TO SUPPORT THOSE MOST AT RISK AND TO ADDRESS THE NEEDS OF THOSE WHO HAVE BECOME PERSISTENTLY NEET

9. One potential solution to alienation would be to allow young people the right to attend College full-time from 14—where they can access wider vocational choices and learning in a more applied way with better specialist facilities. Colleges currently educate 83,000 14 and 15 year-olds for at least part of the week. These young people typically prepare for vocational or applied qualifications while at College, studying at school for the rest of the week. Colleges also provide full-time education and training to around 4,500 full-time 14 and 15 year olds.

City of Bath College enrolls full time 14 and 15 year olds through a programme called “New Start”. Each year the local authority purchases a number of places from the College and as well as the essential and basic skills courses and personal development programmes, the young people choose a full time vocational pathway such as Refrigeration Engineering, Catering, Construction or Hairdressing. The students are treated as genuine full time college students but with additional pastoral support. The scheme is major success and on completion 90% of these young people continue with the College to a Level 2 course. They do not become NEET.

10. In addition, there are also around 9,000 young people joining the DCSF’s Young Apprenticeships programme each year.⁴ Widening access to these and similar vocational programmes could provide otherwise disaffected young people with the motivation to continue learning, which is vital if the higher participation age is to prove successful. Currently, complicated negotiations must take place between schools and Colleges to transfer funding from the school to the College when this happens. AoC believes that the DCSF should ensure that money follows the student so that they can access College and other courses where they may offer better opportunities than school.

11. Colleges should be given financial support and encouragement to provide dedicated support for young people who are NEET. However, this provision is costly and the College currently has to subsidise this. AoC is concerned that this may not be sustainable for many Colleges particularly in the current financial climate.

12. Information, Advice and Guidance must be wholly impartial. Despite evidence that young people have greater choice in Colleges, schools often encourage young people to remain in their sixth form even when this is inappropriate. Young people too often start but don’t complete A-level courses: twice as many 18 year olds are NEET as 16 year-olds. This is not only unhelpful to them but also expensive. The Connexions service does good work with young people who are NEET, but independent advice is needed much sooner. It is vital that schools ensure—as the law now requires following the Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act 2009—that every young person has wholly independent information, advice and guidance from an early stage in secondary school so that they can see the full range of options available to them.⁵ Ofsted should not only monitor this work, they should check with local Colleges and other sixth forms whether they think that impartial advice is being provided by schools.

13. Education Maintenance Allowances (EMA) have supported many young people staying in education with 68% of EMA recipients studying in a College. While EMAs may no longer be seen as necessary when it is a legal requirement to stay on, they will nevertheless be needed to support young people who would otherwise face family pressure to take a low paid, low skilled job. AoC has proposed that the £30 EMA, given to students from the poorest backgrounds is retained, but that the £10 and £20 EMA funding be ring-fenced for local authorities to support transport for 16–18 year olds. The Government is currently reviewing the financial support available to 16–19 year olds.⁶

14. The Government has strengthened free transport rights for 16–18 year olds along with raising the participation age. In many areas, particularly rural ones, a lack of public transport is a huge barrier to participation. There is also a postcode lottery, forcing some Colleges to lay on their own bus services. It is important that every young person has access to free or low cost transport when going to school, College or a training programme, and that its cost remains the same from 11–19.

15. A more balanced funding system would ensure proper resources for those who are NEET. At present, funding is skewed towards schools in two ways. First, revenue funding is greater for each sixth form student in schools than it is in Colleges by an average of 10%. Second, significant capital is provided to build school sixth forms that essentially duplicate existing A-level provision, without similar resources being provided for level 2 and vocational courses for 16–19 year-olds that could appeal to young people for whom A-levels are not the best option. At the same time, there should be a premium attached to each disadvantaged young person so that providers are fully funded for the extra costs involved in supporting their education.

⁴ <http://tinyurl.com/yfajfe2>

⁵ Quality, Choice and Aspiration—A strategy for young people’s information, advice and guidance (DCSF, 2009)

⁶ <http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/14-19/index.cfm?go=site.home&sid=42&pid=544&lid=680&ctype=Text&ptype=Single>

THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE GOVERNMENT'S NEET STRATEGY

16. Despite improvements in participation in education the proportion of young people who are NEET is rising. We support the Government's target to reduce NEETs to 7.6% but we are concerned that the programmes that the Government is willing to fund are too narrow to address the needs particularly of the "sustained" NEET group.

17. We welcome the Government's September guarantee that all young people aged 16 or 17 can have a place in education or training, which they can start either in September or January. However, Colleges take a risk in meeting the guarantees without clarity from the LSC about their funding. Colleges that meet or exceed their September recruitment targets must be funded for this growth, and also need additional ring-fenced funding to allow them to recruit more young people in order to meet the January guarantee.

18. Colleges are keen to work with employers, private and voluntary sector organisations. The funding system should support and encourage partnerships with organisations like Centrepont and Skills Force to develop programmes targeted at vulnerable groups of young people, including the young homeless, those in care and those with special needs.

St Helens College in Merseyside works in partnership with the Prince's Trust, offering a 12 week programme which includes a community project, a work placement and team building alongside basic skills training. Success rates of 75%, against a benchmark of 70%, have been achieved with students progressing into employment and further training

THE LIKELY IMPACT OF RAISING THE PARTICIPATION AGE

19. AoC welcomed the Government's decision to raise the participation age (RPA) from 16 to 18 from 2015 so that every young person should be receiving education or training, whether they are in work or otherwise.

20. An important part of the RPA policy is to deliver a range of options to young people, including A-levels, Diplomas and apprenticeships. Programmes like Entry to Employment, Key Stage 4 Engagement and other flexible and bite-size courses should also be on offer, particularly for the NEET group, and Colleges should have the funding and flexibility to provide them.

21. AoC has supported the introduction and development of Diplomas and the majority of FE Colleges are involved in their delivery. However, we are concerned that they do not yet meet the different needs of all learners. This is a particular issue with many in the NEET group, where the Diploma is insufficiently flexible and often not as practical as existing vocational courses. At the same time, Colleges worry that current vocational qualifications, such as the BTEC and others which can be more readily tailored to specific needs and which have the respect of employers, could be lost. In particular, those young people who have achieved no or few qualifications at school may need access to flexible, bite-size programmes.

22. The Government has rightly emphasised the importance of apprenticeships to provide young people with good work experience. These could appeal to many of the NEET group, if they were available locally but many of these young people will need an appropriate pre-apprenticeship course of study. Ideally, such programmes would be employer-led. However, it has proved difficult in many areas to engage employers in apprenticeships. Support for Programme-Led apprenticeships has been falling. Yet such support is vital during a recession where employed places may not be available. AoC supports the work of Group Training Associations which bring together small firms to support training and so mitigate against the impact of the recession.

23. We would also like to see more support from the Young People's Learning Agency, local authorities and the National Apprenticeships Service for partnerships where Colleges and Sector Skills Councils jointly take the lead but employers continue to offer the minimum 16 hours' work experience a week. This model could ensure that sufficient apprenticeships are offered in areas where there are too few employers willing to offer apprenticeships, and could also help small firms that are keen to engage with the programme.

24. A significant proportion of those affected by RPA will be young people in work, but not in education or training. This is a slightly larger group than those who are NEET—at 13.9% of 16–18 year-olds⁷—and includes young people in low paid jobs without training as well as those receiving on-the-job training that does not lead to an accredited qualification. Partnerships with Colleges and other training providers will be crucial in providing the part-time learning that the law will require from 2013 and 2015 as the participation age is progressively raised. It is important that the spirit of the new law is met as well as the letter, and that young people learn skills that support their future employability. Colleges are ready to play their part in meeting that challenge.

25. Delivering proper choices requires strong partnerships between schools, Colleges, employers and local authorities. However, the quality of 14–19 partnerships can be variable, and can focus too often on institutional rather than student interests. This is because performance is measured at the level of the institution. AoC would like to see consortia wide measures of performance, which we believe would be a powerful incentive to the provision of impartial information advice and guidance. There is merit in some geographical areas for Colleges to offer Diplomas alone. Local partnerships should have the flexibility to

⁷ LFS data August 2009 quoted in *DCSF, Neet Statistics Quarterly Brief, Quarter 2 2009*

agree solutions that best suit students in an area. Where that means a College delivering complete Diplomas—which can be a more cost-effective option—they should have the freedom and encouragement to do so.

OPPORTUNITIES AND FUTURE PROSPECTS IN EDUCATION, TRAINING AND EMPLOYMENT FOR 16–18 YEAR OLDS

26. AoC believes all young people should be offered every chance to achieve their potential. We welcome the Government's goal that 75% of people should gain an apprenticeship or a higher education qualification. But it is important that we provide the right courses and partnerships to ensure that the rest are not left behind.

27. More should be done to develop links between learning and employment. Colleges have been developing significantly better links in recent years and the Government has recognised this in its recent skills White Paper.⁸ We would welcome a broader measure of success against which programmes could be judged and funded.

28. Colleges also have responsibilities if they are to cater for more young people. Colleges have strong pastoral services and many FE Colleges provide bespoke facilities for young people under 19 on campus. If Colleges are to take more students from 14, they will want to extend such provision and support. It is also important that there is follow-up support available once vulnerable young people leave College or training, so that they can get help if they need it and avoid falling into unemployment or becoming trapped on benefits.

29. Colleges also need to be given credit where they successfully work with young people who were NEET. College success rates require students to complete particular qualifications, but no credit is given where a young person has made significant progress but does not successfully complete the course. A measure of success that incentivised Colleges to work even more with the NEET group and which gave credits for advances in learning or employment as a result would encourage much more outreach work.

30. As the Government seeks greater efficiencies in the current economic climate, it should do more to merge youth training programmes linked to the Department for Work and Pensions with its apprenticeships, diplomas and other programmes funded by DCSF and BIS. Young people would benefit from a single independent adviser with good knowledge of all the courses available, and a skills account that they could use—or could be used on their behalf—to access the right training or education.

31. We want to see a significantly reduced NEET population well before the law expects every young person to stay in education or training until 18. With the right funding, flexibility and incentives, we believe it is possible to achieve this.

December 2009

Memorandum submitted by the Association of School and College Leaders

INTRODUCTION

1. The Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL) represents over 15,000 members of the leadership teams of secondary schools and colleges throughout the UK.

2. ASCL members are in the forefront of developing and providing opportunities for young people to continue with study and training and are pleased to share their experience with the Children, Schools and Families Committee.

3. The evidence below cites many examples of good practice and ASCL members would welcome the opportunity to expand on these if required.

STRATEGIES FOR THE IDENTIFICATION OF YOUNG PEOPLE AT RISK OF FALLING INTO THE NEET CATEGORY

4. Schools and colleges have a range of sophisticated strategies which they employ to identify those in danger of NEET.

5. These include “at risk” registers that are maintained by pastoral tutors. Based on a selection of common characteristics of learners that do not complete courses, including socio-economic, prior achievement, health, distance to travel to study factors, these records are used sensitively and confidentially by personal tutors to monitor “at risk” learners.

6. Regular individual tutorials are held and additionally when required in order to allow tutors to support learners in danger of leaving a programme before its completion.

⁸ *Skills for Growth: The National Skills Strategy* (BIS, 2009)

7. Colleges and schools have also established central student databases that are available for all teachers to access confidentially in order to monitor progress of learners across all their activities. These automatically highlight repeated unexplained absences, problems with submitting work for assessment or, with the learner's permission, personal circumstances that could affect the commitment of a learner to his or her course.

8. East Ayrshire authority has developed a Secondary School database system that uses data already collected to identify those students that may need additional support to settle on transition from primary to secondary school.

9. Schools in the Tower Hamlets Local Authority use their excellent working relationship with Connexions to benefit from information obtained in interviews with learners in planning individual support.

10. ASCL members will be pleased to demonstrate examples of these tools, including a college system that has received an AoC Beacon Award, to the Committee.

11. There is evidence to suggest that young people make their decisions about the future at a far earlier age than was traditionally recognised. The work of such universities as Kent and Salford Young People's University is designed to encourage young people to aspire to higher education, thus avoiding becoming NEET.

12. Other good examples of university links with schools include Plymouth University through the Widening Participation agenda, Oxford University working with primary and secondary schools in Banbury and schools in Stoke that have good working relationships with Staffordshire and Keele universities. These initiatives raise aspirations and encourage learners from families that would not otherwise have considered progression to Higher Education.

13. ASCL members are keen to emphasise their support for the work of the Aim Higher programme, which has had a sustained effect in supporting attempts to raise aspiration and provide opportunities for young people.

14. The work of *Action on Access*, which is described at www.actiononaccess.org is a successful national example of strategic action to encourage young people to remain in education and ASCL is represented on its advisory board.

SERVICES AND PROGRAMMES TO SUPPORT THOSE MOST AT RISK OF BECOMING NEET AND TO REDUCE THE NUMBERS AND ADDRESS THE NEEDS OF THOSE WHO HAVE BECOME PERSISTENTLY NEET

15. In curriculum terms, secondary schools and colleges have developed programmes that are designed to encourage young people to achieve, ensuring that their offer includes opportunities at all levels.

16. Many local partnerships have developed curriculum that is shared between schools and colleges—for example in Horticulture and Information and Communications Technology (ICT). Teaching is shared and carefully selected work experience is included in the offer. Individual programmes are often developed to meet the needs of students and this can include tailored on-line learning where the student has fallen behind his or her peers.

17. The introduction of Diplomas was intended to provide vocational opportunities for young people in danger of non-engagement. The progress so far has been slow, with concerns that Diplomas may be insufficiently “hands on” to engage the hard to reach, particularly at level one.

18. Other concerns stem from the need to ensure that Diplomas are offered in “bite sized chunks” so that learners may move in and out of study as their personal circumstances dictate.

19. ASCL members believe that Foundation Learning will be a useful pathway for these students but again this pathway is now under development and it will take some time for it to be available to all beyond the pilots.

20. Up to now, courses and qualifications aimed at students working below level two or students who are hard to engage have been short-lived, particularly in terms of funding and it has been difficult to plan ahead.

21. The Increased Flexibility programme is a good example of a programme that was successful in retaining students and encouraging them to remain in learning post-16, but almost impossible to offer to students in advance as funding was decided at a very late stage.

22. ASCL members hope that a similar fate will not befall Foundation Learning. We need to be able to make clear offers to students and offer qualifications and pathways that are clearly explainable and relevant to employers.

23. The offer to young learners should be widely differentiated from 14 years onwards, allowing for the full range of interests and abilities that exist in the cohort.

24. ASCL members would also welcome more opportunities for young learners to enter for qualifications early and bank their results, thus enabling them to stretch themselves.

25. There are concerns that many young learners leave their programmes at age 17, having studied chosen programmes for one year and not completed their qualification. In order to ensure that learners gain benefit from interrupted study, the speedy introduction of unitised accreditation in a wide range of subjects and at varying levels through the Qualifications Credit Framework (QCF) is essential.

26. Many colleges successfully use flexible starting dates throughout the year as a means of encouraging prospective NEETs to commence education or training, fitting in with the other aspects of the young person's life.

27. Examples of good practice in supporting young people in danger of leaving programmes include the co-location of services in schools and colleges, where Connexions, Social Services specialists and pastoral tutors work together to support individuals.

28. Further funding for enhanced individual tutorial support and mentoring is required to assist in the most difficult circumstances. Specialist support workers from a variety of backgrounds, not necessarily in teaching, are required to work with those young people in danger of missing out on their education and/or training.

29. This level of support obviously has budgetary implications, but if the Government is to take its responsibility to improve the NEET situation seriously, these cannot be avoided. Indeed, an investment at this stage will contribute significantly to improving the country's future overall economic situation.

THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE GOVERNMENT'S NEET STRATEGY

30. The Government's NEET strategy is centred on four key themes:

- Careful tracking to identify those that are or at risk of NEET;
- Personalised guidance and support for young people to tackle barriers to learning;
- A flexible mix of learning provision both pre and post 16; and
- An emphasis on rights and responsibilities in order to provide clear incentive.

31. There is a wealth of advice and guidance available on the DCSF website, including a useful NEET Toolkit which has been welcomed by members.

32. ASCL members approve the opportunity that is offered for horizontal progression through Foundation Learning and its attendant funding. This will allow for young people to build confidence as they progress to the next level.

33. However, if the progress demonstrated in implementing this strategy is to be continued, guaranteed future funding must be in place.

34. This includes funding to support individual learners (through Educational Maintenance Allowances (EMAs) and Discretionary Learner Support (dLS)) as well as funding to incentivise employers to provide employment with training and funding for providers to establish and deliver relevant programmes.

35. As guidance and support is such an important feature of the NEET strategy, related services like Connexions should also be assured of funding.

36. It is important to recognise the effect that the current recession has had on prospective learners and their families. Not only has it caused shortage of family funds to support further learning, but it has also cast doubt on the value of gaining qualifications in order to obtain employment that may not exist.

37. Funding that follows the learner and is devolved to the provider will provide the most economical and targeted means of supporting young people to become trained and contribute to the improvement of the national economic situation.

The Likely Impact of Raising the Participation Age on Strategies for Addressing the needs of Young People not in Education, Employment or Training

38. As many of the young people that will be included in the Raising of Participation (RPA) measures for 2013 are likely to be those who would otherwise have been NEET, attention to the composition of the cohort is required.

39. There is likely to be unwillingness from some young people to "stay on". Therefore the manner in which the requirements of RPA are communicated is very important. Emphasis should be given to the employment with training aspects as well as the improved opportunities for vocational training and education that are offered through RPA.

40. Information and guidance should be carefully designed to ensure the compliance of the cohort involved.

41. In theory, if the offer to these young people is correctly designed to meet their needs and interests, there will be little need for compulsion in relation to RPA. The points made above on curriculum design and unitisation are therefore central to the success of any curriculum offer.

42. It is however important that the public is aware that RPA is not simply "staying on at school" but that it encompasses training at work. ASCL members do not believe that this message is yet fully understood.

THE OPPORTUNITIES AND FUTURE PROSPECTS IN EDUCATION, TRAINING AND EMPLOYMENT FOR 16–18 YEAR OLDS

43. ASCL's recently issued Manifesto includes a call for the development of a general diploma along the lines of the current Welsh Baccalaureate, which incorporates a wide range of academic and vocational qualifications. This is currently under discussion and members will share progress if required.

44. Employers also have a responsibility to engage with new curriculum through their Sector Skills Councils and to accept the qualifications that arise from it as suitable for their needs and those of their future employees.

45. The proposed new arrangements for commissioning across local partnerships will provide opportunities for joint approaches between schools, colleges and other providers, and these should be further explored in relation to NEETS.

46. Robert Hill's *Achieving More Together: Adding Value for Partnership*, which was written in 2008 as part of a year-long ASCL project, includes many examples and case studies of partnership and the successful application of principles formerly used in other public services to schools and colleges.

47. ASCL is pleased to enclose a copy of this book to inform its submission and would welcome a further opportunity to expand on the evidence submitted, as its members are completely committed to improving opportunities for young people who are not in education or training or are in danger of becoming so.

Malcolm Trobe
Policy Director

December 2009

Memorandum submitted by Leicester College

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- Leicester College provides for around 1,120 young people each year who are, or are at risk of becoming, NEET
- It has developed a model for supporting young people pre and post 16 who might fall into the NEET category. This involves two strands:
 - Pre-16 school collaborative programmes; and
 - Launch Pad which provides a choice of pathways for young people to enter skilled employment or full-time education.
- Programmes are designed around the individual.
- Working with Connexions and other agencies, the College cross-refers young people to the most suitable provision in the City, operating a no closed door approach.
- NEETs are *the* most expensive group of individuals to attract, retain and take to success.
- The College anticipates demand for College-based provision to increase; such may be hard to sustain in the face of funding cuts.
- There is a concern that a gap in work-related training may open up with the loss of E2E, although other routes such as European Social Funded programmes may help.
- Apprenticeships offer one route for young people and the Government's support is very welcome. There is however a need for a range of alternative alternatives to ensure individuals' needs are met.

INTRODUCTION

1. This paper provides evidence from Leicester College to the Children, Schools and Families Committee inquiry into young people not in education, employment or training (NEET).

BACKGROUND

2. Leicester College is one of the largest colleges in the Country. The College serves mainly the City of Leicester and surrounding subregion. In 2008–09, it provided for 26,000 learners, of whom 4,160 were aged 16–18 and 1,000 were aged under 16. Included within these were 1,120 young people who were or were at risk of falling into the NEET category.

3. The City of Leicester has a large and growing 14–19 population. It is one of the most deprived Cities in the Country, containing several of the most deprived wards. It has a high population turnover and is a Home Office dispersal site.

4. Although Leicester has a high proportion of young people who are NEET, significant success has been achieved in reducing this figure. The number of NEETs within Leicester City continues to show an overall downward trend at 10.0% in August 2009 compared to 11.1% in August 2008; County figures are considerably lower at 5.6%, down from 5.9% in 2008. The local area agreement target is for 7.7% by 2010.

5. Close joint working across agencies including Connexions, the Learning and Skills Council (LSC), the Local Authority (LA), schools and colleges underpins the NEET reduction strategy in Leicester, with the twin focus of preventative work to reduce the numbers becoming NEET and rapid response and re-integration for those who become NEET. Throughout, there is a focus on vulnerable groups. This work is co-ordinated through the multi-agency cross authority NEET Action Forum. Leicester College is instrumental in reducing the number of NEETS in Leicester.

STRATEGIES FOR THE IDENTIFICATION OF YOUNG PEOPLE AT RISK OF FALLING INTO THE “NEET” CATEGORY

6. The College employs a range of strategies to identify young people who are at risk of becoming NEET.

7. Central to the College’s approach has been the creation of a New Opportunities Unit which is tasked with supporting and engaging young people with previously poor experiences of education. This unit supports learners from the age of 14, some of whom attend College on day release from school, and some of whom are engaged in programme, Launch Pad, designed specifically to improve their confidence and social as well as vocational skills.

8. The College receives direct referrals from schools through the Increased Flexibility programme where schools identify young people before the age of 16 who are at risk of becoming NEET and who they think would benefit from a College experience. The collaborative and constructive nature of the College’s work with schools means that this is now a well understood route for many young people and there is a regular flow of referrals. The College supports over 1,000 young people a year through this route.

9. It also maintains close contact with Connexions, working with Personal Advisers to support young people who are identified as or are at risk of becoming NEET. Connexions refer young people to the College and supply the College with a profile for each young person. This includes details of their previous attainment, behavioural issues and support needs so that the College is able to direct them to the most suitable programme and provide the appropriate support.

10. In addition, the College’s New Opportunities Unit links into the College’s own disciplinary panels. Where a learner is at risk of being excluded from College as a result of poor behaviour, the New Opportunities Unit makes contact with Connexions. A Connexions Personal Adviser is brought in to work with the young person to identify alternative options across the City that might be more suitable and might help them overcome their behavioural barriers to education and enable them to come back to College. While the College does not operate a “no exclusions” policy, it does endeavour, working with other agencies, to ensure a “no closed door” policy for young people, providing them with alternative routes and support.

SERVICES AND PROGRAMMES TO SUPPORT THOSE MOST AT RISK OF BECOMING “NEET”, AND TO REDUCE THE NUMBERS AND ADDRESS THE NEEDS OF THOSE WHO HAVE BECOME PERSISTENTLY “NEET”

11. Leicester College has developed a model which involves two primary strands.

Pre-16 School Collaborative Programmes

12. This involves a range of programmes delivered by the College that extend or enhance the home school’s offer to include curricula which schools cannot provide. This includes:

- The Increased Flexibility (IF) two-year Level 2 course in a choice of curriculum areas;
- Young Apprenticeships (YA) two-year courses in retail and construction offered in collaboration with a school and an employer;
- Pre-16 Diplomas;
- Future Pathways (FP) offer taster sessions to year 10 and 11 students in nine-week blocks; and
- Schools Links working as lead for year 10s to undertake a qualification in year 11.

13. In 2008–09, the College provided for over 1,000 learners on these programmes.

14. Success rates for 14–16 learners on the Level 2 courses are at 85%.

Launch Pad

15. Leicester College has also created a programme called Launch Pad which is designed specifically to re-engage young people at risk of becoming, or who are NEET and which provides a choice of pathways for young people to enter skilled employment or full-time education. Launch Pad offers flexibility in meeting the needs of individual learners and the programmes allow young people to join at various points during the year.

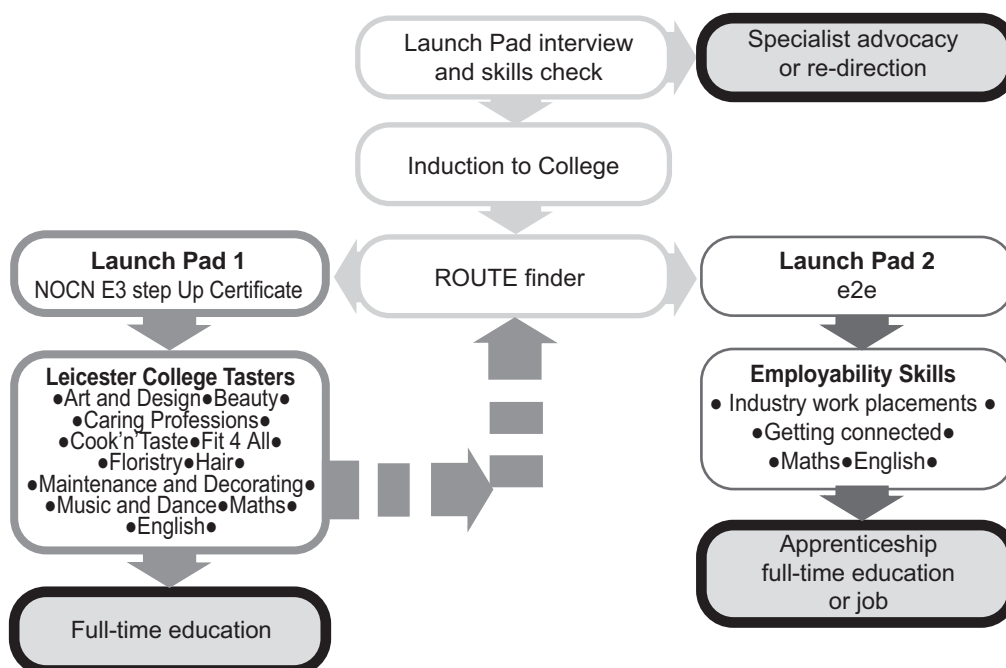
16. All learners undertake learning in three interdependent core areas: functional skills, vocational development and personal and social development. The extent of learning required within each is dictated by the learners' needs and introduced at the appropriate point. Consideration is given to learners' preferred learning styles and interests in order that creative learning solutions can be developed. Learning takes place in a range of settings and styles including classrooms, outdoor activity learning, one to one coaching, group activities, discussions projects, external presentation, work placements and volunteering.

17. These young people are supported through two routes, set out in Figure 1:

- Qualification Pathway: (72 students planned for 2009–10).
- Skilled Employment pathway: E2E (50 students planned for 2009–10).

