



Learning from Three Local LSC Partnerships Working to Tackle Levels of Young People Not in Education, Employment or Training: Guiding Principles for Policy and Practice

Summary

This document describes a small research project in three local Learning and Skills Council (LSC) areas to discover effective practice in bringing young people who are not in education, employment or training into learning through effective local partnerships.

The report is of interest to further education and work-based learning providers, Connexions personal advisers, local LSCs, those working in the juvenile secure estate and in young offender institutions, members of the voluntary and community sector and, at a national level, policy-makers and strategists.

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1: Introduction

- 1 In June 2005, the LSC's national Learner Support Directorate commissioned SHM to research the work performed by local partnerships in tackling the problem of young people who are not in education, employment or training (NEET). The research focused on four main aspects:
 - nature and extent of **local partnerships**
 - the means by which **data** on the problem is gathered
 - approach to **communication and information-sharing** between partners, and communication with NEET young people
 - types of **provision** available.
- 2 The research took place in three local LSC areas: **Greater Merseyside, Central London** and **Nottinghamshire**. The research was intended to provide a snapshot of activity rather than be comprehensive. However, wider discussion following the initial publication of these research findings suggests that the activity in the three areas is broadly indicative of activity elsewhere.
- 3 The research was based on telephone and face-to-face interviews conducted on either a one-to-one or group basis, and site visits to each area. The pool of interviewees was drawn from local LSCs, Connexions, local authorities, learning providers, youth offending teams (Yots), and members of the voluntary and community sector (VCS). The research did not include interviews with young people. However, this document occasionally draws on reviews of secondary material concerning young people's views (where these were offered by respondents), and on insights gleaned from young people in SHM's other recent research projects for the LSC. Where we have drawn on such research, we make this clear and provide references. An overview of findings from the three local areas against the four aspects described in paragraph 1 above is presented in the annex to this report.

- 4 The timescale for the research phase was quite short. In the course of our research, colleagues in Merseyside, Central London and Nottinghamshire were generous with both their time and their insights. We are extremely grateful to all these colleagues, both for their willingness to accommodate us in carrying out this research, and for their clear-thinking, honest and rigorously self-reflective analysis of their activities.

2: Getting to Grips with the NEET Problem

- 5 NEET young people are defined not by what they are but by what they are not. There are many different reasons why young people become NEET: social, cultural, economic, motivational. Often, being NEET is a consequence of deprivation and disadvantage: housing problems, financial problems, drug problems, criminal activity, low self-esteem, or a complex combination of such factors, feature in the personal histories of many NEET young people. But even this generalisation does not hold across the entire group. Being NEET is not the same thing as being deprived: for instance, earlier research carried out by SHM for the LSC identified ways in which high-achieving young people can become NEET, if their understanding of how they will achieve success does not align with the provision on offer.¹ As respondents across the three LSC areas we worked with were keen to emphasise, the NEET group is highly heterogeneous, and the issues of NEET young people are complex and variable. Being NEET is a **common symptom of many different underlying problems**.
- 6 Moreover, the profile of problems within the NEET group varies from one place to another. London, for instance, faces the challenge of young people who “come to London to be NEET”; Nottinghamshire has tackled the challenge of engaging the large Traveller community in the area, while Merseyside has a history of social deprivation to contend with. When we talk about “the NEET problem”, we must recognise that the nature of this problem varies not just from one individual to another, but also from one locality to another.
- 7 The recognition that being NEET is a symptom of a wider range of more complex problems has important consequences for how we think about and address the NEET problem. A doctor who focused on curing

¹ SHM, 2005, *Unlocking Learner Motivation: Report from the LSC Learner Engagement Programme*, Coventry: LSC

headaches, rather than on diagnosing and treating the numerous different causes of headaches, would be a very poor doctor indeed. In the same way, focusing solely on addressing the symptom of NEET can be counter-productive. As one respondent put it: “Effective provision is about recognising that success is not always about hitting the usual targets. There are lots of successes for individuals and groups that are not about [the LSC’s] normal targets.”