18. The Qualification Pathway is designed for young people with a clear vocational goal to access the curriculum at the appropriate level. Learners are entered onto a Foundation Learning Progression Pathway either directly in a curriculum area or discretely with Launch Pad on a National Open College Network (NOCN) qualification. In addition, they are on a carousel of vocational tasters delivered by sector skills specialist staff. Learners engage in the whole carousel giving them the opportunity experience the wider College. Learners receive tailored support to maximise engagement and potential.

Figure 1: A Learner's Guide to the Launch Pad Pathway



19. Progression to further full-time study or skilled employment among the participants in this programme has been around 97%.

20. The Skilled Employment Pathway (E2E) is also based on the needs of each individual. It is recognised that there can be no “quick-fix” for many of the re-engaged young people. Some individuals need relatively short periods of time to prepare for entry to an Apprenticeship, employment, or further vocational learning opportunities; others, with more complex personal and social needs, require much longer periods before they are ready to enter and sustain training and employment. Young people can join programmes at any point during the year and are offered “Getting Connected”, a curriculum framework designed to help young adults on the margins of education and employment to reconnect with learning and to foster their self development and self-esteem. E2E will be replaced in 2010 by the Progression Pathway into Skilled Work as part of the Foundation Learning Tier.

21. The College is also developing its offer under the Work-Focused Training strand of the Young Person's Guarantee using a model similar to Launch Pad

Other Activity

22. The College's work complements a range of other activities to support young people and reduce the number of NEETs in Leicester.

23. The area prospectus (Coursefinder) and the common application process (Le Cap) operate across city and county; this has been held up as good practice by the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) and was the focus of a DCSF 14–19 learning visit.

24. The September Guarantee aims to ensure that all 16 and 17 year olds are made an appropriate offer of a place in learning. In Leicester, 95.4% of all Year 11s and 84.8% of all 17 year olds were made an offer. Overall, Leicester and Leicestershire have the highest offer rates in the region. Part of the success of implementing the guarantee was achieved through the “Big Match”, aimed at getting all providers and all potential learners together, in one place on one day, supported by appropriate information, advice and guidance (IAG) to match learners to opportunities. The Big Match had 290 attendees and resulted in 83.1% taking up a place in learning.

25. Work Highcross, the training and employment initiative for the Highcross shopping development in Leicester delivered 2,075 new retail and hospitality jobs to December 2008. Of these new employees, 141 were aged 16–19 and were previously NEET. The model is now being developed with other sectors including business/contact centres, construction, food and drink manufacturing, hospitality and the public sector.

THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE GOVERNMENT’S NEET STRATEGY

26. The College fully supports the Government view that no single agency holds all the answers. The diversity of young people’s needs means that the solution must be equally diverse and cannot be delivered by individual agencies or providers alone. While local authorities need an oversight of how young people are being supported, one of the fundamental issues about NEETs is that their experience of school has not been successful or positive. The success of any strategy will rely on offering an entitlement to new and different choices for young people with identifiable and purposeful progression routes. FE colleges and their local partners are ideally placed to do this; under the machinery of government changes, there is a concern that, in some areas, that the extent of FE colleges’ contribution to reducing NEETs may be overlooked or not well understood.

27. The College’s own work reflects the four strands of the NEET strategy. However, there remain issues about the timely transfer of data between organisations and agencies, which would enable better tracking of young people at risk of becoming NEET.

28. The College’s view is that for a national strategy to be most effective, it needs to be devolved to local 14–19 partnerships; these partnerships are best placed to identify and support the most appropriate solution for the locality and can bring together key local players to make it happen. For example, in working with young people the College may identify individuals on the autistic spectrum, have dyslexia or other learning difficulties and/or disabilities that have not previously been identified in school. In addition, many learners may have complex behavioural or social issues that mean they take longer to acclimatise to a learning environment. Deciding how best to meet the specific needs of individuals is best done locally, in order to draw on the strengths and expertise of local providers and match provision to individuals’ requirements.

THE LIKELY IMPACT OF RAISING THE PARTICIPATION AGE ON STRATEGIES FOR ADDRESSING THE NEEDS OF YOUNG PEOPLE NOT IN EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT OR TRAINING

29. In Leicester and Leicestershire, it is anticipated that an additional 5,000 young people will be in need of education or training following the raising of the participation age from 2012. A significant proportion of these may well be individuals who would not previously have wanted to remain in education or training; many may well have become NEETs.

30. While Leicester is currently well-served for 16–18 provision, there is the potential for a gap to develop in work-related training particularly when E2E ends. Although Diplomas offer one route, they have not so far been particularly popular and for some learners and indeed for young people who have rejected schools, they are unlikely to be a successful route. Apprenticeships offer a suitable alternative for some young people; more detail is given in paragraphs 33–34.

31. Leicester College currently experiences a high demand for its 14–16 provision in College and this is expected to increase up to and beyond 2015 as the participation age rises. The College anticipates that more schools will want to refer young people to College for vocational skills training. There may also be more demand for collaborative activity that bridges school, college and the workplace such as the Braunstone Skills Centre. This separate vocational centre focussing on motor vehicle and construction is financed by the local authority and run by Education in Partnership (EIP). Leicester College is the centre’s main user, delivering ten sessions 30 hours per week, primarily to 14–16 year olds.

32. However, NEETs are *the* most expensive group of individuals to attract, retain and take to success. Such provision requires additional and higher levels of specialist staff, small class sizes to ensure learners have the support and attention they need to progress and different kinds of physical resource such as additional social space for pre-16 learners. Leicester College is currently looking to make this activity more cost effective as it sees it as a core part of its mission to support learners in a City with high levels of deprivation. However, in the current funding climate, other colleges may struggle to continue their pre-16 offer on the grounds of cost.

THE OPPORTUNITIES AND FUTURE PROSPECTS IN EDUCATION, TRAINING AND EMPLOYMENT FOR 16–18 YEAR OLDS

33. The College welcomes the Government's support for Apprenticeships. In addition to delivering a range of Apprenticeships, the College is also developing an Apprentice Training Agency targeted at the public sector. The College's role will essentially be an employment agency for young people, matching employers to prospective employees. It will also be responsible for identifying alternative employers if an Apprentice is made redundant, or finding another Apprentice for an employer if the need arises.

34. Nevertheless, there remain issues: the current economic climate makes the prospect of recruiting Apprentices difficult for many, particularly small, employers at a time when they may have to make other staff redundant. The College has already seen some of its Apprentices unable to complete their courses because they no longer have jobs. Although the College's development of an ATA should go a long way to making the process of recruiting Apprentices easier and transfer the risk from employers to the College, there are concerns about the general willingness of companies to take on Apprentices.

35. The College also has some concerns about the ending of E2E which provides an effective route for many young people. Although Foundation Learning will replace E2E, such programmes will not include the work placement and preparation for work element that has contributed to its success. It could be argued that when E2E goes, each provider will need to create appropriate alternative offers and that this ought to include work experience, but this is not mandatory. Functional Skills will also take longer to complete and there is a danger that these programmes will not fully meet the individual needs of some of the hardest to engage. While other funding streams such as Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) or European Social Fund (ESF) funded programmes may be able to support specific groups, there are issues about sustainability, the integration of employment and skills programmes, and how partner institutions and agencies work collaboratively to ensure that they are not competing for the same beneficiaries while others remain unsupported.

36. Although the development of University Technical Colleges (UTCs) may offer another route for some young people, they are unlikely to make a significant impact on NEETs purely because the UTC model is essentially a school-based one; the very environment that young people at risk of becoming NEET find least attractive.

CONCLUSION

37. Leicester College's model for supporting young people who might fall into the NEET category is proving effective in engaging and encouraging progression into further learning or skilled employment. Its success is due both to the multi-agency working which the College promotes and the supportive local structures in place, but also to the highly personalised approach which places the individual's needs, preferences and aptitudes at the heart of the programme. The diversity of the individuals and their attitudes and experiences means that no one single model could be imposed on this or any local area. Having a clear view of how young people can be supported and encouraged to reach their potential and how providers and agencies need to work imaginatively and collaboratively to make that possible will be key to reducing the number of NEETs.

December 2009

Witnesses: **Matt Atkinson**, Principal, City of Bath College (for the Association of Colleges), **John Fairhurst**, Vice-President, Association of School and College Leaders, **Maggie Galliers**, Principal, Leicester College, and **John Morgan**, President, Association of School and College Leaders, gave evidence.

Q222 Chairman: I welcome Matt Atkinson, Maggie Galliers, John Morgan and John Fairhurst to our deliberations. We always very much value the time that witnesses give to our proceedings. Some people travel quite a long way. We could make you come before us if we wanted to, but we don't like to do that. Most people like sharing their expertise with us. Thank you very much for attending. Do you mind if we go to first names? It cuts out the knights of the realm, dames and so on. In a nutshell, will you tell us the answer to the NEETs problem? A lot of people say that we should not talk about NEETs at all, that it is the wrong categorisation and that it stigmatises people, but then they immediately start talking about it. We are looking at people not in employment, education or training. We are sophisticated enough to know that that has a close relationship with young people in employment

without training, and that there is a high turnover and movement between those categories. How can we sort the NEETs problem, Matt?

Matt Atkinson: I should start by saying that my college is one of the few in the country that actually has full-time 14 and 15-year-olds. For me, there have been a few initiatives around NEETs, but they have not been significant enough to have a real impact. What is required is more systemic change. The focus on the NEETs problem has been a post-16 focus when, in fact, any head teacher whom I speak to is skilled enough to identify the children in years 8 or 9. Yet we tend to do nothing about it nationally until it becomes a problem, so we are focusing on cure rather than prevention. As I have said, our college has full-time 14 and 15-year-olds on a programme called New Start. Our Georgian heritage in Bath hides a lot of deprivation, but the New Start programme is for

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young people at risk of being permanently excluded. Rather than get to that stage or send them to a pupil referral unit, the young people come to us—we have about 70 places—and we design a programme that specifically meets their needs. As well as focusing on functional skills, we actually focus on development. We help them to find a passion, often for a vocational subject. The majority of the learners stay with us once their compulsory schooling has been completed. We contend that we are saving their lives and securing their futures because they do not become NEETs. How we address the problem much earlier on, and how we provide a system and resources that allow us to do so nationally is key to the answer.

Q223 Chairman: Maggie, you are from a different part of the world.

Maggie Galliers: Yes, I am from Leicester, where obviously we have a great deal of churn in the local population. I am also a college principal and a member of the Association of Colleges. Your Committee has identified that NEETs are not a homogenous group. They certainly do not come to us with a label saying “NEET”. We need to support some, particularly at the lower levels, with specialist provision. There will also be learners who might technically be NEET, but who are not identified as such by us because they access the college’s mainstream education and support. I absolutely endorse what Matt said, in that the way to solve the matter is to be as personalised as possible, in terms of the learner’s experience, and to try to find whatever it is that will switch them on to learning and engage them, and that is often through vocational, practical subjects. Although I do not have many students of 14 or 15 who are full time, the ones whom I have who fall into those categories are mainly new arrivals, because we are a Home Office preferred dispersal centre. About 600 to 800 students come to us part time each year. They often have already been identified as being at risk in schools. We find that the progression rates from those part-time courses for 14 to 15-year-olds are very good indeed.

Q224 Chairman: Are both of you more successful in keeping young people in that category in education for just that little longer? Statistics suggest that if you keep 16 to 17-year-olds in, you then find a much higher percentage of young people at 18 in the category.

Maggie Galliers: My understanding is that that is the national picture. Locally in Leicester we had a very high NEETs problem. When I arrived there seven or eight years ago it was 16%, which was way above the national averages, and we’ve squeezed that down, at best to 8%. Of course the recession isn’t helping us. At the moment we’re on about 9% or 10%. But that demonstrates that it can be done. Our experience is that it has to be collaborative in approach and often cross-sector to succeed.

Q225 Chairman: John, what is your take on this?

John Morgan: I am from Stockton, which is a small, northern local authority. It has been unitary for a while, so it has strong collaboration. It doesn’t have

competition between colleges and schools or vice versa. There is a strong 14–19 partnership overseeing all this, and that’s pointing to some of the success we’ve got. We have New Start provision with our local college, which works extremely well, so we have some students moving on at 14 to full-time provision, and rather more to part-time provision. The key is definitely the direction of travel of education at the moment, which is towards personalisation. We’re on the right route. There’s very little drop-out at 16 now in Stockton; we’re strong on that transition. It’s when they are older—when they get to colleges—and it’s normally nothing to do with education, to be honest. I would certainly agree with what Matt says: schools are very skilled now at identifying the potential, because for quite a while there’s been a national focus, so we’re aware of students who are NEETs aged 16, 17 and 18. We remember what they were like when they came to us at year 7 or 8. We’ve got a much better work force in schools now, focused on the social and pastoral care of young people. We have a much wider skill set in our work force than we had a few years ago, when it was just a case of a teacher doubling up as head of year. We’ve now got many full-time professionals. We’ve got extended groups. We’ve got better relationships with social services. The relationships could be improved even further, but it’s the right track to bring the collaborative groups together. Particularly in Stockton, we have a very strong 14–19 strategic board, which has overseen the NEET figures and the success or otherwise of that potential group.

Q226 Chairman: What percentage of NEETs do you have in your local authority?

John Morgan: At 16, we’re probably in the national area of 9% overall, but it is less at 16, more at 18. We follow the pattern. That’s the trouble. For all the good work that schools and colleges might do, if the recession kicks in and employers suddenly back off and it’s hard to get work-based places, that messes it up, and it might discolour it and give the wrong impression to you as a Committee. Actually, underneath it, the procedures are right, but there’s something beyond all our control that is maybe switching a few young people off.

Chairman: We take that point. John?

John Fairhurst: I come from Essex, which I think has the third largest education authority in the country, and quite a disparate one with some areas—

Q227 Chairman: The third largest in the country?

John Fairhurst: Something like that, yes. There were 80 secondary schools at the last count, which means that communities are quite different within Essex. In places like Basildon, there is a significant problem relevant to this inquiry, and quite a lot of collaboration, and then there are other areas where there is quite a lot of school-on-school competition, which isn’t necessarily helpful. I welcome the focus on NEETs, because it brings to the fore a quite disparate group, a heterogeneous group, who none the less are falling through the system and finishing

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without anything, so I welcome the attention. As for the danger of the label, obviously that point was taken, but none the less we need to talk about that. A lot of good work has happened. I would agree with all three previous speakers that some of it is about curriculum and personalisation. Some of the youngsters are turned off school and learning because they simply did not enjoy being frog-marched through a very prescriptive academic curriculum. A lot of the flexibilities that have now been introduced made a big difference. In a school like mine—mine is in Brentwood, so we're in commuter land and a fairly prosperous community—there are still individuals with quite acute problems.

Q228 Chairman: Brentwood used to be known as Fordland, didn't it?

John Fairhurst: If you say so, yes. It has still got the European management centre up there. Going back to my point, though, the flexible learning programmes and that sort of beginning has grown. Schools—not just mine, or those in my area—are actually a lot more interested in trying to develop alternative routes, especially at Key Stages 4 and 5, where the new flexibilities of the National Curriculum have been extremely helpful.

Chairman: We will drill down on all those things. Helen?

Q229 Helen Southworth: In terms of improving the outcomes for the group of individual young people whom we are talking about, what weighting would you give to the focus on an educational package that relates to them as individuals, in straight, pure, education terms? How much of a weighting would you give to close relationships with employers in the community, or the wider community, or do you not think that that matters? Can you unravel that for me?

Maggie Galliers: My response to that would be that we often think in terms of a ladder of progression. That can be a very helpful idea to have in our heads, but these young people need a climbing frame of opportunity, because these learners are often episodic. They are not linear learners, and for some it is a very good thing that we get close relationships with employers and make sure that they are exposed to employment experiences. Frankly, for some of the others, this would not be good for the employer or for the young person, because they are not ready. We often find that at 16 they need a period of acclimatisation before they can fully enter into a workplace environment. That is where things like the realistic work environments that we can offer in colleges—working in restaurants, hairdressing salons and so on—can be so very useful in helping to acclimatise these young people. My own view is that even if we personalise the learning and include work experience, qualifications are still very, very important, because particularly for these kinds of learners, who very often come from very disadvantaged backgrounds, they need that accreditation as a passport to success at the next level.

Matt Atkinson: On the point about employer engagement, in colleges we are very much focused on employer engagement from the point of view of developing the work force, so we go into companies and train. I think that there has not been enough focus on how we engage with employers of this particular age group. Obviously, diplomas provide us with an opportunity to do that, but generally there needs to be more emphasis on engaging employers in shaping learning programmes and putting packages together. In Bath, we formed a trust with two schools, the college, the university and the biggest private sector employer in the city. That private sector employer is now designing programmes—extra-curricular activities—with us. So I think there is a huge job of work to be done around employer engagement.

John Morgan: Employer engagement is important for all young people. The key part that I picked up on when Matt first spoke was that it is about prevention, not cure. The young people whom we identify as potential NEETs—if they transfer to college they are not NEET, of course—have a complex background. Yes, they will sometimes be from a deprived background, but they may have a complex family background, and those can occur at all levels of financial success. So, often they are identified and have a lot of very personal individual needs. They could have mental health problems—a range of things. We have spotted them all the way through, and the good thing is that schools are now much better placed to work with their partners to get the right support in for those young people. I would totally agree that those young people will see all the rest of their peers achieving some form of qualification success, so it is important that we have qualifications—although of a much smaller size—that these young people can react to. They tend to be more appreciative of any success than any others. You can be met with a rather blank face from someone with a straight bunch of As at A-level: “So what? I expected to get that.” But a young person who suddenly achieves a positive outcome on a six-week course, and showed that they could turn up at a business one day a week for six weeks, act as a normal citizen, and be polite and not be annoying, and who then gets a certificate presented by a head teacher or a business chief executive, will really go to town. And you can feel the warmth, because it might be one of the first successes they have had, after watching the rest of their peers sail through education. We are very aware. We care massively about those people in schools. You say to any head teacher, “Give me a few success stories from your school,” and the answer will not be top-end academic success; it will be the fact that they kept young people like that through education as long as they could, and they remember their small successes. They are the ones who come back to meet you.

Q230 Helen Southworth: I have to say as a Member of Parliament that I have a young offenders institution in my constituency, and some of the clearest images that I carry are some of the young people there who have never achieved anything, but

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the education team there is astonishingly good in the way in which it engages with them and helps them to get qualifications. I remember clearly young people we have had here who have said, “This is the first time ever I have got anything.”

John Morgan: To be a bit technical, one thing that is moving in the right direction is that there appears to be a tendency—we hope it carries on, with the Government and everybody else—not to have thresholds of achievement in the public domain, but to value an average total number of points achieved by each student, rather than thinking you have achieved if you get over a threshold. Many of these young people aren’t going to make it to the Level 2 threshold of five As to Cs.

Q231 Helen Southworth: So it’s about improvement and how we narrow the gap?

John Morgan: If you are using the eight GCSE average points score, every young person’s equivalent on that will count, but if you are looking at how many young people get over a threshold, with the people and students we are talking about, that never triggers, either because they do not have the ability, or because they are so disengaged with education that they are not going to hang around and complete. The fact that we are looking at things such as the school report card, and suggesting that the key indicator for success might be the average points score, rather than a threshold, is a good move. The sooner that happens, the better, because it brings them in. It is an inclusive move, as far as all the students in one school are concerned.

Chairman: John wants to come in.

John Fairhurst: Yes, if I can develop that, I think that part of the pressure in schools is the focus on the number who actually achieve the five A–Cs with English and maths or whatever. So there is a serious issue of some of the potential NEETs falling through without an appropriate plan. We have got a lot better. One of the things that frustrates me, though, is that many of these children or young people, as has been said several times, are from vulnerable backgrounds. I perceive an over-readiness by social out-of-school support to wash their hands of youngsters at the magic age of 16. In fact, I think the system in schools also seems to be obsessed with outcomes at 16, and I hope that an impact of raising the participation age, in the longer term, might be to soften that obsession. It sends the wrong messages that there is an end point at 16. No, there isn’t: it is too early, and there is a lot of water to flow under the bridge. In the longer run, we need to move away from the obsession with outcomes for individuals and schools at 16.

Chairman: Maggie?

Maggie Galliers: I want to endorse that point. I think that school heads are under conflicting pressures: one is that huge passion, which we just talked about, for at-risk students, but the other side of it is the threshold that schools have to reach in order not to be deemed to be under a notice to improve. That inevitably leads heads to concentrate very much on

the top two thirds: the third who are easily going to cross the threshold and the third who might get there. In my ideal world, I would want people to be moving through Level 1, qualifying at that level and then, when they are ready, going on to Level 2. It can be very difficult within a school to organise a curriculum in that way, because the pressure is on to get over that 30% threshold. I want to endorse what the Government are doing around the qualifications and credit framework and foundation learning, which is all about personalised learning, units and building up in a way that suits the learner. If we could move ahead with that as quickly as possible, it would, like the school report card, make a huge difference to the way in which heads of institutions start to think about how they can plan a curriculum.

Q232 Helen Southworth: Finally, could I ask about something slightly different? It is about the transfer of responsibility from Learning and Skills Councils to local authorities. What are your predictions about how that could go, and what would you like to see happen during that process to make sure you get the outcomes you need?

Matt Atkinson: Without doubt, the transfer adds complexity to the way we do things and the way we can do things for young people. One of my concerns about the impact of the transfer on the particular group of young people we are talking about, is that the system may not be responsive enough. If we are talking in funding terms, how many layers do we have to go through before we can secure funding to respond quickly to a local problem? Are we dealing with the YPLA or with local authorities? There is certainly complexity. One problem with this transfer is that it could be very successful, but it could also be quite disastrous. It all depends on where you are in the country. It depends on local relationships and the strength of 14–19 partnerships. From the college’s perspective, it depends on how effective your relationships are with your local authority. In our case they are very effective, but I know in other parts of the country they are not as strong. There is also something about ownership of a NEET strategy and whose problem it is. Where does responsibility lie? I agree with John about the role of 14–19 partnerships, but how do we make local authorities accountable for delivering a particular strategy around NEETs? There are many questions, but it really depends on where you are in the country.

Maggie Galliers: I’d say that it’s not so much about the transfer of funding. It is about the strength of children’s trusts and 14–19 partnerships. I believe that this is best solved at a local level. There needs to be a national strategy. As we have discussed, each of our local areas has very different characteristics. In my area, for example, we need a huge amount of provision of English for speakers of other languages. That would be less true in Bath. Having said that, I think that the 14–19 partnerships do vary up and down the country. There is the potential to charge them with the overall responsibility, as Matt says, for a NEET strategy. We are best placed to solve our own problems locally.

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John Morgan: Yes, I would certainly say it is going to be better in the long run. To be fair—and I can't believe I'm saying this on behalf of ASCL—I think local authorities do a good job on this. The good local authorities do an outstanding job. They certainly care deeply about their NEETs. I think that has been one of the good things, and it has helped. In areas where maybe schools and colleges haven't been working in partnership, the one strong point to bring them together has been the local authorities. LSCs working together, through Connexions as well, all focus on how to deal with the NEET problem. It has been a high point. It should be better as long as the funding is not messed up, as Matt rightly says. There will be less funding around anyway. I hear the words "children's trusts", but I would not want to rush away and say, "Let's make this another high priority for children's trusts" and make them any more important than they potentially think they are. I think they are very unproven at the moment. Strategically, they may be the solution to all evils, but it might over-complicate things. A good local authority with a good partnership plan, knowing it wants to provide the best education and training for all young people up to 18, will have everybody together. They will be commissioning right across that piece. We have to be positive about it and have faith that there will be genuine partnership—not some of the old-fashioned approach to try to rule—bringing the collective wisdom of the partners together to make the best for their area.

John Fairhurst: My view is that a lot of collaboration is thwarted by complexity. Collaboration takes a lot of time, fitting in staff and so on into various meetings. Any rationalisation, like putting the LSC into the local authority, is a move in the right direction. I would also agree absolutely with what has been said about the imperative of locality working, because it helps to keep things simple. If we keep things simple, we make them practical and manageable for institutions. The collaboration has not, of course, just been on 14–19; we've had extended schools programmes, which have worked with similar clusters of schools. That has a bearing on all this because extended schools have obviously invested quite a lot of energy and effort in resolving issues related to the vulnerable and the poorly parented. The most important obstacle of all has been the lack of certainty about future funding. If you're going to build relationships with these vulnerable families and their children and help them to see life from a different perspective, you've got to build up long-term, continuous relationships. It's hard for the consortium in my area to achieve that when we perpetually have to offer people short-term, temporary contracts until the funding is confirmed the next time—or not, of course, in the current climate. That makes building the appropriate cadre of staff, with the specialist skills required to handle this group of children, very difficult for us.

Chairman: That's an interesting point.

interest. It seems that the most important thing is not to interrupt funding, that everything—perhaps not children's trusts—is going in the right direction, John, and that things are fantastic. We've got closer working; we've got whole teams of people, rather than just a teacher, and additional work is being done with all-round schools. When I look at things, what I see is that over 10 years of solid economic growth—however weak the foundations were—the number of NEETs didn't drop at all, and it has gone up in the recession. The only concrete thing I've heard today is Maggie saying that Leicester took it from way above average—16—to below and that it has moved a bit in the recession. John, you're telling me everything's great and everything's moving in the right direction, and you're about the national average, but the national average in this country is a disgrace. Tell me what your message would be if there is a new Government. What evidence is there to make us believe that we are not just spending a huge amount of public money and coming out with a lot of warm words and a lot of talk about strategies, but actually letting down the most vulnerable people? There is absolutely no sign that you have made a difference to the 10% of young people who get washed up because of the failure of people like you.

Chairman: Let's start with Matt and then move to John.

Matt Atkinson: One of the issues is how many priorities we, as providers, have to deal with. The NEET problem has been around for a long time, but it has received serious attention only over the last couple of years at most. So any government must make a decision about how important this issue is and how we ensure that providers prioritise it. As a college, we've been pushed from pillar to post on a whole raft of priorities. Is the priority working with employers? Is it 14–19 diplomas? Is it reaching 16 to 18-year-olds? That's one of the problems. This issue deserves real focus and real attention, but something has to give. As institutions, we have capacity only to do so many things at one time.

Chairman: John? Maggie, I'm not trying to discriminate. If you catch my eye more quickly, I'll call you more quickly. Maggie, you're first.

Maggie Galliers: Thank you. Clearly, we need to do our part, and we need to improve. We always need to improve, and the day we say we're doing the job well enough is the day we should pack up and retire. Having said that, NEETs are about more than education, aren't they? They're about disadvantage. Our experience is that many of the learners in the categories of undecided or sustained NEET really do come from very complex backgrounds and have multiple barriers to overcome. That needs to be acknowledged; it's more than just an education problem. Also, what the country needs changes over time. It's not that long ago that we were being encouraged to get people to Level 2, because that was seen as the threshold that was necessary to take UK plc forward. Now we recognise that we need the higher-skilled craftspeople and so on, so we have got to push harder up the tree all the time. We need to recognise that the NEETs that fall into those "undecided" and "sustained" categories, as opposed

Q233 Mr Stuart: Let's try to put different heads on to get the right angles of approach. It would be easy to see you all as representatives of the producer

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to those who are on a gap year or something like that, are the most expensive to turn around. If they were easy to turn around, it would have happened in the schools long ago. So we need to keep up the effort and we need to do it in a cross-sector way, which is what I said earlier, in terms of impartial advice or guidance, perhaps giving the at-risk students an opportunity to sample college at an earlier stage, funding following the learner and maybe some kind of premium on those learners who are most likely to fall into the sustained category. All of those things would be helpful, along with the curriculum reforms that have already started.

Chairman: John?

John Morgan: Yes. I think you have put a slightly unfavourable picture on it—intentionally, I am sure.

Chairman: I think “slightly” is an understatement.

John Morgan: There is a definite sign of success with the NEETs at 16—that point of transition that we have all talked about and would probably like to see less focus on as we move towards 2013 and 2015, because 16 being the key transition time is not right for those stages. There are far more young people staying on. I think the ones that are not are very complicated, and they cost a lot of money, but I will stand by what I say. It is still early days for this range of new people. It is still early days for many of the partnerships that we all aspire to see working effectively—Matt said, there is a wide difference in or lack of provision at the moment across the country.

Q234 Mr Stuart: Going forward into the funding situation that we are moving to, those bits which you are sure about and which you think that you can evidence are making a difference we want to make sure of under any government—whoever is in government.

John Morgan: Absolutely.

Mr Stuart: We’ve got to pick out those things which are most important and protect them. If we don’t understand and you don’t make the case strong enough to show that you are making a difference, and it looks like you’re not, then it will be swept away.

John Morgan: I think we certainly are making a difference. The danger is, as Maggie said, the wrong sort of national priority or too narrow a national priority might distract people from this. We are going in the right direction and, whichever political party was in power, I am sure that strategies would keep us in that same direction. We mustn’t as a country use the fact that funding is going to be tight for the next decade to rein back on the focus that Matt quite rightly said has been given to this group of young people and their very complicated and very expensive personalised needs. We are starting to get the infrastructure in place to deal with them. We have got people who want to deal with them. We mustn’t have external pressures distracting us from doing that, or the easy thing of saying that we can’t afford it any more, so we’ll just focus on the No. 1 priority in order that we achieve inspection outcomes or whatever. As a nation and locally, at institution and partnership level, we have to keep that focus.

Q235 Mr Stuart: I was going to focus my questions on early intervention. We talked about 14–19. Matt was talking about starting with 14-year-olds coming into college. Should we be doing more at 11–14? Is the whole 14–19 thing too narrow? When we went to Holland, they have systems going up to 27. Should we be looking at people from the end of primary through to 27?

John Morgan: Of course we are in many cases, although it may not have its phrase around it. Some people will naturally take a break. I am reluctant to mention one of my own sons, but he is getting around to working at 28—he has got his degree; he is quite happy, and there you go. Nothing his dad can do can change his mind. We are all, bless us, different and thank heaven for that. I think we’ll see more differences, and we’ll praise the differences. I think most schools can spot a potential NEET long before 14. Fourteen is there because, in reality, up to 14 there is a need for a strong, broad core curriculum, whatever your ability or your attitude to education. I think that is agreed. There is much more flexibility—yes, coming in at 11–14, but certainly from 14–19 onwards the qualification framework allows a lot more flexibility in individual courses. But we can spot the variety of complex needs well before that. They don’t suddenly hit a young person at 14.

Q236 Mr Stuart: Can I ask John what more can the Government do to support people who can be identified? What more must the Government do to support that age group and to stop people from becoming NEET?

John Fairhurst: First, my understanding is that the figures are moving in the right direction from 16-plus and static at 17—yes, there is still an issue at 18. Secondly, if we move into a period of tight funding, which plainly we are, it’s going to be very easy to make savings at the expense of this exact group, because they are labour-intensive and expensive cases to deal with. I hope that whoever is in power will not make easy cuts at the expense of the most vulnerable.

Q237 Mr Stuart: But you take on board my point about the fact that you’ll have to demonstrate that you’re making a difference, right? When they look at doubling education expenditure, big increases and a lot of warm talk over the years to this Committee, yet here we are with NEETs and that hard-to-reach group that doesn’t seem to have been helped, it doesn’t look like the money that we’re spending is making any difference.

John Fairhurst: I think there are indicators of success at 16, 17 and 18. Perhaps the recession is responsible for a large number of people.

Q238 Mr Stuart: In 2007, there was a higher or just about the same number of 16 to 18-year olds who were NEET as there had been 10 years ago. One of the big problems that we have in this Committee is to try to find out the answer why. Why, when there was a genuine commitment by the Government—a real commitment of a broad-based target on the

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vulnerable and increased resources in schools—the end result seems to have been no change? If we don't understand that, we will struggle to stop people looking to make savings.

John Morgan: It is clearly not just raising their qualification level—it is because the qualification levels have gone up. There were fewer people unqualified at that level. It's a more complex, personal issue. That is very much what Maggie said. There's a big social element to these challenging young people.

Chairman: Matt is getting impatient.

Matt Atkinson: It's really only in very recent times that there has been this swing to a local collaborative approach. Because this is very much a local problem, and the solution is to be found locally, it's actually everyone's problem—it's the problem of schools, colleges, social services and every aspect of the community. It is not until we start joining up all those aspects that we're going to get somewhere. It would be very easy to say that funding is the answer, but for me it's only part of the answer. Can I just give, Chairman, a quick example of one of the problems that we face? As a college, we get a 16–18 allocation of money. Our allocation was spent in September, so I now have no more money to run programmes for people who may be in this category. But we do. We actually run roll-on, roll-off programmes—“start when you want”—to get out of that category. We fund it ourselves, and that is the commitment that we make locally. But as things become very different—next year is a much worse situation for us financially—I am not sure that we can continue to do that. So the issue of funding must really be addressed.

Maggie Galliers: I want to pick up on the Dutch example. Yes, I think that we need to see this as a much broader issue than simply 16–19 or 14–19. The Government have put a great deal of money into Sure Start, recognising that some of the disadvantage starts as soon as a child is born. We know all the statistics about children who are read to and children who aren't; to solely put it in our territory would be to deny those other policies. You used the Dutch example going up to 27. At the other end, our experience in colleges is that people often come to us at Level 1 at 16. They haven't crossed that threshold to Level 2. It may take us three years to get them to the level that you might want them to be at. I think one of the unintended consequences of the machinery of government changes is that the young people's money is in a pot up to 18. That allows all kinds of joining up until the age of 18, but it creates a false cut-off point—between 18 and 19, particularly. There are many colleges struggling with the fact that the funding for the young person who started with them at age 16 drops dramatically as they turn 19. We still have a commitment to those young people. We still want to take them through to their full potential but, as Matt said, it is getting increasingly difficult for us to cross-subsidise in that way.

Q239 Chairman: Can we just pull you out of that? You all seem to know your NEETs very well. Is Leicester different? You can just talk across your

professional associations and so on; what is the character of NEETs in Leicester? The Committee has been told that there are more white working-class boys in NEETs than we would expect in terms of the proportion of the population. Is that true?

Maggie Galliers: Nationally, that certainly is the picture. There will be local variations. In Leicester, for example, we are a very diverse population. There might be new arrivals; there will perhaps be people who struggled at school because English was not their first language. They are perfectly capable, but English is holding them back. Nationally, you are absolutely right. White working-class boys seem to take up too big a proportion of this group.

Q240 Chairman: But how many are in the NEETs category? We know that there is a significant percentage of children with severe special educational needs. I expect that NEETs have a significant proportion of those children.

Maggie Galliers: They certainly do. In our analysis at Leicester, those who are NEET often have a disability or difficulty, particularly at 16. Not that we don't try to integrate them, but that will be an additional barrier for them.

Chairman: What percentage?

Maggie Galliers: I am sorry. I shall have to submit that in writing.¹ I don't have the figure with me.

John Fairhurst: From experience of my community, which is very different from Leicester, almost all of the children whom we identify as potentially NEET are one way or the other on the SEN register. It is not necessarily an intellectual issue; it is often emotional and social. Those youngsters are finding it difficult to relate not just to school, but to lots of other things in their lives. That brings me back to the importance of extended school support outside school that we can access swiftly and readily for the children who have been identified. However, it does cost money.

Q241 Mr Stuart: I was just about to agree with Maggie on the cut-off point. The Dutch were showing how they can bring 16 to 20-year-olds on a four-year course up to the level that most people reach at 16—but they were on the course. They were building their confidence, and they were then able to move on to join the work force at whatever point. That is important. We said at the beginning that NEETs are not homogenous. I certainly know epileptics or those on the autistic spectrum; all sorts of segmented groups are more likely to end up as NEET for one reason or another. Do the policies with which you have to work and funding streams sufficiently allow tailored provision for particular groups, such as epileptics? I accept that they are a fairly small group, but apparently the chance of being a NEET as an epileptic is much higher than the national average. It is one of those groups that is perhaps missed.

Maggie Galliers: We have access to additional learning support funds, which allow us to spend some money on additional support of a very specialist nature. For example, if someone has an

¹ See Ev 107–08.

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attention deficit disorder, I have a specialist who can deal with that. My college is unusual in so far as I have a very specialist unit for students with profound and multiple learning difficulties. Some of them are paraplegic. Some of them are in wheelchairs. They have quite extreme specialist needs. Currently, I cannot access the higher bands of funding for those students because those bands go to the students in residential care. I contend that, by keeping those students local and coming to a college with a very high level of skill in such areas, I am saving the taxpayer money. Actually, I worked out only recently that I cross-subsidise that unit to the tune of £230,000 a year.

Q242 Mr Stuart: We talked about the fact that schools can identify people ahead of time. Does that need to be more systematic? Are there some schools in which that is not happening? If it were more systematic, would that make it better able to do the early intervention that we are all hoping for?

John Morgan: I think that it is pretty systematic. There is local co-ordination of the need to identify. You will find a local record, not just a school-based record. Yes, it happens more at 15 or 16 than it does at 11, 12 or 13. The majority of schools, guided by the local partnerships and local authorities, are spotting people and recording them, and access to a common record is becoming available for all the professionals.

Q243 Mr Stuart: You are confident that hasn't just stopped and that it is happening?

John Morgan: All I can say is that we are on that journey. Please don't quote me as saying that Stockton is the bee's knees—I don't think it is—but we are on that journey at different points across the nation. We are not there yet; it is a complicated thing to do. As John Fairhurst would say, the bigger the authority the more difficult it is, particularly if an authority has another problem on its plate at the time.

John Fairhurst: I have a great frustration: Essex is one of the shamed nine. The special needs provision for vulnerable children in the county has been deemed inadequate. So, schools can identify where the problems are and bring together some institutional plan, but they find it quite hard to access the specialist support—educational psychiatry support or whatever—to bring to bear and to crack the problem. I don't have a solution to that. It's something that we have to grapple with in my part of the world.

Q244 Chairman: But John Morgan, in this Committee it is fascinating in a sense for us to be given a wealth of information, but sometimes we want to break down the nature of these young people. If Maggie's authority has 1,000 NEETs—I don't know what the figure is; it could be 500, but let's say we have an authority with 1,000 NEETs—how much careful analysis is done of the composition of the NEETs in terms of how many have special educational needs and so on? It seems

to me that the reason we are always talking about NEETs is that there is no deeper analysis of what this cohort looks like.

Mr Stuart: Mental health problems can be involved.

Chairman: Mental health problems, special educational needs, lack of the English language and so on.

John Morgan: I think you would find that locally there will be that analysis. I think you ought to be quite pleased that we aren't—

Q245 Chairman: We haven't been able to find anyone to give us that. Where would we get that information, John?

John Morgan: I think that each local authority should have a NEETs strategy and there will be somebody managing that strategy. At one level of—

Chairman: And they would have that analysis.

John Morgan: They should do. I can certainly submit it to you from Stockton.²

Chairman: I've been into Jobcentre Plus and have said, "Tell me what these people look like. What are their major characteristics? How many are there of these? How many of those?" They can't give you that information.

John Morgan: Because it's not always as simple as that, Chair. That's the trouble. We are a very diverse population, and not just in respect of NEETs—look at the—

Q246 Chairman: The old social scientist in me suggests that you can take 1,000 people and do a piece of research that shows what the nature of this cohort is. It may change; next year there may be fewer SEN and more of something else, but you could find out how many people. In Leicester for example, one of the real characteristics is a lack of facility in the English language. That's not impossible is it? That is what we are trying to get at in this Committee.

Matt Atkinson: In our locality, Connexions is the body that can provide you with those data. It is the body that co-ordinates the work around NEETs. I recently challenged our local Connexions manager at our 14–19 board, by setting a target of 0% NEETs—we are at 4% currently. She said, "We can't do that, because of the 200, 50 have these particular issues". So in our locality, Connexions is very well placed to do that, but there may be some variation up and down the country.

Maggie Galliers: I would endorse that. Certainly our Connexions service knows by name everybody who is NEET and could tell you about their characteristics. I believe some research was done for the NEET strategy for DCSF because there has been some attempt there to categorise the NEETs, as you discussed, I think, in an earlier Committee session.

Q247 Chairman: So we should be able to get that out of the Minister on Monday, should we?

Maggie Galliers: I would have thought so, because clearly analysis has gone into categorisation.

² See Ev 106.

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Q248 Mr Stuart: Should more young people transfer to colleges at 14? For those for whom school isn't working, are colleges at 14 a better option, and more likely to engage their enthusiasm and interest?

John Fairhurst: I think it needs to be a judgment made as part of an individual education plan for each individual, because what was going through my mind during the conversation we have just been having is that you are looking for a pattern that isn't necessarily there. This is quite a heterogeneous group; there are quite different reasons for people ending up in the situation. We can identify what the problems are in the schools. We look for some solutions. Personalising the curriculum, which we have perhaps not dwelt on enough, is a strategy that can make a big difference and is happening in particular with the freeing up of Key Stage 4 prescriptions. So it's got to be personalised. It's got to be based on that individual.

Q249 Mr Stuart: But if colleges can do a better job in some cases, personalised or otherwise, then that pathway needs to be there. The signposting needs to be there. The parents, the pupil, the teacher perhaps—somebody needs to know that you can go there.

John Fairhurst: There will be some individuals who are quite mature but disaffected from school life who would be highly appropriate for transfer to college. There would be other quite immature individuals—this goes in part with their vulnerability—for whom that would be quite an inappropriate move. It would depend on the individual.

Mr Stuart: And over to the college sector?

Matt Atkinson: On the one hand, I agree with what John has said. It is about a specific individual learning plan for that young person. In Bath we have the Bath Panel where we look at cases individually and decide on the best course of action for that young person. When they come to college their programme is tailored towards their specific needs. We do not simply have a programme with a one-size-fits-all approach. It is very personalised.

Q250 Mr Stuart: When we were in Holland, we saw this enormous, wonderful, modern building—it was very inspiring. We thought it was great, and the people there told us it was great, but not for everybody. They were looking at creating more micro-sites with a scale that better suited some of the more vulnerable people—they would be closer to home and so on. Should you be doing more to get out of your big campus site, if you've got a big campus site, and into the community?

Matt Atkinson: Possibly, but I would say that we take a very deliberate approach at our college not to ghettoise this provision and make it a quasi-pupil referral unit. Walking round my college, you would not be able to spot the 70 or so 14 or 15-year-olds because they are fully integrated into our college. They are in lessons with 16 and 17-year-olds. But, of course, we do have students with very specific needs as well. We are not just dealing with the switched-off but very bright; we are dealing with students with very specific needs, so we ensure that the support is

there for them. What I should say about our locality is that there is other provision. We have a specialist behaviour unit for other young people to go to. We need to start looking at the make-up of education provision locally and making sure that something can be done—whether that is the college going out to and having provision in schools, for instance. There is another model there. Something in which I am particularly interested at the moment is the notion of what Lord Baker has been doing through the Baker Dearing Trust around university technical colleges that begin at the age of 14. The first one will open in Derby—the JCB Academy—in September, so there is another model there. Now is the time to start looking at a whole range of models.

Chairman: We have to move on.

Q251 Paul Holmes: Lots of witnesses have said to us that we should provide more work-based learning, especially for people who are below Level 2. From your perspective in schools and colleges, is that possible? Do employers co-operate to provide enough of these places?

Maggie Galliers: Clearly, it is more difficult to attract employer interest to that age group. If they are not work ready, that will be a toll on the employer. I think colleges are very well placed, because of their enormous links with employers, to ensure that students are getting an experience that will make them work ready and allow work experience of that type to happen, and also to ensure that the curriculum is properly informed by what the employer is looking for. If you take my college as an example, we work with 3,000 employers every year through Train to Gain programmes and other linkages. One of the reasons why I went for a model of organisation in my college where that work is fully embedded into my curriculum was because I wanted that cross-transference into the mainstream curriculum, which is about preparing people for employment. We can find work experience for some of the young people, but a very good preparation for that work experience is what I was talking about earlier, which is having realistic working environments within colleges where there are real customers but there is an additional layer of safety, and we are paying the people who are supervising those young people, whereas to the employer it is a straight cost.

Q252 Paul Holmes: We've all visited training restaurants and beauty salons. Can you extend things beyond that? I've seen some tourism in colleges.

Maggie Galliers: We have a floristry shop and a travel shop. We've been involved in some very real work in the Highcross shopping development in Leicester. Working collaboratively with the local authority and other agencies, we saw that there would be jobs there, particularly for the NEETs, and we set up a programme called routeways into employment. We went out into some of the most disadvantaged areas, took out good-quality information, advice and guidance, and got people on to programmes that were all about preparing them

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for the jobs in Highcross. We had enormously successful outcomes from that project; in fact, we won a Jobcentre Plus award for it. I know that 141 of the people who got jobs in those shops were in the sustained NEETs category.

Q253 Paul Holmes: In general, is there the capacity to do this?

Matt Atkinson: There is a significant problem, of course, with engaging employers in this kind of activity. Once again, it depends on where you are. If you're in an area that's made up predominantly of small and medium-sized enterprises, it is difficult to get SMEs to engage. From an employer's perspective, providing work placements to 14 and 15-year-olds is a huge risk in many cases. The young apprenticeship model, of course, is very interesting. It has a requirement for 50 days' high-quality work experience. We run a young apprenticeship in catering, and the young people work in prestigious restaurants and hotels locally. The young apprenticeship model is a great way of doing those things and engaging employers, but I think that all of us would agree that it is a struggle to get employers to engage in this way.

John Morgan: None of us thinks it is going to get better, realistically; whatever fine words anyone comes out with, it's unlikely to get any better or any easier. That's not really to complain, but it is a short-sighted employer who doesn't see the importance of engaging locally. Maggie's point is very important, and that is where the positivity of local solutions comes in. What you've described might be completely erroneous in Stockton, Essex or Bath, and an understanding of these issues is important. That's where it is important to have the one group—Connexions working with the local authority, or whoever it might be, although it happens to be the local authority. The funding is there with them. The partnership is overseen by them. The children's trust is there. There is one group that can have a real focus on everything and can engage employers in the locality as well.

Q254 Paul Holmes: Maggie talked about colleges providing a lot of this in-house. I have visited schools around the country and in my constituency that have started to do this. Should schools be trying to do this? Have they really got the capacity and the economies of scale?

John Morgan: They can, in some places, although not to the extent that the colleges can. A school within 10 miles of where I live has a fantastic hair and beauty salon. It's a rural school, so it would need to have done something special. It's made a focus. It's identified a local need. It's seen that there will be potential employment. It's worked at a distance with a very willing employer, who has won awards herself. And, lo and behold, the scheme is working well. The school has got the funding and it has something that is very realistic, but it cannot do things on the same scale as colleges—obviously, schools can't. However, for students in the area, who are very parochial and wouldn't want to move away from their rural area, the scheme is working well. You'd

probably never get them to shift to a large college that might be 30 or 40 miles away, because they just wouldn't catch the bus.

Q255 Paul Holmes: Diplomas are suggested as one of the answers to the problem of a lot of the people who fall into the NEETs category. On the other hand, lots of people have told us that diplomas have been pushed towards being too academic and are not providing the practical skills and the hands-on work that are the attraction for a lot of people in the NEETs group.

John Fairhurst: I feel strongly that the diplomas are quite confused about their target audience. In fact, that audience has probably changed as the conceptualisation of the diplomas has evolved. Arguably, the Level 1 diploma is a confusion that is not actually required. Foundation learning tries to bring myriad different qualifications together into some kind of coherent package, and that is an excellent move. Level 1 diplomas are quite regularly being found to be simply too difficult for the sort of youngsters who want Level 1 qualifications, not least because of the academic element within. I can understand at Levels 2 and 3 that there are very good arguments for applied learning that requires quite rigorous understanding and extension, but I am not sure that hard skills—hair and beauty have been mentioned—require the sort of “vocademic”, halfway, applied-learning thrust of the diploma. Structuring any learning at the lowest levels of entry and level 1 into a way that youngsters can access some success has to be a sensible move, and you find it in the foundation learning.

Maggie Galliers: I referred earlier to a climbing frame of opportunity. I am sure that diplomas have a place within that, but I would thoroughly endorse the notion that they really aren't practical enough for some of these learners. If we look at something like hairdressing, given that we have been using that as an example, salons want to employ people who can cut hair, who can colour hair, who can sweep up and who have learned customer service. Although the diploma perhaps engages some learners who would not be engaged through traditional routes, it doesn't give them that level of vocational competence that helps them to be employable. In the past, vocational qualifications have been criticised in the sense that they perhaps have not done enough around those very important skills of literacy, numeracy and functional skills in general. It would be perfectly possible to construct packages where functional skills were a really strong spine going through any offer to a young person, but personalised within that to go down either a vocationally competent route or a more traditional academic route, albeit flavoured by a particular subject area, be it construction, hairdressing, engineering or whatever.

Q256 Paul Holmes: But, at the other end of the scale, advanced diplomas especially are sold as a vocational route that is equivalent to A-levels and will get you into university, just as advanced GNVQs

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were when I was a head of sixth form. Can diplomas, or GNVQs previously, actually deliver both things—the vocational and the academic equivalent?

Maggie Galliers: It is about the balance between the practical and the more academic. If I compare the diplomas with the BTEC National Diplomas, which have been a tool that colleges have employed successfully over many years to advance people into higher education—I can provide you with the statistics of how many of mine on those programmes go into higher education, and it is many—the balance is slightly different. On a BTEC National, it is one third classroom-based and two thirds practical. I think you could reverse that if you looked at the diplomas, and there is certainly not enough time for the students to become vocationally competent.

Q257 Chairman: A lot of the witnesses have not needed pushing at all to talk about the value of the apprenticeship route, but you have to push them quite hard to extol the virtues of the diploma route for this category of young person. Matt?

Matt Atkinson: One issue is that diplomas exist in a crowded qualifications framework at the moment. There is probably not as much practical learning as young people perceive with diplomas. There is also a huge issue of whether the teachers involved have the skills and creativity to make the learning practical. Actually, as someone who taught until fairly recently, I had the ability to take something quite bland and academic and do it in a practical way. So, actually, while there has been some investment in teacher development around diplomas, there probably hasn't been enough. This is a point about whether they are suitable for young people in this category that we are talking about—the NEETs. The key thing with provision for these people is flexibility in curriculum design. These people who we are talking about would certainly need more practical learning opportunities in the diplomas and forward.

Q258 Paul Holmes: Earlier, John Fairhurst and Maggie were both talking about the problem that, because schools face this high-stakes drop at 16, with the league tables, they focus on that and do not look at 17, 18 or 19. It was suggested that report cards might be one way around that, but we have to move away from it. We have got league tables, and schools are being judged in such a harsh way, but will report cards make a difference to that? Will we now say that you've got to be in some sort of training or employment to 17 and then to 18? Will that really make a difference if schools are still going to be pilloried or praised for what happens at 16 with academic qualifications?

Chairman: I can only take one of you on this one. John?

John Fairhurst: The short answer is no. The harsh focus is on 16, so schools will plainly focus on that. When they have dropped out and are no longer part of the school, they are not part of that school—as a single institution—in a measure of success or failure.

Chairman: I am afraid that we have to move on.

Q259 Annette Brooke: I apologise if I duplicate anything that was asked earlier. I wanted to start by asking about the effectiveness of the services of Connexions. Maggie has already given us quite a glowing report on that. Perhaps I might tempt you to think that when they're good they're very good, but perhaps the service is rather patchy. I would be interested to hear your views on Connexions.

Maggie Galliers: Our local experience is that Connexions is becoming more effective. I am sorry that we have lost some of the original inspiration about the formation of Connexions when personal advisers were going beyond the brief of information, advice and guidance, and actually getting into the territory of tearing down barriers that were preventing people from getting into learning. That has been a little bit lost in translation. I am aware that you will have considered various reports that have looked at whether there should be a free-standing Connexions service or whether the money might be better used within schools and colleges directly. My answer is that a hybrid model is probably best. With the best will in the world, although my school colleagues might disagree with me, if a school is 11–18, it will understandably want to offer its sixth-form provision as a first option—not necessarily the only one, but the first. The danger with delegating all that to schools and colleges is that, with human nature being what it is, it might be less impartial. Having said that, I think there is a strong role in both schools and colleges for some staff employed by those institutions, who can work through tutorials and so on, regarding real broad careers education and applications to higher education and so on, when people need a lot of detailed careers advice.

Matt Atkinson: When we talk about Connexions, we tend to assume that there is a national way of working and doing things. Ms Brooke used the word “patchy” and I think that is a fair assessment. We are talking about different contractual relationships and localities, and different ways of doing things. In fairness to the Connexions service, we should remember that it has delivered essentially what the Government have asked it to deliver. It has not provided a service that has impacted on the lives of all young people but it has not been tasked with doing that. The key to the provision of high-quality information, advice and guidance is impartiality—I stress the word “impartiality”. I am interested in the statutory IAG entitlement. The key thing with the statutory entitlement is how is it going to be checked? How can we ensure that young people are receiving high-quality and impartial advice and guidance? Is there a role for Ofsted, for instance, in doing that checking? Should that be an element of the Ofsted framework? With information, advice and guidance, I do not think that there is a national standard. There is a range of standards that institutions can go for, with Matrix being one of them. How do we ensure that there is consistency in the information and advice that young people are receiving? That is a concern of mine.

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Q260 Annette Brooke: That is rather interesting. Is there a model that we need to be looking at, now that Connexions is based within local authorities, that gives formal links, although not in a prescriptive way, so that there is a true partnership among colleges, schools and Connexions?

John Morgan: The key model starts with the individual. The trouble is that, in the past, we have had too many models and the people providing the support forgetting that you start with the person who needs the support. The last thing that a potential NEET student needs is 15 different willing adults telling him or her the best way forward. There should certainly be independence, but it should be someone they can trust. It would not necessarily be their form or personal tutor; it could be a sports teacher who has inspired them, or it could be someone who lives next door. There will be one person they can trust and there must be a framework and structure within any institution or locality to ensure that that person can get the specialist advice, independently given, whenever necessary, and that they can bring in the support. Too fixed a structure cannot recognise the individual nature of the needs of these people. The key thing is whether they have one or two adults or slightly older peers whom they can trust.

Q261 Annette Brooke: May I push you on that? That sounds like what we all probably believe, but I don't see how that stops people falling through holes. We need to be looking at that. What can you do in your position to provide advice, guidance and support to those who have already disengaged?