- 8 Targets, indeed, can get in the way of real solutions to the real problems faced by NEET young people in a number of ways. Some examples of the unintended consequences of very sensible targets, identified by respondents in paragraphs 9-12 below.
- 9 Getting NEET young people into education, employment or training seems like a very good idea. Yet the pressure on young and inexperienced Connexions personal advisers to deliver against challenging targets to reduce number of young people who are NEET can result in inappropriate referrals, for example young people – especially those in the NEET group – being inaccurately assessed and poorly advised. As a result, such young people are guided towards the wrong provision. Although temporarily in learning, they are likely to drop out again. Moreover, having had this negative experience of the education system, they will be harder to draw back into learning.
- 10 The NEET to EET project, funded by the European Social Fund (ESF) was carried out by Central London Connexions and illustrates just how much more effective one can be in reducing the number of young people who are NEET if the focus is on using the right means (for example, the quality of carefully targeted information, advice and guidance) rather than getting the right outcomes. In this project, 16 personal advisers each worked with 22 young people giving them intensive one-to-one support and working with them to tailor activities to suit their personal needs. The intensity of the one-to-one approach, together with a bursary, galvanised the young people into taking genuine responsibility for their progression.
- 11 Getting young people who are NEET to Level 2 also seems like a very good idea. However, the drive to use Entry to Employment (E2E)

provision² to enable young people to progress to Apprenticeships, other forms of learning or employment can put pressure on providers to take on only the more able young people, the “cream of the crop.” The perception is that young people with more complex needs will not be able to progress within the time available, or perceived as being available, and so they are overlooked by some providers.

- 12 Finally, getting young people who are NEET onto courses seems like a very good idea. In the past, however, participation targets have led some providers to encourage young people onto inappropriate courses: provided the young people did not drop out too soon, the providers hit their targets. In light of this, the new Public Service Agreement (PSA) targets for Apprenticeships, which focus on completion of learning programmes rather than on participation, seem an even better idea. But respondents suggested that these will create new challenges. The requirement that, over three years, LSCs improve completion rates by 15 per cent may create a situation in which learning providers are picky about who they recruit. “It has the potential to create a situation in which learning providers cherry-pick young people who are likely to complete, and they’re unlikely to be from the NEET group.”
- 13 Clearly targets will continue to play an important role in focusing and guiding the overall effort to tackle the problems of young people who are NEET. But the risk attending any target is that it is turned by those trying to meet it from a **measure of the success of solutions to a problem** into the literal **definition of a problem**. Over-literal application of targets can hamper the attempt to tackle the real problems of young people who are NEET. As long as targets play a critical role in enabling the measurement of progress and improvement, there is broad acceptance that targets should not be changed. The challenge is to find ways of working within the target regime that enables organisations at the same

² E2E aims to engage young people who are not yet ready or able to undertake learning at Level 2 or above and to enable progression onto Apprenticeships, other forms of learning, and employment.

- time to respond to the problems that cause young people to become NEET in the first place.
- 14 The risk that targets become a definition of the problem, rather than a way of measuring progress, is most apparent in the levels of involvement of pre-16 partners, and in particular schools, in tackling the problems of young people who are NEET. Many of the problems of which being NEET is a symptom have rooted long before the young person actually becomes NEET: as one respondent put it, “the factors that cause NEETness almost certainly manifest themselves before [work-based learning] and Connexions came along.” There is, moreover, much anecdotal evidence to suggest that the Year 11 transition point is a key moment at which young people become NEET and the symptoms appear: “The problem starts earlier than 16. Young people start to disengage from the beginning of secondary school. The traditional school and curriculum do not suit everyone.”
- 15 LSC respondents expressed frustration that they were unable to galvanise into action the agencies and institutions that deal with young people at the points at which the causes of being NEET manifest themselves. In some cases, we heard, institutions adopt the attitude that “No one in our institution is NEET”, which is both literally true, and a depressing indication of the extent to which targets, interpreted by the letter rather than the spirit, can become excuses for institutions to disown the NEET group.
- 16 There are examples of effective early preventative action. For example, the Nottinghamshire Youth Offending Service has received Children’s Fund funding to establish a youth inclusion panel. This sees youth offending staff engaging with schools and parents to identify problems early on and target young people who have been identified by their school as being at risk of offending. The panel also runs parenting sessions to encourage responsible, disciplined parenting and to help parents identify the signs of potential criminal behaviour. What is striking about this example is that the focus is not on young people’s being NEET, even though the problem addressed is a major cause of their