John Morgan: As a school leader, we are very much about stopping them from disengaging. We need to know that there is somebody beyond the confines of our normal staff to whom we can turn. There has to be a structure where there is a specialist personal adviser or a specialist youth worker who can give the intense time at the home site or wherever they are going to meet this young person of whatever age who is disengaged from school. We have to know where to turn, so you need that local structure. What you don't want is three or four different people being given the same opportunity to provide that advice. It is a waste of money in these times of efficiency to find that someone from the Connexions staff is giving a young person roughly the same thing as somebody from social

services and as their pastoral leader from school. You want somebody to work efficiently with that young person.

Q262 Chairman: In a few weeks, local government will be in charge of all of this.

John Morgan: I'm not saying that local government will be in charge.

Chairman: Local government is going to be in charge of the whole shebang within a few weeks. That will be nice and joined up for you, won't it?

John Morgan: No. The schools don't start from who is in charge of it, they start from the young people. Somebody has to make sure that there is that range of support for us to access. If you want to give me one thing that a children's trust should do, it is to make sure that the front-line support is available for the front line to access and so that there can be a decision on what is the best need. You do not need somebody saying, "This is the best need for your NEETs brigade." What you do need is to know that somebody has got an overview to ensure that the front-line support is there, whether it be social services, medical support for epileptics, mental health care or whatever. The people closest to the individuals in schools and colleges see them from day to day. We see a tendency to disengage. We might think, "We've lost this one." The question is who can we get to go and visit them. We can't send out one of our teachers or our year manager. When you ask if the support is there, you need to turn and find that it is there. You need to be sure that there is someone to whom you can turn to provide a high-quality range of support with different skills so that you can pick the right one and get them working with the individual.

Q263 Chairman: Okay, we've run out of time, I'm afraid, so we will have to draw a line there. John, I think you are in the interesting position of being back with us next week, aren't you?

John Morgan: I believe I am.

Chairman: You are a glutton for punishment. Can I say to all of you that this has been a very good session? We have had to cram an awful lot into a brief session—we have another one now. Will you remain in communication with us? If you think of questions that we didn't ask you or things you wish you'd said, please contact us because we want to make this short report a rather good one.

John Morgan: Would you like analyses from our areas?

Chairman: Absolutely, we would love that. Tell us what the needs really look like in your area.

Memorandum submitted by John Morgan, President, Association of School and College Leaders

STOCKTON LA NEET GROUP DECEMBER 2009

16-18 yr old NEET

Age	Total
16	100
17	195
18	342
Grand Total	637

Summary by LDD			Summary by Supervised by YOS			Summary by Ethnicity		
Age	LDD	Total	Age	Supervised by YOTS	Total	Age	Ethnic Origin	Total
16	No	89	16	No	92	16	Mixed—Other	1
	Yes	11		Yes	8		Not known	3
16 Total		100	16 Total		100		White—British	94
17	No	161	17	No	186		White—Other Background	2
	Yes	34		Yes	9	16 Total		100
17 Total		195	17 Total		195	17	African	1
18	No	304	18	No	334		Mixed—White & Black Caribbean	1
	Yes	38		Yes	8		Not known	1
18 Total		342	18 Total		342		White—British	190
Grand Total		637	Grand Total		637	17 Total	White—Not Known	2
								195
Summary by Teenage Mother			Summary by Supervised by YOS			Summary by Ethnicity		
Age	Teenage Mother	Total	Age	Supervised by YOTS	Total	Age	Ethnic Origin	Total
16	No	94	16	No	92	16	Mixed—Other	1
	Yes	6		Yes	8		Not known	3
16 Total		100	16 Total		100		White—British	94
17	No	179	17	No	186		White—Other Background	2
	Yes	16		Yes	9	16 Total		100
17 Total		195	17 Total		195	17	African	1
18	No	294	18	No	334		Mixed—White & Black Caribbean	1
	Yes	48		Yes	8		Not known	1
18 Total		342	18 Total		342		White—British	190
Grand Total		637	Grand Total		637	17 Total	White—Not Known	2
								195
Summary by Supervised by YOS			Summary by Ethnicity			Summary by Supervised by YOS		
Age	Supervised by YOTS	Total	Age	Supervised by YOTS	Total	Age	Ethnic Origin	Total
16	No	92	16	No	92	16	Mixed—Other	1
	Yes	8		Yes	8		Not known	3
16 Total		100	16 Total		100		White—British	94
17	No	186	17	No	186		White—Other Background	2
	Yes	9		Yes	9	16 Total		100
17 Total		195	17 Total		195	17	African	1
18	No	334	18	No	334		Mixed—White & Black Caribbean	1
	Yes	8		Yes	8		Not known	1
18 Total		342	18 Total		342		White—British	190
Grand Total		637	Grand Total		637	17 Total	White—Not Known	2
								195
Summary by Ethnicity			Summary by Supervised by YOS			Summary by Supervised by YOS		
Age	Ethnic Origin	Total	Age	Supervised by YOTS	Total	Age	Ethnic Origin	Total
16	Indian	1	16	No	92	16	Mixed—Other	1
	Other Asian Background	1		Yes	8		Not known	3
	Other Ethnic Group	2	16 Total		100		White—British	94
	Pakistani	4		No	186		White—Other Background	2
	White—British	322		Yes	9	16 Total		100
	White—Irish	2	17	No	186	17	African	1
	White—Not Known	5		Yes	9		Mixed—White & Black Caribbean	1
	White—Other Background	5		No	334		Not known	1
18 Total		342		Yes	8		White—British	190
Grand Total		637		No	342		White—Not Known	2
				Yes	637	17 Total		195

Data Source: Connexions MI Program

March 2010

Supplementary memorandum submitted by Leicester College

The concern is that as E2E will be subsumed within Foundation Learning there will be a loss of the work experience/work readiness elements which have been successful in preparing and engaging young people. It will also mean the loss of some of the preparation for work and acclimatisation needed by some learners before they are even ready to embark on a full learning programme. This could result in some learners being entered onto Level 1 programmes before they are fully ready for them.

There are however also issues about getting people ready to participate in learning even before this. E2E has allowed for young people to have a period of time to get them ready and functioning in a learning environment. Colleges have been able to give young people the time they need to do this which might be quite short or more prolonged, depending upon their needs. A lot of colleges may have a specialist unit and dedicated resource to support these learners but equally a lot may not and many may find it harder to resource these in the current funding climate.

Next year, we are allowed only 10% of E2E learners who do not have to be signed up onto a qualifications; this may not be enough to meet the needs of some of our learners.

Learners also need to stay on programme for 336 hours to qualify for the entitlement which makes it possible to fund IAG/source work placements, etc. This may not be appropriate for all learners but colleges may feel the need to put them onto a programme of this length in order that they can cover the costs of supporting them.

EMAs

EMAs do make a difference to young people. For example, the retention rate for the College's 16–18s on EMAs is consistently around 90% (around 3% higher than College average for 16–18s).

	2005–06	2006–07	2007–08	2008–09
Students in receipt of EMA/% retained	1296/88%	2000/90%	2075/88%	2130/89%

March 2010

Further supplementary memorandum submitted by Leicester College

<i>Count of Ward</i>	
<i>Ward</i>	<i>Total</i>
Abbey	47
Aylestone	31
Baumont Leys	60
Belgrave	19
Birstall Wanlip	1
Braunstone Park and Rowley Fields	103
Castle	30
Charnwood	43
Coleman	24
Evington	12
Eyres Monsell	65
Fosse	28
Freemen	50
Humberstone and Hamilton	20
Knighton	15
Latimer	16
New Parks	83
No fixed abode	3
Not divulged	1
Rushey Mead	13
Spinney Hills	40
Stoneygate	32
Thurncourt	25
Westcotes	19
Western Park	14
Grand Total	794

Count of Gender

<i>Gender</i>	<i>Total</i>
F	380
M	414
Grand Total	794

Count of Age

<i>Age</i>	<i>Total</i>
16	109
17	306
18	379
Grand Total	794

Count of Individual Circumstances

<i>Type</i>	
Caring Own	99
Caring Not Own	3
Looked After	42
Care Leaver	8
Refugee	1
Subs Misuse	12
YOTS	39

Count of LDD type

LDD No statement	200
Statemented	3

Count of Ref

<i>Ethnicity</i>	<i>Total</i>
African	7
Bangladeshi	6
Caribbean	11
Indian	57
No information	24
Other	3
Other Asian background	10
Other black background	8
Other mixed background	11
Other white background	13
Pakistani	14
Refused information	1
White and Asian	10
White and black African	1
White and black Caribbean	30
White British	578
White Gypsy/Roma	4
White Irish	6
Grand Total	794

Memorandum submitted by Bury Council

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1 Since the publication of the NEETs Strategy in 2007 there have been many welcome developments in tackling this issue including the September Guarantee, the introduction of targeted youth support and 14–19 curriculum changes.

1.2 Early identification processes have improved in recent years but further statutory or contractual measures may be required to ensure maximum effectiveness.

1.3 The role of Connexions and the CCIS database is crucial in tackling NEET.

1.4 The current 14–19 entitlement for young people requires further development if the needs of all young people are to be met and to support the raising of the participation age from 2013. This includes the need to review current benefit arrangements for key groups.

1.5 The need to develop the Apprenticeship market and also provide sufficient incentives to employers to enable young people to access learning has never been greater given the impact of the economic climate on training and employment opportunities for young people.

1.6 Flexibility is the key to local commissioning arrangements with the transfer of responsibility to local authorities from the LSC in 2010.

2. SUBMITTER DETAILS

2.1 This submission is made on behalf of Bury Council by Mark Sanders, the Chief Executive. Bury Council is currently the lead authority within the Association of Greater Manchester Authorities (AGMA) with respect to 14–19 Commissioning and previously led on Greater Manchester Connexions arrangements on behalf of AGMA.

3. FACTUAL INFORMATION

3.1 *Strategies for the identification of young people at risk of falling into the “NEET” category*

3.1.1 Early intervention was a primary principle of the Connexions Strategy. The process of identifying those most at risk of becoming NEET using a range of indicators has been successfully adopted by the Connexions Service from Year 8 onwards.

3.1.2 Schools have a statutory responsibility to give “careers advisers” (ie Connexions Personal Advisers with careers guidance training) relevant information on pupils to support early intervention (Education and Skills Act 2008) though the effectiveness of these arrangements varies.

3.1.3 Learning providers are required to ensure that Connexions Services are informed about a young person's intention to leave provision or that they had already left within five working days of this happening. Connexions are then required to ensure swift intervention when notified of someone leaving and also to notify learning providers immediately if they find out a young person had left learning provision when no formal notification had been received. These provisions, originally part of the NEET Strategy 2007, have been implemented but the response from providers especially in the training sector with regards to timely information sharing has been inconsistent.

3.1.4 Connexions providers are required to have cross border arrangements in place for the sharing of data on young people as they move between areas or return to their home area from external provision. Current cross border protocols within Greater Manchester are highly effective in identifying those young people entering or returning to each area that require immediate access to additional support.

3.1.5 The introduction of the September Guarantee for all 16 year olds has helped to support additional early identification activities for those due to leave compulsory education but still uncertain about their future career goals.

3.1.6 The introduction of Targeted Youth Support will enhance early identification processes. Whilst arrangements for this initiative have been fully implemented in most local authorities in England, further work is required before these arrangements are embedded in day to day practice.

3.1.7 The recently published IAG Strategy announced a range of measures that should lead to greater early identification of those at risk of disengaging from learning at a younger age. These measures include plans to pilot approaches to careers education in Key Stage 2 and the provision of a personal mentor for each young person in Key Stages 3 and 4.

3.2 *Services and programmes to support those most at risk of becoming “NEET”, and to reduce the numbers and address the needs of those who have become persistently “NEET”*

3.2.1 National performance indicators for NEET, in learning and the September Guarantee demonstrate the positive impact of the Connexions Service on those at risk of becoming NEET and those in the NEET group itself.

3.2.2 The Activity Agreement Pilot, led by Connexions providers in eight areas of England, has proved to be very effective in engaging the hardest to reach in the NEET group through the offer of a weekly allowance to young people and/or parents and a programme of personalised activities over a 20 week period. The progression and retention rates in to education, employment and training from this initiative have been good—in Bury running at over 60% after three months in a placement—and funding has recently been extended until March 2011. This initiative is resource intensive however so future costs for such an approach would need to be considered.

3.2.3 Other NEET or early intervention programmes, for example European Social Fund and Key Stage 4 Engagement, are in place and are proving successful in providing a range of pre entry activity across the 14–19 age range and supporting progression. The key issue remains that the funding for such programmes is often short term in nature which can put their sustainability at risk if mainstream funding is not available.

3.2.4 The Learning Agreement Pilot, which ran from 2006–09, had some success in encouraging young people in jobs without training to take up learning opportunities, enhance their employment prospects and as a result reduced “churn” back in to the NEET group. Current Raising the Participation Age pilots, including Greater Manchester, are seeking to explore how to use the evaluation findings from this Pilot to inform future policy with regards to those in low skill employment; however, the balance between offering small and medium sized employers in particular the right incentives to release staff for training, and legal enforcement of rights to such training for employees still needs more consideration if further progress is to be made.

3.3 *The effectiveness of the Government’s NEET strategy*

3.3.1 The Connexions Client Information System (CCIS) has proved to be an extremely effective tool for tracking young people both within geographical areas and across borders. The use of CCIS data has grown over recent years and has provided invaluable intelligence to support a number of initiatives including the September Guarantee. It is envisaged that CCIS data will also provide essential support for the planned implementation of Common Application Process by 2011 and the commissioning of provision for the 16–19 age group. The Memorandum of Understanding between the National Apprenticeship Service and local authorities recognises the fundamental role played by CCIS data in supporting apprenticeship provision and planning. (NEET Strategy 2007, “Careful tracking”)

3.3.2 The Connexions Service has provided both targeted and universal support for young people based on need and have been the main providers of the personalised support and guidance envisaged for this client group. The Government’s policy of developing Targeted Youth Support has helped to enhance multi agency working in recent years to support those in the NEET group or at risk of becoming NEET, though it is recognised that these arrangements are still some way from being fully embedded.

3.3.3 The development of 14–19 Prospectuses and Common Application Processes are to be welcomed but the lack of a national model for this has hampered progress in some respects and made both initiatives too open to market forces.

3.3.4 The development of a variety of financial support models for vulnerable young people, including Care 2 Learn, and the widening of access to the Educational Maintenance Allowance are welcome. However, too many young people still have little financial incentive to take up learning, for example, those in supported housing face the withdrawal of all or part of their housing benefit if they enter an Apprenticeship, and these issues need to be addressed if further progress is to be made. (NEET Strategy, 2007, “Personalised support and guidance”)

3.3.5 The 14–19 curriculum reform programme has already begun to improve the range of learning opportunities available for young people, for example Diplomas, though it is still too early to fully judge the impact of these changes. The roll out of the Foundation Learning pathway from 2010 will provide greater coherence to the learning offer below NVQ Level 2 and greater access to important opportunities such as supported employment.

3.3.6 It is unclear whether or not the delivery methodologies and accreditation pathways within Foundation Learning will meet the needs of all young people and especially those with major barriers to learning and/or severe learning difficulties.

3.3.7 The range of personal development opportunities for young people has grown in recent years helped by the introduction of Positive Activities and other programmes such as the Activity Agreement; however, the impact of these is not given enough kudos, for example, young people involved in such activities are still classed as NEET when they are actually undertaking an important first step towards engagement in learning opportunities. (NEET Strategy, 2007, “Flexible Learning Opportunities”)

3.3.8 The September Guarantee for 16 and 17 year olds has provided an effective focus on progression at key transition points and has begun to impact on performance. Questions remain as to how responsive the opportunities market is to issues raised through the Guarantee process, for example commissioning new provision to meet demand, and it is unclear how the new arrangements for the commissioning of 16–19 provision from April 2010 will impact of this situation.

3.3.9 The Activity Agreement Pilot and other similar programmes have proved very effective at engaging the hardest to reach and helping them to progress, however as stated previously, such provision is very resource intensive. (NEET Strategy, 2007, “Rights and Responsibilities”)

3.4 The likely impact of raising the participation age on strategies for addressing the needs of young people not in education, employment and training

3.4.1 The 14–19 entitlement covering Apprenticeships, Diplomas, Foundation Learning and general qualifications such as A Levels, alongside accredited employment will provide a relevant learning route for the majority of young people. Experience shows however that these routes will not address the needs of all young people and especially those in the more vulnerable groups, for example, entry requirements for Apprenticeships are already prohibitively high for many young people considering vocational pathways.

3.4.2 Various programmes and approaches have been piloted in recent years to engage the hardest to reach across the 14–19 age group including the Activity Agreement and Invest to Change with considerable success. The maintenance of such “pre entitlement” programmes will be essential if the plans to raise the participation age are to be fulfilled and should therefore become part of the 14–19 entitlement.

3.4.3 The Learning Agreement Pilot demonstrated that engaging young people in jobs without training in learning through the offer of incentives to both the employer and employee was only partially successful. The incentives offered to employers to recruit young people and ensure that they can exercise their rights and access learning are crucial. There is a risk that small to medium sized employers will decide that recruiting young people is simply not economically viable if they are required to release young people for training with insufficient compensation.

3.5 The opportunities and future prospects in education, training and employment for 16–18 year olds

3.5.1 CCIS management information in the last 12 months indicates large decreases in the number of employment and training opportunities available for young people as a result of the economic downturn. This illustrates the inherent fragility of these routes for young people entering the post-16 opportunities market. The development of Apprenticeship opportunities with the formation of the National Apprenticeship Service is to be welcomed though it is too early to judge impact.

3.5.2 The increasing breadth of further education opportunities, allied to the growth in provision such as foundation degrees are welcome. From an information, advice and guidance perspective however there are growing concerns that young people are entering further education because this is seen as the only secure route to progression in the current volatile employment and training market rather than because this is their preferred choice. This increases the likelihood of drop out from learning post-16 which is a potential risk to NEET levels unless the level and range of the training and employment opportunities for young people can meet potential demand.

3.5.3 The transfer of the responsibility for commissioning 16–19 provision from the LSC to local authorities from April 2010 is a major development that will require time to embed. This development will only support the future prospects of all young people in areas if there is genuine flexibility to commission local provision to meet identified needs alongside the expected commitments to sub regional commissioning and the maintenance of a large proportion of existing provision.

3.5.4 The IAG Strategy rightly highlights the fundamental role of high quality, impartial information, advice and guidance to enhancing prospects, ensuring that young people make informed decisions about future choices and that they raise their aspirations. This Strategy is a welcome development, however indications that IAG funding may be devolved to schools rather than invested in high quality, specialised IAG services such as Connexions may undermine this role especially given the concerns raised in this Strategy and accompanying Statutory Guidance about schools delivery of careers education and guidance over a number of years.

4. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION

4.1 Provide more detailed statutory guidance to schools regarding the information they are required to share with other services to ensure that early identification processes are as effective as possible.

4.2 Enhance current contractual arrangements with post-16 providers to ensure the comprehensive and timely sharing of information to support the early identification of leavers, the September Guarantee and targeting of support activity.

4.3 Further develop the 14–19 Entitlement to include a “pre entitlement” option or “fifth pathway” covering more individualised provision for those with major barriers to learning such as the Activity Agreement.

4.4 Review current benefit arrangements to ensure that identified groups of young people are not financially penalised by taking up learning opportunities, for example those in supported housing.

4.5 Review incentives offered to employers to enable young people to access learning based on the national evaluation of the Learning Agreement Pilot.

4.6 Review the classification of those engaged in personal development opportunities as NEET.

December 2009

Witnesses: **Kostas Androulakis**, Birmingham City Council, **Adrienne Carmichael**, Cumbria County Council, **Judith Hay**, Sunderland City Council, and **Mark Sanders**, Chief Executive, Bury Council, gave evidence.

Chairman: I welcome Mark Sanders and Adrienne Carmichael. Let me get the pronunciation of your name right, Kostas, in case I annoy you the whole time.

Kostas Androulakis: It is Androulakis.

Q264 Chairman: I also welcome Judith Hay. I will save myself from struggling with any surnames by reverting to first-name terms. Is that all right with everyone? Excellent. Thank you very much for participating. We work only on the basis of the good information that we can get in front of the Committee. You have all heard some of the evidence given in the first session. We are pressed for time, so we are going to get straight on to the questioning. I am going to riff across and say to each of you that we have a problem with the category that nobody wants to call what we have been calling it. What's the solution? Mark?

Mark Sanders: I haven't got a solution to the name.

Chairman: I don't care about the name. What's the solution to the problem?

Mark Sanders: The solution, I think, is not imposing one solution on all. For this group of youngsters in particular, it is about bespokeing what we are able to do and applying that to the particular needs of an individual at different ages and at different times, perhaps by simply repeating things, and then being able to slot people into a complex system that suits their individual needs.

Q265 Chairman: I should tell you, Mark, that David Chaytor, who is an excellent member of this Committee, is very sorry that he can't be here today when you, who are from Bury, are giving evidence. He very much regretted that he had to be elsewhere this morning. Adrienne, do you have a solution to the problem?

Adrienne Carmichael: Not a single solution, but, from our point of view, what we need to concentrate on is participation and progression rather than the "not in". We have to avoid the deficit model viewpoint, and look at how we can ensure that all young people can participate. We think that is via providing opportunities and support that is personalised to individual needs and aspirations.

Chairman: Kostas?

Kostas Androulakis: I agree with my colleagues. For me, the point is not to try to solve the problem at the time when it presents itself; it is about looking at early intervention and getting to the cause sooner, rather than waiting for young people to turn 16 before we deal with it. A review has spotted this. A number of research and evaluation studies ranging

from 1993 to 2001—they are not our reviews—suggest that interventions on children under 10 are 75% more likely to succeed than interventions that look at improving outcomes for adolescents. There are a number of outcomes for the NEET category that could be looked at earlier in life and addressed earlier through prevention and early intervention. That could contribute to the solution. I am not suggesting that that is the solution, but it could contribute to it.

Q266 Chairman: Where did you pick up on that research?

Kostas Androulakis: This is part of a lot of the research analysis we have done in Birmingham on trying to improve outcomes.

Chairman: Excellent. We will draw on that later. Judith?

Judith Hay: In terms of the name, young people in Sunderland suggested SEET—seeking employment, education and training—rather than NEET, although young people do not identify with the name NEET; it is a professional term. In terms of solutions, I think we are almost there in Sunderland. The north-east NEETs have been reduced to 9%. In Tyne and Wear, the figure has been reduced from 16.5% in 2002 to 8.6%, a 47% reduction over eight years. And in Sunderland, I am really pleased to say that it was 17.3% in 2002, but in January this year it was 8.1%, which is a 53% reduction. We have done that through a very committed Connexions service, which is very experienced in terms of the specialist advice that it needs to give, and is impartial and independent. The bit that was missing when Connexions was transferred to the local authority was performance management, so they did not know the story of why people were NEETs. So we now segment all our data and we know every single young person who is NEET, apart from a small number of not-knowns. We know where they want to go, where they drop out from and where they go, so we have a whole plethora of performance-trapping of NEET young people.

Q267 Chairman: That is what we have really been trying to get at. Will you share that information with us?

Judith Hay: We can, yes.³ We also have a NEET panel every week that I chair, so we see the 20 most stuck young people every week. We get providers,

³ See Ev 123–26.

24 February 2010 Kostas Androulakis, Adrienne Carmichael, Judith Hay and Mark Sanders

the college, work-based learners, the university and the Connexions staff together, and we work to try to get individual solutions for those young people.

Chairman: That is most encouraging. It is very nice to have such a diverse group of local authorities represented here. We could not have done better. Paul, over to you for your questions.

Q268 Paul Holmes: May I start where Judith just left off. The Government set a target to reduce NEETs from 9.6% in 2004. The target for this year, 2010, was for NEETs to be down to 7.6% across the country. Clearly, that is not going to happen. That is not just because there was a recession this past year, because, far from going down, in 2006 the figure had actually gone up to 10.5%. Across the country the Government have failed to achieve what they set out to do over the past six years. You are saying that in your area you halved the figure from 16% to 8%. How do we replicate that everywhere else in the country?

Judith Hay: The four elements of success are data segmentation—knowing exactly where your NEETs are and why they are NEET in terms of assessment. So we are currently moving to the common assessment framework assessment, the multi-agency assessment. The previous witnesses said, “Wrap the right person round the young person, but bring the different agencies in”. I would say that in terms of the programmes, we knew what the young people wanted to do. The three top areas are catering, clerical and care. We then had a gap analysis in terms of what young people wanted to do and where the gap analysis was. What we found was that a majority of young people who wanted to go to college were in college and it was successful. This year we have a 98% retention rate in college in Sunderland. The issue was the young people who wanted to work and couldn’t. They needed supported apprenticeships, or what we call ILM—intermediate level market provision—to get them ready for apprenticeships. So we put in a bid to the Working Neighbourhoods Fund, which has been very successful in turning around the NEETs, with supported apprenticeships and getting people ready for apprenticeships. So it was the gap analysis, the NEET assessment and then it was the partnership work. We have a very strong 14–19 partnership in the city. Also, the local strategic partnership has been very influential in pulling partners together and saying, “What are you going to do about this?” So we have a multi-agency approach. Also, Connexions is very much embedded in schools and in the college. We all work together really well in terms of the information, advice and guidance that we give.

Q269 Paul Holmes: But clearly, if you have halved it from 16% to 8% while the rest of the country is actually drifting up from 9.6% in 2004 to some higher figure this year, all the other local authorities, schools, colleges and Government programmes must be failing.

Judith Hay: It has been a hard journey and we are not there yet, but we know what the story is and we can certainly replicate that anywhere. It is the data

segmentation that is needed to know exactly what the stories of the young people are and then making sure that you have got the provision to match that. The other issue nationally is that we are returning NEET figures on 18-year-olds which are incorrect, because we cannot get the data from Jobcentre Plus. Although there has been an agreement with the Department for Work and Pensions and the Department for Children, Schools and Families in terms of providing provisional benefits, what they cannot provide yet is information on new deal, which made people EET, not NEET. So every year, Sunderland and every local authority return on 18-year-olds says that they are NEET when a significant number will not be. So actually, the figures that we have given you would be even better if we could unlock the data sharing information.

Q270 Paul Holmes: So why have Bury, Cumbria, Birmingham and the rest of the country not had this glorious success?

Mark Sanders: I think that we have actually, if you look into it, but that misses the point. We need to give advice on those statistics. I think we have had some indicators of it already. If we go back 10 years, we didn’t know the numbers of NEETs and so there is this enormous category of not-knowns. That was a very patchy proportion depending on where you were. The main activity has been moving people from not-known into NEET. That does not sound like a very productive exercise, I accept, but it provides the baseline from which those statistics are derived. So those of us who had a bigger proportion of not-knowns had an uphill struggle to get into a scenario where we can pay attention. A couple of other things need to come behind that—the progressive changes at different ages. I am aware of the north-west figures, where we have had significant improvements at 16 and 17, but not matched as well as 18. Again, we need to get behind some of those issues. Also, we need to look at where some pilots have been taking place and what effects they have had. There has been a Department for Children, Schools and Families pilot in terms of the activity allowance and a Learning and Skills Council pilot in terms of something called the learning allowance. In Greater Manchester, we have had the luxury of both of those things taking place at the same time. What I hope to show in some of the evidence that we have already had is how successful they have been at drilling down into the very difficult groups—people affected by juvenile justice issues, asylum seeker families and so on. Those are really difficult tasks to get hold of. We need to get behind that overall headline to evidence-base what some of the solutions are, to be able to apply them across the board. I would commend—I don’t often do this—the DCSF’s work as far as activity allowance is concerned.

Chairman: Sorry?

Mark Sanders: It’s called the activity allowance. I would invite you to look at what the outcomes have been, because the DCSF has not told people well enough in my view about what is a very successful scheme, piloted with allowances and, as far as the

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learning allowance is concerned, money to employers to assist this particular group to get placements and live a successful and productive life.

Q271 Paul Holmes: In a way, Mark, you're saying that you've been running down an up escalator because you've been attacking NEETs, but because you've started counting and looking for them, you're finding more than there were in the first place.

Mark Sanders: That is a factor in there, yes.

Adrienne Carmichael: I don't think it is necessarily the case in Cumbria—sorry, in the north-west. Our NEET figures in 2005 were 6.8%, with very low not-known numbers; about 2% at that time were not known. In the last count—the January figures—we were down to 4.6%, with 1.3% not known, so we are highly successful. If you were to ask me to identify one particular reason why we're highly successful, I couldn't give one. I think it is a significant combination in a very complex set of interactions that fortuitously—probably—has got us to a situation where we know our individual youngsters, what their needs are and how those might be best met. Through partnership we are able to corral, if you like, the sort of expertise that is needed. In a lot of cases, one of the factors is that the more you reduce your NEET figures, the harder it is to meet the needs of those who are still there, because they have more complex and difficult needs, and they need particular expertise to address their issues. Cumbria is very diverse; it's not homogeneous in terms of its communities, what they look like and how they act—much like NEETs, who all have individual needs. So if we have 600 NEETs, they will have 600 different sets of needs. Working in partnership is absolutely critical. The centrality of information, advice and guidance within an overarching 14–19 entitlement has contributed to our success. The value of our Connexions service, working as a key partner within the 14–19 partnership, has definitely been part of that. I can't knock our Connexions service at all. It has maintained the universality of its approach despite having to focus more and more of its resources on the harder-to-help young people, but it has maintained universality and that has helped us prevent many young people from going down the NEET road. Now we are at a situation where we are relatively low, although 4.6% is still too many. We are having to look at where there are other issues within the raising of the participation age that we need to focus on. We know that there are non-traditional NEETs at 17 who have dropped out of Level 3 provision, and if we're not quick enough to re-engage them into the right provision, that builds up a head of steam. We know that we've got significant increases in our 18 to 24-year-old NEET figures, and we think that is a much greater concern. It's relatively easy once you have the systems, processes and agreement right to deal with the 16 to 18-year-olds. As far as the 18-plus group is concerned, we are building up a bigger set of issues, challenges and problems.

Q272 Chairman: So you would like the Dutch system that looks at 18–27?

Adrienne Carmichael: Why does your 18th birthday mean that your individual needs are no longer of interest or concern? They certainly are when we look at the public costs that result from those young people's not being supported and not being enabled to choose to succeed.

Q273 Paul Holmes: I am still not clear about the national picture. What you are generally saying is that you have been successful in your areas in cutting the number of NEETs or in covering a bigger pool than you thought was there in the first place. Nationally, though, the figures have not gone down. If anything, they have gone up. What is everyone else doing wrong?

Judith Hay: I was interested to hear the feedback, to see if it is similar to our area. Some 98% of our young people who are NEET are NEET for only a short time. They go in and out of provision, so the gaps are where we need to get them on to something else. The solution to that is pooled budgets and commissioning seamless provision for young people. They know what they want. We have good connections, information and guidance. It is the provisions that need to be seamless. Only 1.9% of young people in Sunderland are long-term NEET. For those young people—interestingly they are not offenders or care leavers—we have excellent rates. Some 90%-odd of young offenders are in education or training. It is the very damaged families and the inter-generational poverty issues that are the problem. For that 2%, we are looking at piloting a family model in which we are looking at the needs of the whole family and not just the NEET young person. The mother may be depressed, and there may be domestic violence and school attendance issues. There may be a young child in the family with problems. We are proposing wrapping intensive support around the whole family, which will include looking at NEETs and also the broader needs of the whole family.

Q274 Chairman: In parallel to that, we have been looking at Sure Start and children's centres. It is almost as though you are saying that you don't want silos, but a system for helping young people wherever they are from and from a much broader age range, but with all the services working together to ensure that something works for them.

Judith Hay: Some 2% are from chaotic families. We have looked into a number of families and found that some of them have 18–20 agencies going in separately and assessing them.

Chairman: 18 or 20 agencies?

Judith Hay: Some of those families are very chaotic. They have lots and lots of agencies going in and doing separate assessments, separate intervention packages. Some of the families just cannot cope with that, so we have stripped out the professionals and put in a lead practitioner. The other people are still there; they are still working with the family, but it is now a sequenced plan. If someone is about to lose their accommodation, there is no point in the

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education welfare officer knocking at the door and saying, “Why wasn’t he at school yesterday?” If there are mental health issues, they need to be sorted out with the parents before we can ever have a chance with a young person who is a NEET. It is very much a co-ordinated, intensive and supportive approach with such families. Inter-generationally, they have experienced problems many, many times.

Q275 Paul Holmes: The Local Government Association says that we should scrap the term “NEETs”, because focusing on that group of 16, 17, 18 and 19-year-olds is wrong. You are saying that we should look much wider at all sorts of other factors. Yet in the local area agreements, 76% of local authorities have voluntarily chosen NEETs at 16–18 as one of their performance indicators, whereas only 8% have chosen children in care and children coming out of care.

Judith Hay: We were red-tagged for NEET in the corporate assessment, so the local area agreement target is chosen because of the Ofsted audit commission intervention. Models such as Think Family are not on the list that you can choose from, but the intervention that Think Family provides is a solution to this chaotic 2%.

Mark Sanders: One of the things that is attractive about using that particular indicator is that it is a proxy for a civilised society. Not a lot of the indicators are in that sort of way. It is a symptom of those other issues—what the Chair was saying earlier about the queue of professionals outside some front doors to deal with different segments of chaotic behaviour. We need to have a system, and I think certainly, now that commissioning for 14–19s is going to local authorities, that that’s an advantage. But we need to have a system of key case workers who have a responsibility of a one-to-one relationship with individuals, whose needs are complex and different. They all intervene in different ways. For example, we are trialling a pilot that is looking at nought to fives in relation to 14–19s. They are the issues that are caused while someone is very young but that display themselves later on in life; of course, that’s the philosophy behind Sure Start and the rest of it. We haven’t quite got these things right yet because they are complex, difficult and intertwined, but we are realising that we should not say, “Haha, we have 14–19s and NEETs, and we’ll have a magic solution”, as it’s too late by then. There is some low-hanging fruit that we are able to deal with. But the really difficult youngsters are the ones with all these complex needs that are family-related.

Q276 Paul Holmes: Some people argue that of course there will be large proportion of NEETs in predominantly poor, urban and inner-city areas, where there are large numbers of people with English not their first language, transition from old heavy industry to the new world and so on. Sunderland would seem to give the lie to that. What about Birmingham?

Chairman: Kostas, you are doing some very interesting stuff in Birmingham as well, aren’t you?

Kostas Androulakis: I’m not really an expert in the area that you are looking at, as my work focuses on the transformation of services and improving outcomes, and looking at early intervention and prevention. The stuff happening in Birmingham at the moment is looking at evidence-based programmes, which have been proven to work longitudinally, through longitudinal research, to address outcomes earlier in life. We have the minus zero point nine to two year olds group, so from conception up to two-year-olds, where we are looking at improving parenting outcomes, particularly with teenage or single mothers. We have early parenting programmes targeted from three to five-year-olds, from four to 10-year-olds and then later in life, looking at improving some of the outcomes around the family earlier on—parenting and using interventions through a lead professional to address financial shortcomings, social issues or any inequalities. The focus of the work in Birmingham is on intervening early. The Connexions service is deemed to be a good service and performing well. We are hoping that over the next few months, as we integrate services and hopefully provide a wider choice, we will see further improvement in this sort of end spectrum bit—the older spectrum.

Q277 Mr Stuart: Following from what you’ve just said, I would suggest that early intervention pays off in the long term. What other barriers stop local authorities from being able to invest to save?

Kostas Androulakis: There isn’t a short answer to that—I don’t think that there is an answer to that yet. Invest to Save hasn’t been proven yet in a robust way, and it hasn’t been proven in a model that can be replicated across local authorities in England. We are trying to ascertain whether the Invest to Save concept is valid, and whether there is a model that can be replicated. The other issue that we have, which has been proven time and time again through research, is that the implementation of interventions can vary significantly. A lot of the time, local authorities and partners are more focused on the volume of service or absorbing funds, depending on where funding comes from, rather than looking at fidelity of implementation and looking at what works—not everything works. Again, from research, it has been proved that a badly delivered intervention can have an adverse effect—not only does it have no impact on improving outcomes, it has an adverse effect.

Q278 Mr Stuart: Can you give us an example?

Kostas Androulakis: There have been studies of the triple P intervention programme, which is a parenting programme. It addresses a number of tiers of services. A very large study was done in the US. There were highly qualified practitioners delivering the intervention—some delivering the intervention out of how they felt they should deliver it, others following the set examples and guidance that had been developed through the academic institutes that designed the intervention, and general practitioners on the ground. About 25% of highly skilled

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practitioners longitudinally, over 10 years, had a negative impact in terms of outcomes; so instead of improving parenting in the families, they were actually going the other way. Just having an evidence-based programme is not enough. And just having the will to do the co-ordinating work is not enough. Understanding all the parameters that can help improve outcomes—fidelity to implementation, stopping and evaluating consistently, and targeting resource to activity that works and has been proven to work—is part of the solution. As I said at the beginning, I don't think there is a magical panacea to all of this. We have to look at what works, combine best practice, and ensure that what is being delivered on the ground is delivered and is actually improving outcomes rather than just providing a volume of service or used to absorb resource.

Mark Sanders: One of the barriers is data. If we are providing a targeted service, it does not need much intelligence to target it on those who most need it. We have enormous barriers between the DWP on the one hand and ourselves on the other, with the health service as a third party. We need to be able to get through this data protection issue to be able to target those most in need.

Q279 Mr Stuart: Could we localise more and integrate more? Could we give local authorities more control over a whole range of Government spending in their areas, and give them much broader outcome-based measures of success? They could tailor their own policies locally, but use the national resource, with youth services being judged by where people end up when they are 25 rather than the artificial target of having five GCSEs at 16, which we have already heard is sometimes a perverse incentive.

Mark Sanders: Certainly I would be very much in favour of that—but I would say that, wouldn't I? The real issue is that we work together. There is the opportunity for pooled funding, and it being put to use where the greatest priorities are, but priorities differ in different places. Avoiding that one solution throughout the nation is beneficial. But agencies on the ground know what the local problems are, and largely what the solutions are. There is a range of barriers—we need to get over those—and funding is one of them.

Q280 Chairman: Can we bring Adrienne and Judith in here? I was getting a bit depressed about Kostas's analysis of research. I thought that that sort of intervention always worked, but obviously in 25% of cases it does not work at all. Mind you, Kostas was being negative. Adrienne, what were your thoughts when Kostas was saying that intervention did not seem to be working?

Adrienne Carmichael: There is a range of responses to what Kostas was saying. They go from acknowledgement that sometimes the data do not tell us what we want to know to too much concentration on data,⁴ often too late as well. For example, we get datasets for what we have to be

planning in order to improve the provision within the 14–19 entitlement two years after we really need to be using it. So there's the business about making sure that we've got all the information that we need in order to be more fleet of foot. Actually, I agree with Judy. A lot of the young people that we're talking about fall out of education or employment, and we need to get to them quickly. Knowing where they are, what they're doing and why they're doing it is extremely important. I think the issue of student or learner tracking—significant problems associated with sharing data—is one thing that, if I had a magic wand, I'd try and solve. When you've got the right professionals in place to give the right support on an individualised, personalised basis to young people, it can work. We've got evidence to demonstrate that. Importantly, we've got evidence—nobody's raised this—from the young people themselves. I'm sure we've all had it: feedback from young people themselves who are being “saved”, or re-engaged, from being long-term unemployed, for example. They tell us that actually, what made the difference was having somebody there quickly to help. As I said, data tracking is a problem—the tracking issues associated with knowing where young people are.

Q281 Mr Stuart: My specific question, though, was about Invest to Save. Kostas said you've actually got to have rigorous assessment of the evidence, because it's easy to go along with it as a political fad—“We can all pile into early intervention, because we'll save later”—but he's saying you'd better watch out, because you may find you end up needing those prison places you weren't going to need in 20 years' time. You'd better be very sure about what you're investing in and very sure of the evidence before you spend billions in an optimistic splurge that may or may not work.

Judith Hay: I entirely agree. We have triple P in Sunderland. We have a range of programmes. I think the evidence of the triple P evaluation is that you can't import something from another country and expect it to work in the same way. We've got a number of programmes that work very well, but triple P we've had some hiccups with, I agree. I also agree with what Kostas was describing as a strong commissioning model. In terms of Invest to Save, if you've got a strong commissioning model based on assessed need, we call it “assess, plan, do, review”, very simply. Everything we do now in Sunderland, we're saying, “What assessment have you got and evidence that you need to do that? Where's your planning?” We're looking at a thorough plan process. We then review that work, and if it has not made any difference, we decommission it and stop doing it. So, for example, we just decommissioned a youth work contract that couldn't give us evidence that it was working. We've recommissioned that. In terms of Invest to Save, we've got examples in Sunderland where we've actually done that. We were a high custody rate youth offending service in Sunderland. We had 12% of our young people going into custody—very costly and very damaging for the families. We've now reduced that to 2.9%, so only about 30 people a year go into custody in

⁴ *Note by Witness:* The witness is referring here not to data on young people who are NEET but to data on young people in education and training.

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Sunderland, out of 31,000. We've re-engineered the money that we've saved through that to work with five-year-olds. We're now working with five-year-olds-upwards offenders, preventing those siblings from coming into the criminal justice system when they're 10. That's one example. We've got a long way to go to improve on that.

Q282 Mr Stuart: I thought you didn't get the money. I thought one of our problems was that the criminal justice system has saved a fortune by what sounds like your very effective intervention, but you don't get the money to sustain your programmes to stop them getting in there.

Judith Hay: The criminal justice system has saved a fortune, but we've obviously had a lot of staff who haven't had to go all over the country visiting prison establishments, so we've actually reduced that to a very small group. We've now reinvested in a team of eight people who work with early intervention and parents. It's the young intervention concept, as Adrienne and Mark said, in terms of parenting. If we get young offenders at 10-plus, we find parents very reluctant to work with us, so we actually have to go for orders to make them work with us. But when we work with the parents of five, six, seven and eight-year-olds, you're knocking on an open door. They want to work with us. They say, "This is great. We wanted this a year ago." So we've got examples where we have invested to save and had very good outcomes. That's why I agree with Kostas. Smart commissioning is the way to do things. If you can't prove you're making a difference, you shouldn't do them.

Kostas Androulakis: Mr Stuart mentioned whether it is about giving more money to local authorities than giving better freedom to commission locally. That is absolutely the case. However, it also needs to come with some commitment to further distribute that locally. We are in the middle of nine randomised control trials at the moment when we are testing evidence-based programmes in Birmingham. We are coming across the fact that, without using local networks at neighbourhood level or the school cluster level, any information and data that come centrally are not enough to allow us to determine the level of need and the level of intervention that needs to be applied. Providing free rein over funding could be not the best way of moving forward. It should be tied to our local partnership initiatives—tied to using local vehicles for doing that.

Q283 Mr Stuart: In terms of rewarding the broad outcome of success and making sure that local authorities have the resources, Holland froze benefit payments at a certain level to the local authorities. Suddenly, the local authorities wondered what would happen if they went up, and there was a horrible gearing effect on the local taxes. They suddenly looked at it and came up with a novel solution that has now been adopted nationally. Should we create systems whereby, if a local authority was successful in reducing the NEET

population, it actually gets additional revenue to reinvest in reinforcing that success? At the moment, it does not. The Treasury does not allow that.

Adrienne Carmichael: We did get a performance reward grant for exceeding our stretch target on the local area agreement for NEET. Unfortunately, because of the way in which the funding mechanisms work, it did not get reinvested back into children's services or the children's trust partners. It went elsewhere. There are issues associated with whether we ring-fence funding for a particular purpose, such as reinvestment. No doubt, we can argue about that in a different place. Significant issues are associated with getting partners in particular to understand what the pooling of resources is likely to mean for them and the impact that it might have on their capacity to be able to do what they want to do. It is about ceding a bit of autonomy to the greater good, particularly on the funding side. We are very successful in our 14–19 partnership and our approach to partnership working across the children's trust. Where we often come up against a brick wall is the notion of reinvesting to address particular problems.

Judith Hay: Initially, I thought, "Great, give us the money," because we are half NEET, so we should get some money, but it is not all about money. It is about working differently and transformational change. For example, we had a problem with youth work. We have great youth workers, but young people were saying that they wanted more on a Friday and a Saturday night and asked why we were not doing it. We started with a budget of £25,000 on positive activities. We got the partners together and said, "What are we going to do, when we haven't got any money?" We have £25,000, which will pay for the salaries. Within weeks, we then had a transformational change. We had the police. We had the health provider, youth workers, Connexions workers and alcohol workers all working together on Friday and Saturday nights. We had mobile provision. It started off in small caravans, complete with screens and football cages. Because it has been so successful, it is manned by the police for free because the antisocial behaviour has been reduced by 34% across the city. Housing providers provide the perimeter fence for nothing. Nike gives the uniforms for the staff for nothing. Northumbrian Water gives us the water for the young people. The drug and alcohol people provide non-alcoholic cocktails. Connexions are there. It is a one-stop shop. I started from absolutely nothing, so it was not a case of we could not do it because we did not have any money. We had a little money and the will to do it. It has worked. Because of the response of the public, our partners have now invested in it. We now have a state of the art Friday and Saturday night youth work provision. It is not a case of targeting a night sometimes, but about transformational change. It is up to us to provide the change. We've got to have a solution to everything and not be problem-focused.

Q284 Chairman: Kostas would want to crawl all over this to see if he could cost it and see if it was value for money.

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Kostas Androulakis: Absolutely.

Mark Sanders: The question about incentivising local authorities is a vexed one. From my memory, there are only two funds that do that. There are the local area agreement funds, which we have just talked about, and the economic development funds. The rest of the funding—not all of it, but a considerable proportion of the rest of it—actually rewards failure, if you like. So you have a problem, and if it gets worse, they give you more money. So the point is well made. The one that is obvious and apparent and that I would certainly like to see pursued is the question about DWP funding. The DWP has an incentivised system with the private sector: when more people come off the register, the private sector firms get a proportion of the savings that come from benefits. We are not incentivised in that way at all. I would argue that there is a strong possibility that that type of approach could produce the goods, if the money is invested wisely.

Q285 Mr Stuart: I just want to ask about the preparation for the responsibilities moving over from the Learning and Skills Council to local authorities. Probably only one of you should pick that up—Mark wants to pick it up. How well prepared do you think local authorities are, and will that change have a negative or a positive short-term impact?

Mark Sanders: Here, I speak on behalf of 10 local authorities, because that's one of the jobs I manage. I think they're well prepared. Actually, the way that the business cycle works, I don't think that it is difficult anyway, because for the first four months we are just making payments that have already been decided by the LSC. That is an administrative function and no more than that. As we move into the next business cycle, which starts in September, the majority of the planning is already done. Literally as we speak, the final numbers are coming through the pipeline. So, again, for that business cycle, from September 2010 to August 2011, it is about making payments that are predetermined. That is where the rub comes. It is starting that business cycle; it is understanding what one wants to achieve, where the funding is best placed and being able to improve, I think, upon the current mechanisms for ensuring that the right courses are available for the right people in the right place at the right quality. That is the test of time. We have got even longer to move into that position. I think that the change can only work well, because local authorities are well placed not only to understand the needs of the young people in their districts but to have a relationship with employers in their districts and the other providers. They are able to make that link between what is needed and what is available. I think that that will become particularly important as far as young apprenticeships are concerned in getting those placements out in workplaces for people to take advantage of. I think that it is a really welcome change, and I think that there will be positive reaction to it when the planning is in place to make it work well.

Q286 Ms Buck: I just want to pick up on something that you, Judith, were saying about commissioning. You talked about the example of decommissioning a youth project because the evidence was not there. That is absolutely as it should be. However, is there not some form of tension really? First, to what extent can we be sure that projects are failing to deliver, rather than simply failing to provide the evidence? I ask that question, because that is often a tension, particularly with the third sector organisations that do not necessarily have skills in terms of presenting their achievements. Secondly, and this question slightly segues into the issue of foundation learning, is there also a tension between the need for less formal and more fluid provision to meet the needs of those who are hardest to reach and the need for hard evidence that ticks the boxes that satisfy the commissioners?

Judith Hay: In relation to the third sector, we commissioned a third sector provider for youth work. We had 33 successful youth work contracts. We have done that commissioning for six years. Initially, the third sector organisations had problems and there was a tension; they did not have a performance culture and they did not have the means to quality-assure things. So we had a hybrid model, where we went and helped them with their performance frameworks. We also quality-assured their work with them, so we kind of enabled them. Now, we've got a lot of youth work contracts that can return data and outcomes easily; others still can't really provide that support. We've got a compact agreement, where we provide that support. Sorry, what was your second point?

Q287 Ms Buck: Is there also a tension between the desire for more informal learning approaches to meet the needs of those who, almost by definition, are in difficulty because they have been let down or do not flourish in a formal learning environment and the kind of performance management that says, "This project is a success. This project fails."?

Mark Sanders: That fits in with the earlier point about transferring functions for 16–19 commissioning. Organisations such as Rathbone are marvellous at not just providing, but understanding what they are providing and relating that back to the commissioning. So a dual process is taking place. We understand what the critical success factors are, and the contract pays accordingly. Those sorts of organisations are the ones that can focus really well on some of the hardest-to-reach youngsters. Hopefully, we can increase that. There are some devices that we need to ensure we have in there. For example, some in the third sector have another organisation that skims of the management fee. To be blunt, we as local authorities should be contracting directly, so that management fee goes directly to the sharp end. There are lots of efficiencies of that order that will get money to the right place, but the key is that the commissioning is there to achieve a particular objective, so that both sides understand it, are able to measure it and can have a dialogue about whether it is being achieved.

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Q288 Ms Buck: On the 14–19 entitlement, you were particularly in favour of there being a fifth option that was geared towards more personalised learning. What is missing? Is there not a danger of duplicating some of the individualised learning provision that the schools grant is now offering to some of the youngsters who are in need of a more personalised approach?

Mark Sanders: A complex subject. I am worried that we are perhaps losing some of the devices in here. For example, e2e—Entry to Employment—has an awful lot of benefits. That’s now being transformed into the foundation learning fund. One thing that I very much regret about that is that a bank of time—13 weeks or so—is required to get that support. That creates a danger, because those who were getting on to a pathway and who we might be able to engage with for only a week at a time will now lose some of the financial support that is necessary to help them along the path. We seem to have thrown the baby out with the bath water by providing a top-down solution that youngsters may not be able to engage with. My local experience—I can’t go any further than that—is that there are good providers that can deal with the hard-to-reach groups. It is the connectivity between organisations such as Connexions and some of those providers that ensures that we have a personalised, bespoke arrangement that is fit for the individual, rather than for somebody’s system.

Q289 Ms Buck: Where that works well—Judith, the model you described was clearly a good one—it will potentially be very effective. But what are the other mechanisms? Are they robust enough in terms of funding, monitoring or whatever to ensure that if the Connexions service or the partnerships are not as good as they should be, that is not allowed to create a structural problem all the way through?

Adrienne Carmichael: I think it is. The mechanisms are there; we’ve just got to get people to understand that they’re going to be used. They’re going to be used as part of a process of making sure that, in terms of 16–19 commissioning, for example, we do not knowingly commission poor provision in the future and that, if we do, we decommission it pretty quick. In Cumbria, we are keen on ensuring that we create local capacity in high-quality provision, but if it is not good enough, we’ve got to decommission it. That’s not the problem, and everybody understands that, or they’re beginning to understand it. There are some little tensions around, such as whether we continue to commission five sets of A-level music in a travel-to-learn area that is one of our smallest, with three students. That is not value for money. I am not sure that it is a high-quality experience either. So we’ve got to the situation where that is being understood. With respect to your question about foundation learning, I am a little bit worried about the notion that foundation learning of itself, which is a qualification route, should be seen as very restrictive as far as an entitlement and our ability to be able to re-engage young people with the concept of learning and achievement and progression on to the next stage. I think that foundation learning is an

envelope in which we can tailor the individual’s learning experiences to meet their needs, and at the end of it, we can use the building blocks of the qualifications that are in the foundation learning pathway to enable progression on to the next stage. We are not seeing it as restrictive; we are seeing it as quite enabling. We also think that we’ve got to get this one right, because we never have in the past. The business about the pre-entry, entry and Level 1 qualifications in the past, whether you were talking 14–16 or post-16, has never been addressed properly and never been used as a process that enables progression on to the next stage of learning. We think there is an opportunity within foundation learning and the packaging and all the different support funding that you can channel into it as well to make it something that is worth while.

Q290 Chairman: Are you worried about Entry to Employment being wound up?

Adrienne Carmichael: No, because I think we can place Entry to Employment programmes within the foundation learning package and make sure that youngsters progress at the end of it. Rather than using the 13 weeks as a constraint, as a limitation, use it as a building block, a springboard.

Q291 Ms Buck: Just looking at the September guarantee, is there enough money to implement it?

Judith Hay: We’ve had a very successful September and then January guarantee. The only problem we had with it was that it was initially for e2e and we didn’t need e2e. We had lots of it that was very successful, so we asked for flexibility.

Q292 Ms Buck: But you had the flexibility you needed?

Judith Hay: No. What happened was that we contacted the DCSF, who contacted the LSC, who said that we could have flexibility after anyone who has been for e2e gets it. So a very small sum was left. We wanted flexibility because we knew exactly what we needed in Sunderland and it wasn’t e2e. So we didn’t get it, no.

Ms Buck: So enough money, but not enough flexibility?

Judith Hay: Yes.

Adrienne Carmichael: I don’t think the September or January guarantee have any costs at all. You can offer tomorrow morning on the basis of what you’ve got available. That trick is making sure that you’ve got sufficient resource funding included to provide the personalised, collaborative support in order to access the right sort of provision for the individual. Obviously, the more personalised that is, the more expensive it is.

Q293 Annette Brooke: We have been hearing over and over on the Committee that the Connexions services vary widely between different local authority areas. Perhaps you could give some examples of good practice and how could that best practice be shared with other local authorities?