being NEET. The preventative action focuses on the problems, rather than the likely future symptom.

- 17 Just as the problems faced by young people who are NEET are diverse, so too will be the appropriate solutions: as one respondent put it, “providers need to understand that NEET young people have specialised individual needs – we need to look at them as a whole package, as individuals, in a holistic manner.” And if the solutions are diverse, so too the appropriate measures of success may be. Reaching Level 2 may be an excellent measure of success in a programme tackling young people who are NEET because of learning difficulties, but wholly inappropriate to an effort to re-engage young people who have already reached Level 2 but are disengaged from employment, education and training for attitudinal and motivational reasons. Targets for reductions in the numbers of young people who are NEET, which are essential at the strategic level, need to be realised at the delivery level through targets tailored to the specific situations and problems of specific groups of young people. To put the same point more simply: the NEET problem can be defined nationally, but must be solved locally.

Case study 1: Flexible provision that recognises that different young people need different progression outcomes – Merseyside LSC Preparation for Progress.

The ESF-funded Preparation for Progress (P4P) is the initiative that LSC Merseyside has used to supplement the E2E programme to ensure that the Greater Merseyside area has sufficient provision for young people.

P4P was designed to meet the needs of those young people for whom the mainstream E2E programme is not thought of as being suitable. P4P contains similar features to those of the E2E programme, but builds on it by focusing further on the needs of the individual; in addition to basic and key skills and vocational development. There is also an emphasis on personal and social development. P4P aims to prepare young people for a variety of progression routes, such as into employment with or without training, Apprenticeships or further education. Progression from P4P into E2E is also allowed.

The programme targets those young people who are considered to be the most disadvantaged and disaffected, and those who are unable to commit to achievement on a programme of 16 hours or more and need to build trust and confidence as well as develop their personal skills.

P4P uses a similar funding model to that currently offered in mainstream E2E. Learners are entitled to the same bonuses (up to £50 when initial assessment is complete and an individual learning plan has been agreed). The learner is also entitled to receive a bonus of up to £50 for moving onto a positive progression that is, Apprenticeship, FE or employment with training. However, should the learner progress to E2E they are not entitled to a further bonus for joining the E2E programme.

(This example predates the extension of EMA in April 2006.)

3: How Should Provision for the NEET Group be Funded?

- 18 At the moment, local LSCs draw down funding for provision and learner support in line with the requirements of the national funding methodology. Typically, the national funding methodology specifies aspects of the shape, duration and outcomes of the provision that is being funded. Such, for instance, is the case with the Entry to Employment (E2E) programme.
- 19 Respondents were clear that, while E2E is by no means the only LSC-funded provision that has the potential to address the NEET problem, it is currently the main vehicle for doing so. Respondents in each area were keen to emphasise that the E2E programme had enabled them to make significant inroads into the problem of people who are NEET. They recognised that whilst E2E hadn't necessarily been designed with the NEET group in mind, it has proved a powerful tool and has been very successful in tackling the number of young people who are NEET. At the same time, many respondents acknowledged that despite the progress that E2E has brought, they were struggling to make the programme work for some of the more excluded members of the NEET group. As one respondent acknowledged: "The further you penetrate into NEET, the harder it becomes. The last 10 per cent is very hard to shift".
- 20 Insofar as it prescribes the volume, scope and outcomes of E2E, the LSC's national funding methodology specifies the means by which the NEET problem should be tackled at the local level. With this in mind, although broadly positive about what E2E can achieve and endorsing its successes so far, respondents indicated that because of the need for something much more flexible and tailored for those who are "most NEET", it is possible to perceive the E2E programme as it is currently conceived as a constraint. Given the diversity within the NEET group, it is not surprising that these constraints on the means by which the problem is tackled locally are perceived as barriers to effective provision.