24 February 2010 Kostas Androulakis, Adrienne Carmichael, Judith Hay and Mark Sanders

Judith Hay: In terms of the target in Sunderland, that has very much been driven by Connexions with other partners. The absolute will in Sunderland from Connexions has been there. In terms of the data segmentation, the performance person who was put in Connexions has done it. She churned the data. We know how many 16, 17 and 18-year-olds we have. We know how many young mums we have. We have 80 at the moment who are NEET. We have eight mums-to-be. We know all the data, and that has been driven by the Connexions performance person. That leads to our NEETs analysis and our gap analysis. She also makes sure that the performance is there and the outcomes, rather than outputs, are evidenced. I think we have a really good model in Sunderland. It was already there; the bit we didn't have was the performance culture.

Adrienne Carmichael: We may be luckier in Cumbria than other parts of the country, because our Connexions service, our local authority and the Learning and Skills Council were all coterminous in terms of the boundaries. In Mark's neck of the woods, you've got a Connexions service that covers more than one local authority, and in the past there might have been lots of issues associated with different approaches to how the local authority wanted to see the Connexions service work within its patch. We were also lucky in that we were a 14–19 pathfinder from late 2002, and that meant right from the beginning that we had a commitment to a learner entitlement, the central part of which was the quality of independent provider information, advice and guidance. You might aspire to impartiality, but when you have groups of providers—schools and colleges—working together, that is really quite hard, and we needed to recognise that at the outset. So the independence of the advice and guidance that was provided was important. We think that there is good evidence that the fact that Cumbria Connexions has been committed to maintaining a universal service, and that it did that and didn't just talk about it, has contributed to us being able to keep the lid on our NEET issue.

Mark Sanders: In Greater Manchester, we have a member-led overarching body that oversees all the activities around 14–19s. Connexions is part of that, and some very practical issues follow there from. For example, there is a computerised tracking system that crosses the 10 boroughs—obviously, youngsters move, although we don't like them to. That system is standardised across the authorities to ensure we are able to follow through and continue to work with a youngster. Similarly, the body provides basic standards for information, advice and guidance, and oversees some of the employer engagement issues and a website that all the boroughs are able to access

and own in common. Having common standards and one resource that each of the authorities can look into enables best practice to be shared across borders.

Q294 Chairman: Kostas, surely you will go back to the research and say that local authorities historically weren't very good when they ran the career service. Why should we expect them to do it better now?

Kostas Androulakis: That is correct, but I think local authorities have moved over time in their delivery of services. There are a number of very interesting models of how best to achieve that that are being explored around the country. It is important, when you're making judgments about the Connexions service, to look at how the service has been established within the wider group of services in the local area. It is about sharing best practice not just in terms of what works, but in terms of setting up and delivering mechanisms locally, implementing those and working with schools. Once the Connexions services move within the local authority, there are a number of models we want to explore in terms of working closer with schools and our local providers.

Q295 Annette Brooke: Some people have suggested that Connexions should be broken up and just focus on NEETs, and Adrienne gave the contrary view to that. Do the other witnesses have any views on making it a more highly specialised service?

Judith Hay: No, we don't think it should be broken up. It provides excellent information, advice and guidance. It works in schools and with colleges, but it is impartial. We don't want it to focus just on the specialist end but on both universal, targeted and specialist and we want to make sure that it does that in a smart way, making sure in terms of the commissioning process that what it does is based on need—on whether it will make any difference. It is working differently—transformationally. We really value the independence and impartiality of its work.

Kostas Androulakis: I agree. I don't think there is scope to create another highly specialised service. There are opportunities for Connexions to work with highly specialised services when it needs to, to address specific outcomes.

Chairman: You all seem to be agreed on that. It has been a high-pressured session, because we didn't have very much time. I'm sure the team would agree that we would like a lot more time to extract even more information from you. Would you remain in contact with the Committee until we have finished this? I know you will think, "Why the hell didn't I ask this or that, and why didn't I tell them that?" Could we have that process? We have really enjoyed your evidence. Thank you.

Supplementary memorandum submitted by Bury Council

<i>Bury Council</i>	<i>2008–09</i>	<i>2007–08</i>	<i>2006–07</i>
% of 16–18 year olds who are not in education, employment or training	6.6%	6.5%	7.7%
% of 16–19 year olds with learning difficulties and/or disabilities in education, employment or training	79.4%	80.4%	73.3%
% of care leavers aged 19 in education, employment or training	81.4%	69.5%	Not available
% of teenage mothers aged 16–19 in education, employment or training	41.1%	34%	35.7%

No report on 2009–10 yet as the year does not end until 31 March 2010

March 2010

Memorandum submitted by Cumbria County Council**OVERVIEW**

The approach to reducing the numbers of young people not in education and training in Cumbria has been to see all the issues involved as inter-related. Consequently reducing NEET is not seen as an isolated “problem” but rather an integral part of the 14–19 strategy. If we achieve the Cumbria 14–19 Strategic Partnership’s vision of enabling all young people to choose to succeed this will have meant that early identification of potential disengagement and disaffection has worked right through to ensuring that those young people who disengage at a much later stage, for example during their undergraduate years at University, are supported and helped to find the right progression route for them as an individual.

Cumbria County Council, through its 14–19 Partnership, has a long track record of successful development and implementation of 14–19 reforms. Cumbria was one of the first 14–19 pathfinders 2003–05, worked with QCA as one of only three multi-pilot areas from 2006–07 and was the only rural local authority to be awarded Beacon status for 14–19 development in 2008–09.

The Cumbria 14–19 Strategy is focused on:

1. Securing universal access to the 14–19 learning and curriculum entitlement before 2013;
2. Securing an appropriate place in learning and progression up to the age of 19 for every young person by 2013;
3. Developing and embedding minimum quality standards for 14–19 provision across the partnership;
4. Establishing a robust commissioning framework to enable successful delivery of the 14–19 entitlement; and
5. Securing partnership based efficiency in collaborative delivery to provide value for money.

The county 14–19 Strategic Partnership is committed to and has responsibility for implementation of the 14–19 strategy and enabling the development of the collaborative provision in each area of the county. The focus is on enabling successful participation and progression for the individual. The partnership maintains the performance management framework that governs identification of priorities for development and targets for improvement, thereby ensuring all young people can access the Cumbria 14–19 learner entitlement. The five “travel to learn” Area 14–19 Partnerships have responsibility for implementation of overarching elements of the county strategy and further development, within the performance management framework, of local context specific initiatives and priorities which support delivery of a personalised curriculum to learners in their area. Each area has three key working groups, with membership at practitioner level, which drive participation and progression, namely: The Information, Advice and Guidance Development Group; The Personalised Curriculum Support Group; and The Inclusion/NEET Group

Cumbria is a county of contrasts. The popular external perception of Cumbria as synonymous with the Lake District and idyllic rurality belies a much more complex mix of settlements, lifestyles and policy priorities. It also hides significant levels of deprivation in Barrow and West Cumbria as well as pockets of deprivation across all main indices in rural parts of the county and Carlisle. 12 wards in Carlisle, Barrow and West Cumbria fall within the 10% most deprived nationally. The impact of this diversity can also be seen in other important performance indicators including those for educational participation, attainment and progression of young people. Whilst the county is in line with or above the national average on all the key indicators this masks pockets of underperformance which are not always attributed to traditional deprivation factors. Consequently lessons learnt from Cumbria initiatives and developments are

transferable to a wide range of local authority contexts and challenges. These range from the sparsely populated rural area to the isolated, semi-urban area with high levels of deprivation and a cultural antipathy to learning.

The 2009 data for Cumbria shows a continuing decrease at 4.6% of 16–18 year olds who are not in education, employment or training with a further 2.1% whose activity is not known. Although these figures are amongst the best nationally they mask variations between travel to learn areas and some specific issues with, for example, young people engaged in employment without training. The use of and access to data by the partner services that work most closely with young people in and with the potential to be in the NEET category is excellent. Access to data on real time participation and progression is a lot less secure being fragmented across providers and all too often delayed by validation requirements for performance management purposes. Cumbria's Raising the Participation Age Implementation Plan enables current work on NEET reduction and related developments, including those involving voluntary sector partners and AimHigher, to be given an added impetus and also support focus on addressing the specific issues facing the county and each area partnership in a systematic, planned manner.

Examples of local action to maintain high EET and prevent future NEET

Cumbria's approach is to address the barriers and challenges to full participation in each travel to learn area and to develop workable and sustainable solutions to secure better outcomes. Examples of the participation and progression activities in each travel to learn area include:

1. Carlisle Area—addressing high participation in employment without training by raising young people's aspirations and securing appropriate employer engagement in apprenticeships and training;
2. Eden Area—securing full participation in a very sparsely populated rural area by linking with the community development and coherence strategy;
3. Furness Area—continuing to develop the strategies for early identification and intervention for young people with the potential to disengage from learning by further developing integrated support services for long term improvements;
4. South Lakes Area—enhance and further develop current good practice in personalisation of the curriculum to secure continuation and successful completion in learning 16–18 and improve retention by 17 year olds; and
5. West Cumbria Area—further develop strategies to ensure match between curriculum offer and individual learner need ranging from early careers education and guidance (Year 6 in primary schools) to developing the Foundation Learning offer to secure progression opportunities.

Specific activity drawn from current good practice also seeks to secure progression and participation for targeted groups across the county, including:

1. Support for Looked after Children and Young Care Leavers from 13 years;
2. Pre and post natal support for Teenage Mums;
3. Continuing learning for Young Offenders; and
4. Securing progression for young people with learning difficulties and disabilities.

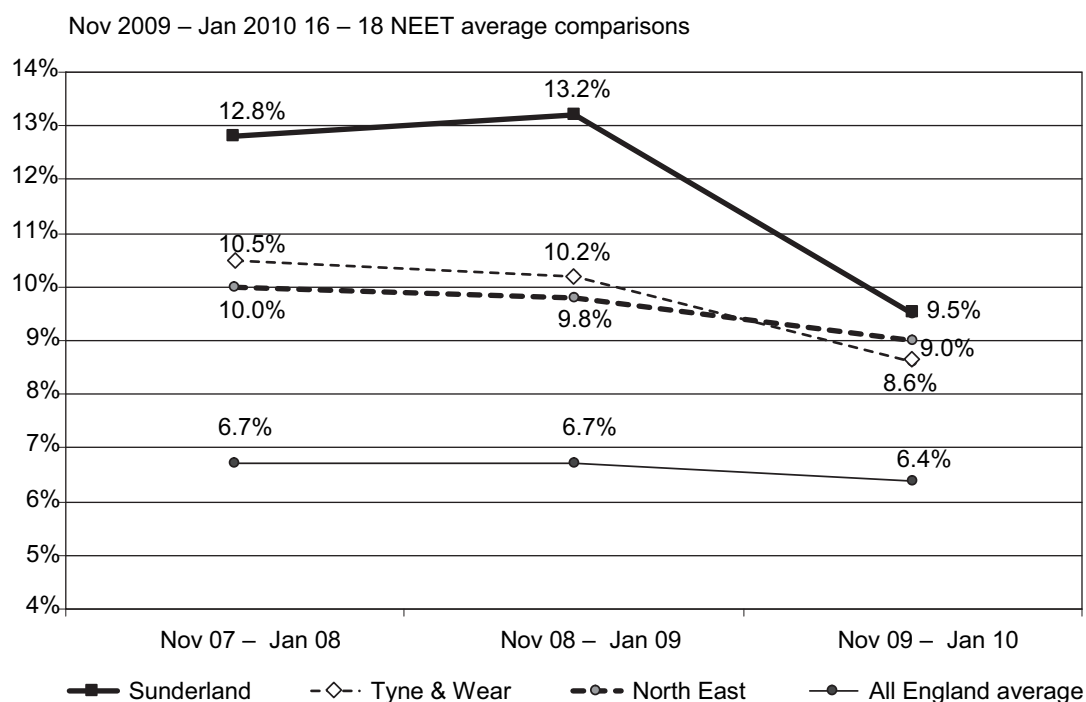
Single action that would help to sustain participation and progression for the long term?

Require all providers, including Local Authorities, of 14–19 education and training to opportunities to track the participation and progression of their learners up to age of 24. Easily said—very difficult to achieve under the current system.

March 2010

Memorandum submitted by Sunderland City Council**ADJUSTED NEET 16–18 DATA**

	<i>Nov 07–Jan 08</i>	<i>Nov 08–Jan 09</i>	<i>Nov 09–Jan 10</i>
Sunderland	12.8%	13.2%	9.5%
Tyne & Wear	10.5%	10.2%	8.6%
North East	10%	9.8%	9.0%
All England average	6.7%	6.7%	6.4%



<i>Sunderland 16–8 adjusted NEET</i>	<i>2007–08</i>		<i>2008–09</i>		<i>2009–10</i>	
	<i>Numbers of young people</i>	<i>Adjusted NEET %</i>	<i>Numbers of young people</i>	<i>Adjusted NEET %</i>	<i>Numbers of young people</i>	<i>Adjusted NEET %</i>
November	1,307	13.2%	1,319	13.3%	1,027	10.7%
December	1,215	12.7%	1,263	13.0%	894	9.7%
January	1,169	12.6%	1,262	13.3%	723	8.1%
3 month average (Nov/Dec/Jan)	1,230	12.8%	1,281	13.2%	881	9.5%

WHAT WE HAVE DONE DIFFERENTLY OVER THE LAST 12 MONTHS

Ownership of the NEET Agenda by all local partners—NEET is very much everybody's business—Local Strategic Partnership, City Council, 14–19 Strategic Group.

Utilising additional resources within Connexions and the wider Partnership.

Increased ownership of the NEET agenda by schools and the 14–19 education and work based learning providers and schools for ensuring young people begin the correct course and are supported to remain in EET by moving to another opportunity rather than dropping out.

For instance, a school for those young people with emotional and behavioural difficulties trained some staff at the College and a work based learning provider on the issues that some of their pupils face and how to support them. During year 11 the young people who are moving to the providers have regular visits so they are familiar with the new environment. They also allow the young people to return to school if a difficult situation arises or they are considering dropping out. This has improved the retention figures for these young people. This scheme is now replicated across another school and may be rolled out further.

Improved data sharing between partners to identify those who are at risk of being NEET or at risk of dropping out of provision so that they can be given the correct level of support by Connexions and other support staff.

Increased number of opportunities for young people on the wide variety of opportunities with a wide choice of providers and locations. Details of all opportunities received by Connexions from providers and passed onto young people.

Engagement of a wide range of partners in an Outcome Based Accountability “Turn the Curve” exercise that resulted in an action plan focused on what will make the difference to engage more young people in EET.

Involvement of Partners in case conferencing NEET clients to identify suitable provision and where required to tailor provision to suit specific needs.

Assessment and referral process between all providers and Connexions, with provider staff interviewing prospective learners in Connexions premises as well as their own.

Additional funding for an Engagement, Support and Prevention project in which young people who are in year 11 and at risk of being NEET or are already NEET are given one to one support to identify and address barriers to learning and supported until they progress. Partners arrange taster courses and bespoke provision for small groups and support them to progress into mainstream learning.

Additional provision through Working Neighbourhood Funding that offers supported apprenticeships and intermediate labour market opportunities.

Part of the Activity Agreement pilot which supports 16 and 17 year olds who have been NEET for more than 6 months or are vulnerable by having one to one support to identify and address barriers to learning. Actions are agreed, bespoke training is organised, and financial support is provided and if actions implemented a financial payment is made. Support is given for up to 20 weeks or until they move into EET. However, whilst on the programme they are NEET.

Positive Activities budget used to offer bespoke support and courses with progression routes built in.

Additional financial support in certain postcode areas that allows for bespoke training and support.

Increased opportunities available through Future Jobs Fund.

Support for young people financially and emotionally to attend interviews and start courses.

Robust monitoring of implementation of the September and January Guarantee.

Understanding of the NEET data by the 14–19 Partnership—what does success look like, geographical split, occupational choices, level of attainment, where are gaps in provision.

Understanding and review of where young people join the NEET group from so that issues with particular providers or support staff could be addressed.

Quality review of all NEET clients to identify process improvements and actions that could be taken to move young people on.

Improved data recording and scrutiny of records to ensure performance reported was accurate.

Implementing good practice from regional forums, publications and national conferences.

ACTIONS TO SUSTAIN AND IMPROVE THE CURRENT LEVEL OF PERFORMANCE

Continuing the support and involvement of key strategic partners.

Continuing the culture change—NEET is everyone’s business.

Focus resources on NEET preventative activity—identifying, supporting and providing additional programmes for young people at risk of being NEET.

Continue to reduce the “churn” by young people remaining in provision and being supported to find different provision without becoming NEET.

Expand the number of Apprenticeship opportunities available whilst at the same time absorbing the impact of the reduction in programme led apprenticeships.

Funding for some of the projects that have supported the improvement are coming to an end (ESP/WNF/ Back on the Map) and we need to mainstream the good practice identified whilst meeting the public sector efficiencies agenda.

Utilising existing funding streams fully with all partners so that expected reductions in public sector funding can be accommodated without impacting on NEET and service provided to young people. Use the learning from Total Place pilots.

Continue to offer young people appropriate learning opportunities to achieve their aspirations despite the expected cuts in the FE and HE sector and the reduction in places that this will entail.

Improve working practices and data sharing with Job Centre plus colleagues so that the Sunderland Partnership can support the delivery of the young persons guarantee.

Improve funding streams so that funding supports young peoples level of attainment and support requirements rather than being restricted due to timescales.

Implementation of the new Quality, Choices and Aspiration information advice and guidance strategy and the proposed pupil and parent guarantees.

Following through on all agreed actions and process improvements across the partnership.

Evaluate and improve the role of the NEET Panels.

Joining up activity of Youth and Adult Services—overcoming data sharing issues.

Develop further performance management and quality assurance arrangements within Connexions and other partners.

Reduction in the size of the 16–18 cohort.

Changing of responsibility for all 0–19 provision to the Local Authority.

Implementing changes required for raising the participation age.

Progressing those young people who refuse support or just want a job.

Group of young people to visit a similar geographical area to Sweden to share good practice.

Understand implications of reporting based on where educated compared to where resident (currently those who are educated in Sunderland or Sunderland residents who are in HE or NEET are reported rather than report the destination of Sunderland residents no matter where the educational institution is located).

ADDITIONAL DATA TO UNDERSTAND THE MAKE UP OF THE NEET GROUP IN SUNDERLAND

Details of NEET group as at 31 January 2010 for information

	Aged 16		Aged 17		Aged 18		16–18 Total	
Available to labour market	76	85%	240	81%	247	76%	563	79%
Not available to labour market	13	15%	58	19%	78	24%	149	21%
<i>Young carers</i>		0		2		4		6
<i>Teenage parents</i>		3		27		50		80
<i>Illness</i>		6		13		15		34
<i>Pregnancy</i>		2		12		6		20
<i>Other reasons</i>		2		4		3		9
Not knowns counted as NEET		0		2		9		11
					3,344			
Adjusted NEET Group total	89	12%	300	41%	12	46%	72,3161	

This includes 82 young people who are engaging with the Activity Agreement Pilot who are recorded as NEET despite the majority of them engaging in personal development opportunities.

Details of the EET group as at 31 January 2010 for information

	Aged 16		Aged 17		Aged 18		16–18 Total	
In education post year 11	1,482	82%	2,415	75%	1,877	62%	5,774	72%
Employment	101	6%	325	10%	771	25%	1,197	15%
Training	234	12%	465	15%	395	13%	1,094	13%
EET total	1,817	22%	3,205	40%	3,043	38%	8,065	

Geographical breakdown of 16–18 NEET as at 31 January 2010

<i>DH4</i>	<i>DH5</i>	<i>NE37</i>	<i>NE38</i>	<i>SR1</i>	<i>SR2</i>	<i>SR3</i>	<i>SR4</i>	<i>SR5</i>	<i>SR6</i>
8.5%	10.3%	8.7%	8.2%	13.2%	9.7%	8.3%	8.6%	10.9%	6%

Gender breakdown of 16–18 NEET as at 31 January 2010

	<i>Female</i>	<i>Male</i>
NEET available	43%	57%
NEET not available	78%	22%
Total NEET	52%	48%

Additional circumstances recorded as at 31 January 2010 (data relates to 16–19 not 16–18)

	<i>LAC</i>	<i>Care Leaver</i>	<i>Known to YOS</i>	<i>LDD</i>	<i>Young carer</i>	<i>Pregnant</i>	<i>Teenage parent</i>	<i>Teenage mother</i>
In Learning %	76.3%	64.4%	71.8%	68.9%	66.1%	21.4%	24.9%	22.2%
Adjusted NEET%	17.5%	21.4%	22.5%	13.5%	57.2%	61.4%	57.2%	61.3%
Cohort total	59	45	71	1,265	124	206	382	338

Length of time those recorded as NEET on 31st January 2010 have been NEET

	<i>NEET available</i>	<i>NEET not available</i>	<i>Total NEET</i>	
< 1 month	93	13	106	15%
1–3 months	118	17	135	19%
4–6 months	180	41	221	31%
7–9 months	88	23	111	16%
10–12 months	34	6	40	6%
> 12 months	50	49	99	13%
Total NEET	563	149	712	

16–18 NEET TURNOVER

Joiners to the NEET group

<i>Joining NEET from</i>	<i>Sept 2009</i>	<i>Oct 2009</i>	<i>Nov 2009</i>	<i>Dec 2009</i>	<i>Jan 2010</i>	<i>Total joiners in 5 months</i>	
Apprenticeships	11	10	15	9	8	53	6%
E2E/Work based learning	42	41	24	21	51	179	20%
Employment	12	21	13	17	25	88	10%
Gap Year	0	1	1	0	0	2	0%
Sixth form and FE College	124	52	62	16	39	293	32%
HE College	1	0	0	0	0	1	0%
School	95	2	0	2	2	101	11%
New Deal and other personal development opportunities	1	0	0	1	4	6	1%
EET total	286	118	115	71	129	719	
Unknown total	46	75	25	9	22	177	20%
Total joiners to NEET	332	193	140	80	151	896	

Leavers from the NEET group

<i>Leaving NEET from</i>	<i>Sept 2009</i>	<i>Oct 2009</i>	<i>Nov 2009</i>	<i>Dec 2009</i>	<i>Jan 2010</i>	<i>Total leavers in 5 months</i>	
Apprenticeships	41	27	42	5	24	139	10%
E2E/Work based learning	76	89	91	19	77	352	24%
Employment	57	71	61	24	36	249	17%
Sixth form and FE College	281	19	9	1	74	384	27%
HE	4	3	0	0	0	7	0%
School	1	0	0	0	0	1	0%
New Deal and other personal development opportunities	6	6	10	16	44	82	6%
EET total	466	215	213	65	255	1214	
Unknown total	6	7	71	96	54	234	16%
Total leaving NEET	472	222	284	161	309	1448	
NET leavers from the NEET group	140	29	144	81	158	552	140

March 2010

Monday 1 March 2010

Members present:

Mr Barry Sheerman (Chairman)

Ms Karen Buck
Mr David Chaytor

Mr Graham Stuart
Mr Andrew Pelling

Memorandum submitted by the Department for Children, Schools and Families

INTRODUCTION

1. It is the Government's aim that young people remain in education or training to get the skills and qualifications they need for further study and work. The Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) has embarked on an ambitious programme of 14–19 reform to ensure that every young person can find an opportunity that motivates them and to provide the support they need to progress. 16 and 17 year olds are guaranteed an offer of a suitable place in education or training through the September Guarantee and the January Guarantee for 2010, whilst the historic legislation passed in the Education and Skills Act 2008 will take this a step further by raising the participation age to 17 in 2013 and 18 in 2015.

2. Young people who are not in education, employment or training (NEET) are a particular concern. Not only are they failing to get the skills and qualifications they need to succeed, evidence shows that young people NEET between the ages of 16 and 18 are at risk of poor outcomes in later life, including adult unemployment, low wages and poor health. This is why DCSF has committed to reducing the proportion of 16–18 year olds NEET by two percentage points by 2010.

3. There were 208,600 16–18 year olds NEET at the end of 2008, 10.3% of the 16–18 year old population.¹ This is a snapshot figure and disguises the fact that the NEET group is far from static. Research shows that over one in six young people becomes NEET at some point in the two years following compulsory education, but only one in 25 is NEET for 12 months or more.² Reducing the number of young people NEET is therefore about preventing young people from becoming NEET in the first instance, as well as supporting those who are NEET to re-engage in work or learning.

4. The very diverse nature of young people NEET is reflected in *Investing in Potential*, the Government's strategy to increase 16–24 participation in education, employment and training. This shows how we expect services to work in partnership to deliver both the preventative agenda and clear action to help 16–18 year olds NEET make a sustainable return to work or learning through:

- prevention—intervening early to ensure those at risk of becoming NEET are given the support they need to remain engaged in learning;
- careful tracking—identifying early young people who are NEET, or at risk of becoming so, planning suitable provision and targeting intervention;
- personalised guidance and support—making sure young people know about the full range of participation options and are given the help they need to overcome any barriers;
- tailored provision—so that young people are able to access engaging and flexible learning provision that motivates and enables them to progress, regardless of where they live or their prior achievement; and
- clear rights and responsibilities—so that there is a clear balance of incentives and support to help young people engage in learning.

5. Local authorities lead on reducing NEET at local level, bringing together their responsibilities for young people through the 14–19 Partnership, Children's Trust and Local Strategic Partnership. There is a clear commitment to this challenge, with the NEET indicator the most frequently chosen indicator in Local Area Agreements. Funding for 16–18 education and training transfers from the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) to local authorities in April 2010 which means that for the first time, local authorities will have responsibility for all the levers—schools, Connexions, targeted youth support, education and economic development—for reducing NEET.

¹ Statistics on 16–18 year olds NEET are published annually in the Statistical First Release (SFR): Participation in education, training and employment by 16–18 year olds in England. Not all are unemployed; they may be experiencing illness, caring for a child or family member or taking a "Gap Year". ONS data on the number of young people who are ILO unemployed includes learners who are in full time education and who are seeking part time or holiday employment that they can combine with their studies.

² Youth Cohort Study and Longitudinal Study of Young People in England.

ISSUES IMPACTING ON THE LIKELIHOOD OF YOUNG PEOPLE BECOMING NEET

6. Young people who are NEET are a diverse group with wide ranging characteristics and needs. However, analysis shows that early experiences of education, attitudes and behaviours are key to explaining why some young people are more likely to become NEET than others:

- 36% of young people with no GCSEs are NEET at age 16, compared with just 2% of those with five GCSEs at grades A*–C;
- young people who make poor progress between Key Stages 3 and 4 are more likely to become NEET than those whose progress has been below average throughout their school career; and
- young people who engage in risky behaviours such as frequent drinking and anti-social behaviour.

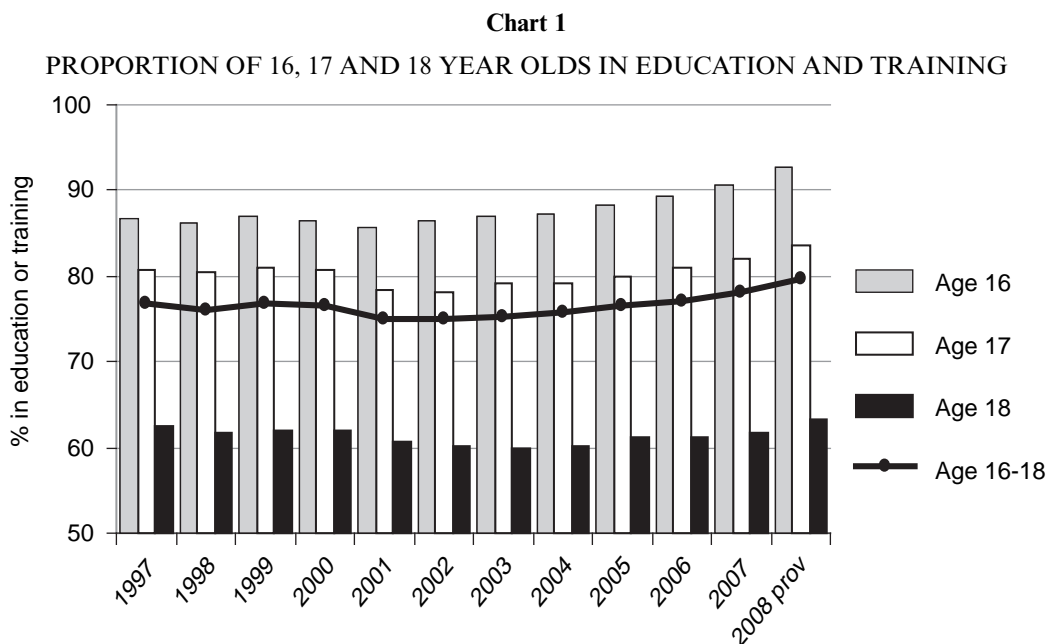
7. There are other groups of young people whose particular needs and characteristics place them at greater risk. This includes young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities who are twice as likely to be NEET as those without; young offenders and care leavers. Teenage motherhood is also a key factor, and it is estimated that 15% of 16–18 year olds NEET are either pregnant or a teenage mother.

8. But, the majority of young people NEET do not fall into any of the groups above, or fit the stereotypical image. 27% of 16 and 17 year olds who are NEET have achieved Level 2 or above, and this proportion rises to 45% at age 18.³ 44% of 16–17 year olds NEET state that the main reason for not being in work, education or training is that they are looking for suitable job or course, whilst a further 14% are waiting to start a job/course.⁴

RECENT TRENDS

9. Although the proportion of 16–18 year olds NEET has remained at around 10% over the last decade, the headline figures mask significant changes in the activity of young people and the age profile of those NEET.

10. The proportion of 16–18 year olds participating in education or training reached 79.7% by 2008, the highest ever rate. 16 and 17 year olds are most likely to be in education or training, with the proportion in learning at this age rising by 6% points since 2002 to 88% at the end of 2008. The proportion of 18 year olds in education or training has also risen sharply since 2004 and reached a record high of 63.4% at the end of 2008. Chart 1 below shows that participation levels began rising in 2002–03 when the economy was buoyant. Largely as a result of increased participation in learning, the proportion of young people in employment has fallen by 50% since 2000.



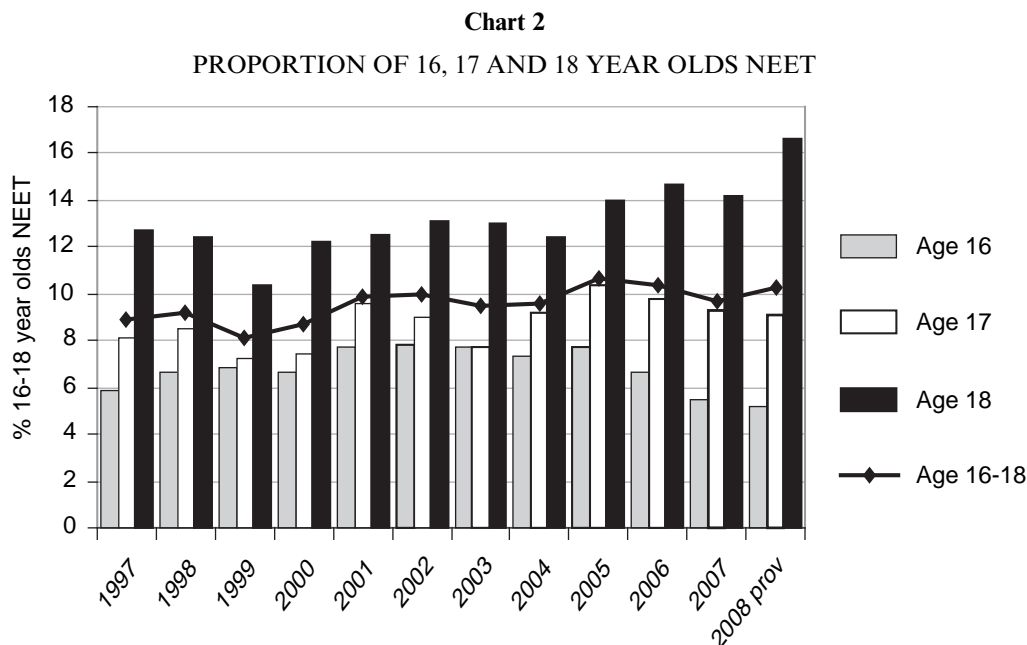
Source: SFR 12/2009

11. The increase in the size of the 16–18 population from 1.79 million in 2000 to 2.02 million in 2008 also makes the labour market more competitive for young people. Statistics over the last 30 years show a clear link between rising population levels and an increase in the proportion of young people NEET.

³ Youth Cohort Study and Longitudinal Study of Young People in England.

⁴ Labour Market Statistics, 2009 Q3.

12. The NEET statistics also mask very different trends at ages 16–17 and 18. The proportion of 16 and 17 year olds NEET fell in 2008 for the third consecutive year and at 16, the proportion NEET stood at 5.2% (34,000), the lowest level for more than a decade. However, the proportion of 18 year olds NEET rose to 16.6%. This led to an overall increase in 16–18 year olds NEET from 9.7% at the end of 2007 to 10.3% (208,600) at the end of 2008.



Source: SFR 12/2009

13. The global recession is having a significant impact on young people, but in comparison with previous recessions in the 1980s and 1990s, our key policy interventions, such as the New Deal and September Guarantee, have helped to ensure that we entered this downturn in a much stronger position. Compared to previous recessions;

- participation in full time education is significantly higher;
- a greater proportion of ILO unemployed young people are in full time education;
- the proportion of young people not in employment or full time education is lower;
- total youth claimant unemployment is lower; and
- long-term youth unemployment is much lower on both the ILO and claimant count measure.

14. Increasing participation is helping to lead to increased attainment amongst young people. The latest statistics⁵ showed that 2008 targets to improve Level 2 and Level 3 attainment by age 19 had been exceeded. The proportion who reached Level 2 by 19 rose by 10.4 percentage points between 2004 and 2008, from 66.4% to 76.7%—the equivalent of around 87,000 additional young people reaching this level.

IDENTIFYING YOUNG PEOPLE NEET OR AT RISK OF BECOMING SO

15. Connexions services maintain client databases (CCIS) to record young people's current activity, their needs and characteristics. The client record is updated on a regular basis either through individual contact or exchange of information with other services. Post-16 learning providers are expected to notify Connexions as soon as a young person leaves learning so that they can offer support to re-engage. The increased focus on client tracking, together with improved data sharing between agencies, has resulted in the proportion of young people whose activity is not known to Connexions reducing from 13.6% in 2003 to 4.6% in 2009.

16. Exchange of information with partner agencies is key to ensuring that CCIS records are as complete as possible, and DCSF has legislated through the 2009 Apprenticeships, Schools, Children and Learners Act to allow Jobcentre Plus to share basic details on 18–19 year old benefit claimants. DCSF is also exploring how best to develop the Connexions database to identify and support young people who are not participating in education or training when the participation age is raised in 2013.

⁵ DCSF: *Level 2 and 3 Attainment by Young People in England Measured Using Matched Administrative Data: Attainment by Age 19 in 2008*—<http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s000835/index.shtml>

SUPPORTING 16–18 YEAR OLDS TO PARTICIPATE

17. Policies to support 16–18 year olds to participate in learning and to ensure that those who are NEET are enabled to make a sustainable return to work or learning are key elements of both our NEET strategy and our preparations for the raising of the participation age. Whilst local authorities have overall responsibility for delivery, effective front-line action requires education, training and support services to work in partnership with one another, and with employers.

Preventing young people from becoming NEET

18. Factors affecting young people's participation often have their roots much earlier in their life. Over 3,000 Sure Start centres provide a strong network of health, education and childcare support around 2.4 million families. Family Intervention Projects are working with some of the most challenging families, helping them to tackle issues such as anti-social behaviour, school absenteeism and underlying inter-generational disadvantage.

19. Schools take the lead in preparing young people for their post-16 choices and intervening early to support those at risk of disengaging. Through Attendance and Behaviour Partnerships, the level of absence was reduced by 9.9 percentage points between 2002–03 and 2007–08. Innovative curriculum routes are being developed to help young people remain engaged, such as the Key Stage 4 Engagement programme, 85% of whose participants went on to a positive post-16 outcome.

20. The range of qualifications is being transformed through the 14–19 Reform Programme to offer four equal pathways—Apprenticeships, Diplomas, Foundation Learning and General Qualifications—to ensure that every young person has an option to engage and excite them. Good qualifications at 16 are a strong protection against becoming NEET, and provisional data shows that 50.4% of pupils achieved five A*–C GCSEs including English and Maths in 2009, 90,000 more than in 1997.

21. The September Guarantee of a suitable offer of a place in post-16 learning was introduced in 2007 for young people leaving compulsory education, and extended to 17 year olds in 2008 to ensure that those who had left learning or completed one-year courses had a further opportunity to continue their learning. Nearly 96% of 16 year olds (up from 94% in 2008) and 90% of 17 year olds received an offer under the Guarantee in 2009, and latest Connexions data shows a further significant rise in participation.

22. The September Guarantee approach is being extended to all 16 and 17 year olds who are NEET in January 2010 through an offer of a place on an Entry to Employment programme (the January Guarantee). This will provide a further opportunity to engage quickly in positive and productive learning.

Personalised guidance and support

23. The contribution of information, advice and guidance (IAG) to enabling participation is central to the Department's *Quality, Choice and Aspiration* published in October 2009. The strategy sets out expectations of a high quality service required to help all young people plan a smooth transition into post-16 education, training and work and avoid becoming NEET.

24. The transfer of responsibility for Connexions to local authorities has enabled local areas to embed the Targeted Youth Support approach, ensuring that the needs of more vulnerable young people are assessed through the Common Assessment Framework. Most areas have implemented the reforms and early evaluation shows that they have already succeeded in improving the way in which professionals deliver multi-agency support.

25. 18 and 19 year olds are able to access support from both youth and adult services, which enables them to approach the service they feel most comfortable with. Jobcentre Plus (in addition to advice on benefits) offers:

- group sessions for 18 year olds looking for work for the first time to give them an introduction to the local labour market and support with their CV and job search skills. We will explore extending these to 16–17 year olds to give an early introduction to the local labour market and skills needs;
- a new mentoring network to match young people with experienced adults to help find their feet in a tough jobs market. This will be available from early 2010; and
- give young people access to a dedicated personal adviser from day one of their unemployment claim, and more young people fast-tracked to the support available from six months.

26. Young people can access advice and information through Connexions Direct, the 14–19 area prospectus and a range of publications. This means easy access to details of all options to young people and their families and advisers.

27. Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA) is designed to encourage more young people from lower income households to participate in education or training. Payment is contingent on continued participation and for the first cohort of recipients in the national rollout, evaluation evidence suggests that an extra 18,000 more 16 year olds participated in full-time education than would have done so without EMA and an extra 16,000 participated at age 17. “First step” provision courses for those NEET are in scope for EMA.

28. Discretionary Learner Support Funds are available to school sixth forms and colleges to provide help to young people experiencing financial difficulty, whilst Care to Learn provides essential support for teenage parents by helping them to meet the costs of childcare. Recent evaluation shows that over 70% of recipients would not have been able to engage in learning without it.

Tailored Provision

29. DCSF is investing nearly £8billion to deliver more than 1.5 million learning places and financial support for 16–18 year olds in 2009–10. But as young people will only participate in education or training if they can find a place that meets their needs and aspirations, there must be a choice of provision at every level, offering a range of subjects and learning styles, and which is sufficiently flexible to meet individual needs. This includes part time and flexible start dates. Funding and responsibility for commissioning post-16 provision passes from the LSC to local authorities in April 2010, providing a unique opportunity to match the supply of provision more closely to the demand from both young people and the local labour market.

30. 27% of 16 and 17 year olds NEET have no recorded qualifications. A new suite of Foundation Learning qualifications is being developed to enable learners who are not yet ready to learn at Level 2 to follow tailored learning programmes at a pace that meets the needs of the learner and enable progression to higher levels of learning. Entry to Employment (E2E) is a key programme for helping young people who are NEET back into learning and 20,000 new E2E places have been made available this year with a Community Service element to enable young people to combine their learning with practical experience in their communities. E2E will be delivered through the Foundation Learning route from 2010.

31. Many young people learn better in the workplace. The National Apprenticeships Service (NAS) was launched in April 2009 and will focus on engaging with employers to secure good quality apprenticeships, including for 16–18 year olds. The NAS will also provide 5,000 subsidies to employers by March 2010 to support them to take on 16 and 17 year olds as Apprenticeships.

32. 18 year old Jobseekers have had fast track access to the New Deal, on a voluntary basis, since April 2008. Fast tracking up to the six month point of the New Deal has been mandatory for 18 year old jobseekers who have already built up a six month period of NEET since April 2009 and around 16,000 18 year olds had benefited from this by September. Alongside the Backing Young Britain campaign, DCSF is also working with DWP to extend the support specifically targeted on young people seeking work during the recession, including:

- the young person’s Guarantee of a job through the Future Jobs Fund, work-focused training or a work experience place delivered through the community task force;
- internships to support non-graduates to gain practical work experience; and
- access to work trials from the first day of their claim for 18–24 year olds from disadvantaged groups.

Clear rights and responsibilities

33. The measures outlined above will only work effectively where young people see the value of reengaging in education, employment or training and take responsibility for their own participation.

34. The Activity Agreement and Entry to Learning Pilots are exploring the most effective and efficient way to support vulnerable young people to reengage through support from a trusted adult, tailored provision and a financial incentive. Compared to a control group, the independent evaluation of the first phase of the Activity Agreement pilots showed that this approach generated a 13 percentage point shift in outcomes, away from non-activity or jobs without training and towards education and work-based learning. The lessons learned from this approach will inform the development of the Learning and Support Agreement which will help young people who are not in learning to engage when the participation age is raised.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

35. The economic downturn is having a significant impact on young people’s participation, but in comparison with previous recessions in the 1980s and 1990s, our key policy interventions have helped to ensure that we entered this downturn in a much stronger position. The New Deal for Young People had virtually eradicated long-term youth claimant unemployment whilst the September Guarantee had helped to ensure record levels of participation in learning amongst 16–17 year olds.

36. Since the start of the downturn, we have taken decisive steps to strengthen existing provision and put in place new support for young people, but we recognise that we need to go even further and that is why we set out in *Investing in Potential* significant additional support to engage young people aged 16–24 in education, employment or training. These additional measures will help us to use this recession as an opportunity to raise young people's skills levels so that we emerge from it with a young, skilful and dynamic workforce ready to contribute to and benefit fully from the upturn.

December 2009

Witnesses: **Mr Iain Wright MP**, Minister for 14–19 Reform and Apprenticeships, and **Chris Heaume**, Chief Executive, Central London Connexions, gave evidence.

Q296 Chairman: I welcome the Minister and Chris Heaume. Chris, do you pronounce your surname "Heem" or "Hume"?

Chris Heaume: "Hume".

Chairman: That is even more complicated than Douglas-Home, who pronounced his name "Hume".

Chris Heaume: Or the cardinal.

Q297 Chairman: And the cardinal, yes. We usually give Ministers a chance to say a few opening words, or we can go straight into questions. Which would you prefer, Minister?

Mr Wright: Can I mention two or three points? First, I welcome this short, sharp inquiry on an incredibly important issue. Obviously, there has been the backdrop of a massive global recession, which has had a major impact on employment levels. In terms of what the Government have done to respond to that, I would mention the short-term policy response and the longer-term policy response. The short-term response included things such as the September Guarantee, the January Guarantee and the Young Person's Guarantee, which have had huge successes, particularly for 16 and 17-year-olds and their participation in education, but there are still challenges in the transition at 18. We also need to look at the longer-term policy responses, which incorporate most of my brief as the 14–19 Reform Minister. It means making sure that we have a diverse, personalised and flexible curriculum offer for people, regardless of where their interests lie, and making sure that we can raise the participation age so that we can keep people engaged in training and education up to 18 and beyond. It also means making sure that we have good information, advice and guidance so that people may make the right career choices at appropriate times in their lives. I am satisfied that we have the vision right. I think some of the things that we have put in place have been very positive, but I await your questioning with interest.

Q298 Chairman: Thanks for that, Minister. One of the things that we have picked up in this short inquiry is of course that here we are with the statistic suggesting that we have done better for 16 and 17-year-olds because we have kept more young people in some form of education or training, but the figures have risen at 18. If you are looking at 10.3% who are in that NEET category, it seems that there has been

partial success in that early period. But on delivering more young people at 18 into unemployment, what is the answer to that?

Mr Wright: I think it is fair to say that the rise in education participation has been offset by the decline in employment opportunities to some extent. We've got very successful policies in place, and in respect of 16 and 17-year-olds the wider point about raising the participation age is important as well. We are not churning people out at 16 and 17, and we don't then want to get them out at 18 to be unemployed. The whole point of what we are trying to do in policy is to make sure that we have well-skilled, enterprising, resilient young people who can address the challenges of the economy that we find ourselves in at the moment. Can I mention another thing? I don't think we can put the flags out yet in terms of 18-year-olds, but Thursday's announcement with regard to NEETs was positive. It showed 18-year-olds coming down. Statistically, we can class that technically as insignificant, but it is a step in the right direction, and shows that a lot of our policy is working.

Q299 Chairman: There is no doubt that there has been some real progress, and we can see that from the information we have been given, but when you look at all this stuff, there is a plethora of policies, and bits and pieces. It is confusing for this Committee, which is quite experienced at looking at this stuff. It must be tremendously confusing for young people out there, and for the people we have had in here this afternoon—the people from Fairbridge, the Hub and other organisations that help young people in the NEET category. Why isn't there any overarching policy? We recently went to Holland—to the Netherlands—where they seem to have a grip on this. First of all, they keep young people in education until 18. Between 18 and 27 you have to be either in work or in education and training. There are no ifs and buts about that right through to 27. Why haven't we got an overarching policy for young people in this category that is like the Dutch one?

Mr Wright: I disagree with you. I think we do. I mentioned two things. One is the 14–19 reform, for which I have responsibility, which puts in place what I think is a personalised and flexible offer whether you are interested in the so-called traditional, so-called academic subjects—GCSEs and A-levels—or if you are not that way inclined, you've got opportunities in terms of diplomas and apprenticeships. For people who need a hand in

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getting to Level 2, we've got foundation learning. Amid all that, we're raising the participation age, so we will be like some of our European neighbours in terms of raising the participation age to 18—something that is long, long overdue. It was first talked about around a century ago, and we are now putting it in place. We have got that, and I think it will provide a degree of resilience for any future economic downturn. We can't be completely immune from a global recession—of course we can't—but I think it gives young people the resilience that they need. The second thing that I would mention is in terms of a more joined-up offer from Government. You will be aware of "Investing in Potential"—the 16–24 participation strategy that we announced late last year. It is a very clear joint strategy between us, DWP and BIS. For the first time ever, we've got a strategy across Government to deal with this. I think that's a very positive step, and one of the key themes within that strategy is the element of partnership. That is true not just in central Government; it is true in local government also. I think we're on the right lines there.

Q300 Chairman: But Minister, we've had evidence today from young people in that age group. They've got friends who just don't do anything. They don't work. They don't learn. They take the minimal benefit they can get, and stay at home, or get into drugs or the black economy. Why, after nearly 13 years in Government, isn't there a policy that makes young people in that category have an opportunity to do something with their lives?

Mr Wright: I think we have got that and we are putting it in place. Thanks to the improving performance of Connexions—we will hear from Chris later—and that sort of data capture, the interrogation of where those young people, NEETs, are and putting in place a personalised offer to deal with them is very much our vision. I would say that that is exactly the road we are travelling along.

Q301 Chairman: We like the personalised offer, but why is it that we allow young people to just do nothing? Why are you so disinterested, it seems, in the Dutch experience, which says that they have to do something, even if it is learning English for new immigrants or learning a skill? They cannot take benefit without doing something. Why in this country in 2010 can we not have a system that challenges people to do something with their lives rather than moulder with nothing?

Mr Wright: I think we have those rights and responsibilities. That is a key part of what we've done in "Investing in Potential". It is a key part of the allowance system we have. In terms of the financial support we've got, Education Maintenance Allowance, which provides up to £30 a week for people, is a something-for-something offer. If you don't attend or your behaviour is not up to patch, it stops. There are other things, such as the activity agreement pilots, which are very interesting and are really helping to raise participation among young people. Again, that involves a Connexions Personal Adviser and a young person sitting down to see what

needs to be put in place, perhaps for a 20-week period. Again, the objectives are monitored. I think we have got those rights and responsibilities. I understand that you have been to the Netherlands. A lot can be said for what is in place there, but there are also unforeseen consequences. For example, many more young people are claiming that they're disabled in order to avoid this. I think there are also a lot more people going underground, as it were, and going away from the official statistics. We have to be careful and the balance in policy, as you are aware, is to make sure we can have every young person engaged in something meaningful to them and that they can fulfil their potential.

Q302 Chairman: You know that when the participation age decision was made for 2013 and 2015, I called on the Government to set up a commission to find out what we will do with these young people in 2013 and 2015, particularly the young people who are more difficult to place in education and training. Is anything going on in the Department to look at that?

Mr Wright: Yes. I will mention two big things that I think are very important. In December, just before Christmas, we produced a toolkit to help advise local authorities and key stakeholders on what they need to be doing with regard to moving towards 2013 and 2015. The 11 pilots we have in place up and down the country are also very important. There are three themes to do with the challenges with implementing RPA, which are NEETs, information advice and guidance, and local solutions. There are different places up and down the country. I am particularly interested in the Greater Manchester pilot, in which the local authorities that make up Greater Manchester are coming together to see if there is a sub-regional element. It is looking at all those themes. That is important and we will learn a lot from these pilots.

Chairman: Okay. Graham?

Q303 Mr Stuart: I have asked various Ministers this question. Before the credit crunch hit, there were 10 years with basically no movement in the number of NEETs in this country. What is your analysis of that? We have been trying to find the answer. There was genuine commitment and spending, and a lot of effort was put into challenging disadvantage, and yet that did not seem to lead to any change. Is that because the labour market for young people changed or because the policies didn't work? How do we understand what happened before we even got to the credit crunch, when the numbers went up again?

Mr Wright: At a very simplistic level, we have more young people. We have something like a 13% increase in the number of young people, from about 1.8 million in 1997 to over 2 million now. We are absorbing more young people into the system. As other witnesses have said in evidence, the 10% bumping along the bottom for the last 10 or 12 years has masked a range of other things. We have mentioned 16 and 17 participation, which is at an all-time high. Eighteen-year-olds are an issue, and a key

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element of this “Investing in Potential” document is making sure that we can help them manage the transition. One key thing that we should identify is that there are various risky points along a young person’s journey, whether it is pre-16, 16–18 or 18 and onwards, and 18 is a particularly risky point. We are putting in place a range of measures to deal with that. Yes, the economic recession has had a major impact, as it has in all industrialised nations across the world. We are doing an awful lot, and I am pleased with things such as the September Guarantee; it is early days with regard to the January Guarantee, but, again, we are putting a lot in place. So what has happened does mask an awful lot.

Q304 Mr Stuart: So what does it mask? That’s what we are trying to understand. In terms of policy criticism, we’ve heard that we’ve had a huge number of initiatives, some of which have been very short-lived, with people churning through programmes, getting a job, going on a programme and being flicked out again. As the Chairman suggested, it does not feel like there’s been an overarching strategy, let alone a continuum of policy support for some of them. Would you recognise that criticism as valid?

Mr Wright: No, I don’t recognise that. I would cite—

Q305 Mr Stuart: Not even a little?

Mr Wright: No, I wouldn’t. In the last five or six years, we’ve seen a structural change in society and the economy. Before, in my generation, you finished education at 16, but we’re moving away from that now to a growing recognition that 18 is a more sensible point at which to finish participation. I look at the evidence a lot, and what struck me is that the single biggest predictor of being NEET is educational attainment in year 11. If you’ve got five good GCSEs, the chances are you’re not going to be NEET. Some of the statistics are quite remarkable. The five good GCSEs are incredibly important and tell me a number of things. One is that the Government’s emphasis on raising standards is vital.

Q306 Mr Stuart: So why hasn’t it come through? That’s what we are trying to understand. There’s been the will, it’s been quite a long time, but the numbers have, if anything, moved the wrong way.

Mr Wright: Because we also have to be mature and say that GCSE is not the answer for everybody. Sometimes—we have this in our constituencies—12, 13, 14, 15-year-olds are disengaged from the system. The other thing that strikes me from looking at the evidence is that if you can predict at 16 who will be NEET, you will know a lot earlier where the problems lie. That comes back to my point about the 14–19 reform strategy, which is making sure that other things are in place, such as Apprenticeships and Diplomas. Those can really engage and enthuse young people, and that will reduce their chances of becoming NEET.

Mr Stuart: Can I bring Chris in?

Chris Heaume: Alongside all that, we’ve been putting into place massive structural change in the system. We’re seeing the impact of that now. I read

transcripts from last week’s meetings, where several local authorities told you what a vast change they’d seen in their NEET levels, which have gone down from 14 or so to eight or nine.

Chairman: Some.

Chris Heaume: That’s right, some. We’re learning how to do this bit by bit. Probably about two thirds of the boroughs that I’ve counted have gone quite drastically in a different direction, but others face other situations locally that prevent that from happening. We’ve seen the changes that have taken place as a result of structural change. We are plotting and tracking young people from age 14 very specifically and individually right through. We’ve now got a very proactive approach to supporting them when they get to 16 and they are not in learning. At 15, if they have no learning plan, we know that there’s the September Guarantee and the intended destination. If they have no offer, we’re there with them getting things right, and we see the changes.

Q307 Mr Stuart: Okay, I hear you. Perhaps I’m just flogging a dead horse—it certainly feels like it, because no one wants to answer the question. A lot of effort has been put in and a lot of money has been spent, but we didn’t see any movement, and I’m trying to tease out why. It is in the nature of sitting on a select committee that people tell you that things weren’t so good a few years ago, but that they’re a lot better now. When you don’t see any movement, their optimism seems to be belied by the facts. We want to believe that we really will make a difference to people who are left with no opportunity. Everyone has always been able to sit there and tell us about new initiatives that sound great, but if we don’t understand what went wrong before, how will we understand what will really make a difference in the future? We’ve had the Minister tell us that there has not been a plethora of ill-conceived initiatives that have not been joined together—it has all been great—so we can’t look there. Are you able to disagree with him and say that perhaps there should have been fewer initiatives and better follow-through?

Chris Heaume: I can say that up until the age of 18, we have young people very thoroughly tracked and supported. We’ve seen NEET levels come down in central London, in seven very complex boroughs, from 4,000 to 1,700. That’s a vast difference, from 14% to 5.6%—a huge difference—and it has been sustained and is even coming down more rapidly than announced previously. Those structures are starting to pay off. We have not got them in place yet for 18 and 19-year-olds, but we’re now working with and have resources to work with the Jobcentre Plus side of things so that we will have similar partnership work that will enable the same thing to happen there. That’s the situation at the moment.

Q308 Mr Stuart: We have seen progress at 16 and 17, but the numbers at 18 have deteriorated marginally. How do we know that we won’t just push the problem to 19?

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Chris Heaume: We know all the young people aged up to 18. When they get into the Jobcentre Plus regime, we are not allowed to share data.

Chairman: You're not allowed to share data. We've heard this before.

Chris Heaume: We are allowed to share aggregate data. Very shortly, we will finally have a solution—it has taken some time to achieve—that will help us to share data.

Mr Wright: The Act that will allow that to take place got Royal Assent last year. There has been a real barrier to Connexions and Jobcentre Plus having good, shared services and information. The Act identified that and will be sorting it out.

Q309 Mr Stuart: Again, on the positives, we have seen increases in participation rates among young people in both education and in employment at one level—I can't get my maths right here—but we have also seen an increase in the unemployment rate for 16 to 18-year-olds. We have greater participation in education but at the same time a higher rate of unemployment. What has been so difficult about helping young people make the transition from education to employment?

Mr Wright: I would disagree with that analysis, to some extent. The idea that we can be immune from the global forces of the world economy is wrong.

Q310 Mr Stuart: Let's pretend it's 2007. Then we don't have to rehearse continually that there is a global recession and the rest of it.

Mr Wright: But when demand in the global economy falls off a cliff—Britain is a trading nation—young people at the start of their employment who don't have the skills and experience that others might have will be disproportionately hit, to some extent. It could be an element of last in, first out. The trick is to avoid the messages of previous recessions and to ensure that they get back into education, employment or training very quickly. The evidence that we have from this recession is quite encouraging. There has not been the long-term unemployment that we saw in previous recessions, which can blight communities like ours, Mr Chairman, for decades. It is important that stakeholders such as schools, colleges, training providers, Connexions and Jobcentre Plus work together in partnership in order to make sure that if people fall out of the job market or education, they can go back in fairly quickly.

Q311 Mr Stuart: In our first session with some academics, it was said that if this were 20 years ago, we would have a much better understanding of the youth employment market than we do today. Therefore, in some ways, it may not necessarily be that Government policies have failed, but that there have actually been some big changes in the employment market—they might partly be to do with immigration, or with other issues—that have made it harder, and that if it had not been for Government policies, things would have been a lot

worse than they are now. Do you have any intention to do more to increase our understanding of the youth labour market? Because, as was said in that first session, without understanding that side of things, we're sitting here making out that there is a problem with young people—if only they were educated more—when actually many of them may be capable but there simply are not the jobs any more. We need to understand that in order to ensure that they have a chance.

Mr Wright: The Department last year produced what I think is a very interesting and important study on the characteristics of young people who were NEET and also the characteristics of young people who were in jobs without training—that segments different parts.¹ I think that has helped an awful lot. It certainly shaped my thinking when I was pulling together with ministerial colleagues the 16 to 24 participation strategy. You will know, Mr Chairman, the idea that we talk about this 10% group as if it were some sort of homogeneous group. It's not. That's far from being the case, and it will be different in local areas. The study that the Department produced has really helped that.

Q312 Mr Stuart: But that's the whole point. That's about them. That's focusing on the young NEET people rather than the context in which they have to try and seek employment, pursue education and so on. I forgot which academic told us that we do not have the same understanding of that context that we used to have. I suppose this is a request to you, Minister, to consider commissioning further research to ensure that we have a continuous picture and understanding of the context in which Connexions and these young people are having to operate.

Mr Wright: One of the really exciting opportunities within the machinery of government—that's not a phrase I thought I'd ever use, Mr Chairman—is the marrying up of commissioning for young people from birth to 19 and for learners with difficulties and disabilities up until the age of 25, and also the economic duty. What does that local authority want to produce in terms of the economic vision for their area? That marrying up together, I think, can provide a lot of the data and policy solutions that Graham is suggesting.

Q313 Chairman: Can we go back to one throwaway line of yours, Minister, about not sharing data with Jobcentre Plus? A lot of my constituents and people out there who pay their taxes would say, "What on earth has been going on that Jobcentre Plus wouldn't share their data?" In parallel, the other inquiry that we're finishing before the election, we hope, is on children's centres and Sure Start. There we have the problem that the health people won't share their data with the Department for Children, Schools and Families. What is going on when government departments don't share data?

¹ See Ev 140–41

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Mr Wright: The principal requirement and barrier to that was concern over data protection. I think we've overcome that through the legislation that has recently been passed. Chris can tell you what's happening on the ground in terms of making sure that Connexions and Jobcentre Plus work much more fully and in co-operation together, but we're starting to see the tentative feelings of good joint working and shared services between Connexions and Jobcentre Plus.

Chris Heaume: We used to struggle to share data with social services, but as the Departments merged and we have got a holistic Department of Children, Schools and Families now, that is overcome. We are getting those relationships across other departments too. Our work with Jobcentre Plus has gone ahead in leaps and bounds since the latest policy at the end of last year. We're really pushing from our angle and from the Jobcentre Plus angle, too. There's so much willingness. We had in central London one area office that has always been good at working with us and another one that found it difficult to work with us. We've now got excellent relationships with all offices. Staff are co-staffing each other's agencies. There is joint training. Even more importantly, there's joint advice sessions pre-18 and post-18 for young people that we're staffing between us. When we've embedded those relationships, we'll start to see the fast-tracking of young people and, more importantly, the support that we take through in place in the Jobcentre Plus regime, where support hasn't always been possible to provide in the same way. We heard earlier how young people really value that individual, personalised support. That's what we want to put into their Jobcentre Plus activities.

Chairman: Thank you for that, Chris. We're moving on.

Q314 Ms Buck: Minister, in your introductory comments you talked about rights and responsibilities and said that the Education Maintenance Allowance was something that is on the right side of the equation. But we heard from some young people this afternoon that there were young people in continuing education courses on EMA who were living independently and who were ending up, as a consequence, because they had to contribute towards their living costs, effectively living on £5 a week, whereas others on jobseeker's allowance were able to get not a lot of money, but significantly more money. How does that operate as an effective incentive?

Mr Wright: In very simplistic terms, you don't tend to get benefits below the age of 18. But there are exceptional circumstances in which that is no longer the case. Living independently and alone could be one of those. What I would expect to see happening on the ground is good information, advice and guidance, again through Connexions, working together closely with Jobcentre Plus.

Ms Buck: They've had all the advice. They just didn't have the money.

Mr Wright: They should not be on EMA then. They should be on benefits² if they are 16 or 17 and having to deal with other circumstances. You bring out an important point, Karen. Sometimes we think about education over here, and the rest of the young person's life over there. That should not happen. For teenage parents, care to learn and so on there should be an holistic approach: what is happening in the rest of your life that can help you come together with a viable offer for education or training?

Q315 Ms Buck: That is absolutely right, but it strikes me not just from this afternoon's session but from all the young people I have known over the years who fall into this group that a disproportionate number of them are exceptional cases. That is almost the point. They are often in the NEET category because something has or many things have gone wrong in their education and their lives. Once you start unpacking the circumstances they are in always trapped in all kinds of personal, emotional, financial and educational disadvantages. Yet what they say to you, apart from the lucky few who have found truly inspirational mentors at Connexions or whatever, is that no one is actually taking that holistic approach to their problems.

Mr Wright: I think the key point is trying to make sure that everybody has access to that personal adviser. In a former life we used to discuss and fight over housing. The idea of being able to go to college or work if you don't have good, suitable accommodation is fanciful. So having that personal adviser who can look at a whole range of different things is so important.

Q316 Ms Buck: I totally agree with that, but I what I am trying to get at is that there are a lot of structural problems that are not susceptible to good advice. We had this young person today on EMA with no money. I was dealing with a young woman recently who blew it in year 11. She was a very bright girl but she was not allowed to take her GCSE retakes anywhere. There was no college anywhere in central London that allowed her to retake her GCSEs, so she was permanently stuck because the college requirements would not let her do it. I don't know whether anyone is properly auditing a whole range of these benefits and access, because these practical difficulties seem to be acting as rigid barriers. It was not that young people around here were saying, "We just didn't get it together and now we are starting to get it together." They were all coming up with very practical problems: financial disincentives and lack of access.

Mr Wright: It is not going to be the magic wand but a key benefit will be the machinery of government changes when, from 1 April, local authorities have that responsibility to commission services. That will

² *Note by witness:* Young people who are estranged and therefore supported through the benefit system can claim EMA in addition to those other benefits. Receipt of EMA is on top of those and does not affect them. The appropriate benefit for such a young person who is in learning is Income Support rather than JSA. Young people on JSA, who move into learning need to switch to Income Support. Estranged young people will be eligible for maximum EMA as well.

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help an awful lot in identifying these people and making sure that you have that wraparound system of support, taking into account not just education, but other benefits and housing. I do not think we will be able to get the flags out on 2 April, but working towards that we will be able to overcome some of the practical and administrative barriers.

Q317 Ms Buck: If they are going to lay off 25,000 people we probably will not see that implemented in any meaningful way.

Mr Wright: I have seen the reports today as well. Local authorities are autonomous bodies. They have responsibility to make sure that they have good, decent services for local residents while at the same time providing value for money for the council tax payer. How they do that and how they administer that is up to them.

Q318 Ms Buck: If this is a discretionary service it's not going to happen, is it? It's going to vanish into the mist.

Mr Wright: You say a discretionary service. One of the things I have been really pleased about concerns local area agreements. Local authorities are criticised for an awful lot of things, but facing up to this agenda about tackling NEETs—knowing that if they invest now they can save huge amounts in terms of social and economic costs for decades to come—117 local authorities have put NEETs as a key priority. It is the single biggest national and local indicator. That gives me great hope that when people are thinking about potential job cuts, this area might not be one of them.

Q319 Ms Buck: Just looking at the issue about early intervention, again you made some mention of the fact that it's quite possible, in many cases, to identify who is likely to be NEET and there are clear correlating factors such as not having a GCSE. Correlating with that is a particular drop in performance between Key Stages 3 and 4. Perhaps Chris could answer this. What specific measures and what resources are going into place in schools to help them to identify and then turn around young people who are at risk of that educational drop at that critical point?

Chris Heaume: We start working with schools in year 8 and then move forward up to year 11. That assessment process is in place, shared between the pastoral system and ourselves. People are referred out to us if they need a range of support. If they simply need academic support, the school will put that in place. The September Guarantee is where we start to measure their readiness to progress, and if they're not ready to progress and don't have a proper plan, that very systematically, individual by individual, triggers additional guidance so that we can get in and support them. The new duties on schools for tutorial processes, a tutorial curriculum and tutorial staff will also start to enhance that. That is something we will really welcome. It's going to enhance the pastoral support available for young people. The learning support systems in place are

strong. There are still young people who surprise us when they get further down the road where perhaps other things go wrong.

Q320 Ms Buck: That sounds incredibly positive. I don't want to pop the balloon, but if it is all so good, how come a third of young people leave school with no GCSEs at all—no A-Cs?

Chris Heaume: Yes, there are some schools that through 14–19 approaches are trying very many different things. A lot of young people are now studying outside school for at least two days a week and sometimes a much greater portion of the week in Key Stage 4. I've even heard of re-engagement programmes in Key Stage 3 having a much wider range of support available in skills development. Those are starting to pan out and have an effect.

Mr Wright: My earlier remarks, Karen, were that I think it's right that we try to raise attainment in GCSEs—that's important—but GCSE is not the full answer. I mentioned the other different routes within the 14–19 area. Let me give you a quick anecdote. I've had this experience, as everybody will have. I went to see a residents meeting in the summer and spoke to a woman who had a 13-year-old boy who was bored stiff with school. He was not a bad lad, by any stretch of the imagination, but he didn't want to be in the classroom setting. He had started to play truant and she was worried that this was the time when he was going to go off the rails. He wanted a job in construction and I was asked, "What can we do?" My vision for what would happen is that that young lad, at 13, would start to be identified as playing truant and would be brought in for people to talk to. It would be found out that he wanted to do construction and maybe he would even be going into an FE college and getting work experience at the age of 13 or 14 to get him back on track. It's not beyond the realms of possibility that he would be saved and have a really productive life. It's just that that classroom setting wasn't for him. One of the great beauties of the 14–19 reform is that we can have personalised flexible pathways for different individuals.

Q321 Ms Buck: The last question from me is on young people going into jobs without training and the very high correlation, again, between NEETs and going through that mill of being in work without training. Will the employment guarantee also include jobs without training, or will that be conditional on there being a training dimension?

Mr Wright: No, you're right: it needs to be conditional on the training dimension, certainly up until the age of 18. Again, as part of the report I mentioned earlier that the department commissioned and published last year, we addressed not only the issue about NEETs, but the issue about jobs without training. Again, the segmentation of that is really interesting: 48% of the people identified as in jobs without training were classed as in sustained jobs without training. That gave me hope, actually, because, from reading the evidence beneath that headline figure, it was saying that they want a couple of quid in their pockets. They like working.

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They want to make sure that they get up and go and do some work. I don't think it would take a lot to nudge them towards apprenticeships and jobs with training. That way they would get better health outcomes, pay and life chances. There is room and scope to do a lot of positive work regarding people in jobs without training.

Chris Heaume: The National Apprenticeship Service, which is pushing forward the apprenticeship policy, is working with us on an individual basis to persuade those young people about a job with training—in other words, converting that opportunity into putting training to use.

Q322 Chairman: Can we turn to a bit of data that you don't have to share with any other Department, because it relates to your own Department: what percentage of the NEETs we are talking about, at 16–18, have a special educational need?

Mr Wright: Off the top of my head, it is around two fifths.^{3,4} If I go back to the segmentation point, there are three broad elements of what is called the NEET group. Two fifths are classed in the report as “open to learning”, which means there is no particular significant barrier to their participation.

Chairman: Two fifths.

Mr Wright: That is quite positive. They will be sorted. They are looking for the right course for them. One fifth are undecided NEETs. They have had bad experience with the advice they were given, but they are not completely closed to the idea of participation. With good information, advice and guidance, and a good personalised offer, they can get back on track. The remaining two fifths have got real barriers, in terms of making sure they can participate, of whom 15% are teenage mothers,⁵ and a sizeable chunk have special educational needs.⁶

Q323 Chairman: What percentage will have difficulties with the English language?

Mr Wright: Very few. I don't have the figures off the top of my head, but it is not statistically significant.

Q324 Chairman: Under your present schemes, teenage mothers will not get any training or development while they have small children, will they?

Mr Wright: Some might want to.

Q325 Chairman: I know you don't like me mentioning the Netherlands, but in the Netherlands it doesn't matter if you are a teenage mother, you still have to learn. The children are looked after in a good setting, but they have to learn. Why are teenage mothers written off in our country?

Mr Wright: I don't think they are. They might be by some parts of the media but they are certainly not by the Government. I would specify the Care to Learn scheme, which is fantastic, and you can clearly see that from the huge positive participation rates. They are allowed £160 a week—£175 in London—to help with the costs of learning and child care.⁷ There are really positive steps there. Off the top of my head, something like 70%⁸ of the women⁹ who participate in the Care to Learn pilots¹⁰ say they would not have participated had it not been for the scheme. It is a major success and as a Government we perhaps do not shout about it as much as we should.

Q326 Mr Chaytor: Minister, you mentioned earlier the impact of the recession and the way in which it forced a rethink on some policies. Isn't it now time to bring forward the 2013 date for raising the participation age?

Mr Wright: Somebody once asked me whether, as a result of the recession and growing participation in education, we had brought forward raising the participation age anyway. I hadn't thought about it in those terms, but I would suggest not. I think that we have something like 95%¹¹ of 16-year-olds participating and 90–91%¹² of 17-year-olds. It is important that we get everything right to ensure that we can identify all the risks and barriers to ensuring that RPA is implemented successfully. That is why I think the pilots in your patch, as well as other areas, are important. I don't think we should bring it forward, but we are very much on the right track to ensuring that that historic policy is implemented properly and successfully.

Q327 Mr Chaytor: Can you tell us something about the development of diplomas below Level 2, and what role they will play in this gradual extension of participation age?

Mr Wright: The fourth pathway for 14–19 reform is foundation learning. One criticism is that it doesn't get the attention it deserves. I think it is a really important way of bringing forward people who are entry level on to Level 2. I have been reading the transcripts from earlier sessions and was very much struck by somebody—I can't remember who—saying that learning and education policy in this country tends to be a ladder of progression. That is wrong; it should not be like that. It should be a sort of climbing frame of opportunity. I like that; it is quite a nice phrase. It is not going to be a linear step. You are going to have different things, and I think foundation learning helps to provide that. Again, that is a personalised, flexible package that can really help people, particularly with a focus on vulnerable

³ *Witness correction:* The correct figure is 12%.

⁴ *Note by witness:* The term Special Educational Needs only applies to young people below the statutory school leaving age and lapses when they leave school. Young people with a SEN in year 11 can be assessed for learning difficulties and/or disabilities if they intend to enter further education.

⁵ *Note by witness:* The figure of 15% includes teenage mothers and pregnant teenagers.

⁶ *Note by witness:* See footnote 4

⁷ *Note by witness:* Care to Learn provides financial assistance to help with the cost of childcare and associated transport, but not the cost of learning.

⁸ *Witness correction:* The correct figure is 73%.

⁹ *Note by witness:* Care to Learn provides support to both male and female parents

¹⁰ *Witness correction:* Care to Learn is an established programme—not a pilot.

¹¹ *Witness correction:* The correct figure is 93%.

¹² *Witness correction:* The correct figure is 83%.

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people, to move to a Level 2 and into good, meaningful employment. I think that is the right approach.

Chris Heaume: Could I add to that the activity agreement pilot, which was in eight sub-regions? Again, that was really successful in doing just that and keeping young people in learning, even if it is their own skills and personal development en route to learning. We have had great success, with 70% progression for very vulnerable young people.

Mr Wright: In terms of activity agreement pilots, if you compare the group who participated in the pilot with a similar group who did not participate, there is a 13 percentage point difference in success—massive, massive success, and much better, actually, than Australia. We pinched it from Australia and we are doing it much better than they are.

Q328 Mr Chaytor: In terms of Diplomas in general, what percentage of the 14-year-old cohort is now registered on Diplomas, as of last September?

Mr Wright: In terms of a percentage, I cannot do the maths quickly enough because I was educated in the 1980s.

Q329 Chairman: You were an accountant weren't you, Minister?

Mr Wright: I was a very bad accountant though, Mr Chairman. In answer to David's point, 36,000 learners are currently engaged.

Q330 Mr Chaytor: But that's quite a small percentage, isn't it?

Mr Wright: Well, it's early days. It has only been going a year or two.

Q331 Mr Chaytor: But do you have projections for what it should be in 2010–11?

Mr Wright: The simple answer is no. I have no target as such. It is on offer; it is part of the 14–19 offer. All the evidence that I see, talking to young people and teachers, is that it engages people in a really positive way. To say that I want to see x amount of people do it is not the right approach to take, because we would then have a simplistic, "Well the policy is a success or a failure," and I do not want to do that. If it is right for what people want to do, that is what people will want to do.

Q332 Mr Chaytor: I just want to move on, or perhaps back, to the question of benefits and finance and the issue of lack of communication between different sectors of government, particularly between local authorities and the Department for Work and Pensions. My local authority has made the point that it is very difficult to get detailed information out of the DWP. Without that, it constrains the local authority's capacity to plan properly for NEETs. In your remark earlier about the impact of the recent legislation, you said that from 1 April that should no longer be a barrier. Can you give us this absolute assurance that all local authorities will now—not on 2 April but over time—be able to get full access to Department for Work and Pensions information about NEETs?

Mr Wright: I would certainly hope so. I would be reluctant to give a cast-iron guarantee, because a lot of this performance is very much driven by local stakeholders. I would mention specifically that Jobcentre Plus are now going to be part of Children's Trusts as a result of legislation. I would also mention 14–19 partnerships. One of the lessons that may be learned from the Committee—I am not suggesting that I write your recommendations for you—relates to Sunderland City Council, which gave evidence recently. Sunderland is in my patch. I am very much aware that a good dynamic local authority leading that 14–19 partnership can really make a difference on the ground. So, local vision can really drive improved performance.

Q333 Mr Chaytor: This can't be left to the accident of how dynamic or entrepreneurial a particular director of children's services is, or a particular local authority, or how recalcitrant the local Jobcentre area manager is. There must be a clear Government steer. If Government believe in integration of public services and co-operation between different arms of government, there must be a clear steer. It cannot be left to local negotiation.

Mr Wright: I think we have done that in the framework we've provided and in terms of the different offers that are available. But, there is always going to be a tension between central government and local government, certainly when the Government are trying to devolve power to as local a level as possible.

Q334 Mr Chaytor: But the tension here is between the area manager for the Department for Work and Pensions and the director of the Children's Trust.

Mr Wright: What we are trying to do through legislation is to remove some of those barriers in respect of data protection and to encourage shared services as much as possible. Whether they work locally will be down to local people.

Chris Heaume: Structurally, I feel that all the performance management and legislative requirements are in place and weighing heavily—we have to perform. The impact is how well we will make use of all that on the ground through partnership work. If the partnerships aren't there, we won't use it and it won't have the effect we want.

Q335 Mr Chaytor: Can I ask just two other quick questions on the benefits side? We heard from a group of young people earlier this afternoon about the enormous variation in the amount of money they were expected to live on depending on their circumstances: whether they were at home or independent, what kind of housing they were living in, whether they were in hostels, and what kind of programme they were engaged on. What do you think is the minimum disposable income that a young person aged 16–19 should be expected to live on while engaging in some full-time education or training?

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Chairman: That's an easy one, Minister.

Mr Wright: Yes, that is incredibly easy to answer. Not every 16, 17 or 18 year old is the same; there will be different circumstances in different parts of the country. I can't possibly answer that.

Q336 Mr Chaytor: Assuming you haven't got an adult to subsidise you each week, what do you need to feed yourself each week? Assuming your housing costs are covered by housing benefit, what do you need to feed yourself each week?

Mr Wright: I do think you raise a very important point that was touched upon earlier by Karen. If we are going to have successful implementation of the measures to raise the participation age, what are the financial barriers to that? Late last year—I think as a result of the *New Opportunities* White Paper commitments—I called for evidence on the financial barriers to 16 to 18-year-olds' participation. We have had that consultation—the call for evidence—and we are hoping to produce fairly soon an idea of what the financial barriers are and how they can be addressed.

Q337 Mr Chaytor: Will that be done jointly with the DWP?

Mr Wright: The simple answer is yes. In terms of the "Investing in Potential" document that we produced late last year, we realised the importance of close co-operation between ourselves, DWP and BIS. That will continue for things like that as well.

Q338 Mr Chaytor: One final point. The most vulnerable young people frequently live in supported housing, which can be very expensive if it is run by a national children's agency, and it is almost impossible for them to find a job and accept the wage level likely to be offered without there being a massive impact on their housing benefit, because the costs of supported housing are so much greater than the costs of mainstream social housing. Do you recognise that as an anomaly that is holding back a lot of vulnerable young people from engaging in education and training? Have you discussed that with your counterpart in the DWP? If not, will you discuss it and could you find a way through to sorting out the problem?

Mr Wright: In a previous life, as I mentioned before, I was a Housing Minister. That issue came up time and again. I have discussed it with Jim Knight, as Minister for Employment, but I do not think that it is his particular area of policy responsibility. I think that Helen Goodman deals with it. I have not

discussed it with Helen, but I certainly pledge to do so on the back of the call for evidence for financial support that I mentioned earlier.

Q339 Chairman: Minister, just the very last thing. When we were in the Netherlands, Karen was very interested in the one-stop shop they had for young people. They could go in and everything was there—for example, medical things. It was an all-singing, all-dancing one-stop shop to which young people went. They got sorted there. There were seminars going on, and different people with different expertise to counsel and guide them. Isn't that something we should aspire to?

Mr Wright: I think that is certainly something we could consider and that it is suitable for certain areas that want to go down that route. In terms of the machinery of government and commissioning young people's services, it is important to have integrated support. That could certainly happen, and we could realise what Karen wants to see.

Q340 Chairman: But, if, as Karen said, you save a lot of money for the Government, they don't give you anything back. In Kirklees, my own local authority, if we do very well and save the Government a great deal of money, we do not get anything back out of the money we've saved to reinvest in what we're doing.

Mr Wright: I don't think that is strictly true. I am a bit rusty on this now, but in terms of the local area agreements, the single biggest indicator is about tackling NEETS, and there is a reward element to that. As I said, I am slightly rusty on the mechanics of that now as I've moved away from the Department for Communities and Local Government, but there is an element of reward.

Q341 Mr Chaytor: I think that there is, but the issue is, can the local authority reclaim part of the DWP budget? If its actions result in more young people getting back into the workplace, surely there should be a transfer from the DWP to the local authority.

Mr Wright: I am not aware of the technicalities of that but I can certainly ask my colleagues in the DWP.¹³

Chairman: Minister, this has been a short, sharp session. We have been very grateful that you and Chris have been able to come. We have enjoyed it and will, I hope, remain in communication with you so that we can write you a very good short, sharp report.

Mr Wright: Thank you.

¹³ See Ev 141

Letter to the Chairman from Mr Iain Wright MP, Minister for 14–19 Reform and Apprenticeships, Department for Children, Schools and Families

When I gave evidence to the Select Committee on 1 March, I agreed to provide the Committee with further information on two issues.

At Question 311, I referred to a DCSF study produced last year. This study, which was entitled "Increasing Participation: Understanding Young People Who Do Not Participate In Education or Training at 16 or 17" explored the characteristics and experiences of young people who are not in education, employment or training or in jobs without training.

The study is available on the DCSF website (please see link below) and I have enclosed a hard copy of the report for your information.¹⁴

http://www.nfer.ac.uk/nfer/publications/PEJ01/PEJ01_home.cfm?publicationID=91&title=Increasing%20participation:%20understanding%20young%20people%20who%20do%20not%20participate%20in%20education%20or%20training%20at%2016%20or%2017

I also undertook, at Q 341, to explore if authorities could reclaim part of the DWP budget if its actions result in more young people getting back into the workplace. I have been advised that this is unlikely for a number of reasons. Benefits are paid out of HMT annually managed expenditure (AME). The benefit “savings” from getting people into work cannot, therefore, be allocated for other purposes.

In addition, we could not be sure about the attribution of effects. There are, as we discussed at the hearing, many factors that contribute to the number of young people who are classified as NEET. It would not be possible to assess what ‘savings’ had been generated as a direct result of the local authority’s action.

I hope this helps to further inform your inquiry, and I look forward to reading your report.

March 2010

¹⁴ Not printed.