- 21 To overcome these constraints, local LSCs and providers have to spend time finding ways to tackle the needs of specific groups of young people who are NEET that are acceptable within the current funding framework. For instance, the Desi Girls project run by Learning Works in Nottinghamshire runs alongside a highly effective conventional E2E programme and aims to build young Islamic women's confidence and self-esteem and tackle many issues that are taboo in their community. It is to the credit of local LSCs and their partners that they are finding ways to deliver innovative and targeted solutions to the NEET problem. But at the same time it is striking that LSCs are having to use much of their energy and creativity forcing these solutions to fit with funding constraints.
- 22 The use of ESF, while largely a response to a reduction of other sources of funding, seems to have created some leeway for greater flexibility in tackling the problems of young people who are NEET, and especially harder-to-reach groups. For instance, the ESF co-financed Preparation for Progress (P4P) scheme in Merseyside allowed for individualised personal development for a range of outcomes far wider than would be easily possible within the E2E framework. Similarly, the ESF-funded NEET to EET project by Central London Connexions allowed for more intensive, individual attention to the young people. This approach enabled their needs to be properly assessed and resulted in frontline staff developing a longer term relationship with the young person, with the consequence that all beneficiaries targeted by the project moved into and remained within the EET category. It is worth noting that, unlike the funding drawn down for programmes such as E2E, ESF specifies the purposes to which funding should be put, but not the means by which those purposes should be achieved. In 2006/07, ESF will start to reduce, and as a result further restrictions to LSC funding are anticipated.

Case study 2: Shifting the perception of learner support funding by linking it to things that enable learning - Central London Connexions ESF NEET to EET project.

This project illustrates how effective funding can be when it is linked to purposes rather than means and positioned as “enabling” rather than “constraining”. All the NEET young people targeted moved into education, employment or training (EET).

The project targeted the hard-to-reach young people who faced additional barriers to learning and required intensive and individualised support, beyond that normally offered by Central London Connexions. The aim was to attract disaffected, disadvantaged NEET young people who were aged 16-19 to new routes into learning; and to engage and retain them and ensure their access to progression. The model was delivered by 16 personal advisers across the 7 Central London boroughs in the Central London Connexions Partnership. Each personal adviser worked intensively with 22 young people, providing:

- rewards and incentives to include up to £1,000 for each beneficiary to enable them to progress successfully and help remove barriers to learning and work such as childcare, travel, lunch, clothing, mobile phones, driving lessons and computers
- intensive one-to-one support to identify their individual issues and needs
- individual and group activities negotiated by the young person such as work experience, life coaching, workshops and other activities.

The young people accessed support in a wide range of areas from their personal advisers, including advice on college, employment, benefits, housing, health and childcare to help them overcome barriers to learning and employment.

Where was the value?

Beneficiaries attached the most value to the intensive support and advice they were provided by the one-to-one relationship they had with their personal advisers, which made the difference to their lives as the personal advisers went “that extra mile”. Individual programmes were negotiated with the young person to meet their specific needs and interests.

The research showed that 68 per cent of young people on the project felt that the ESF personal adviser had “totally sorted them out”.

Soft outcomes could also be attributed to this one-to-one support as 74 per cent felt more confident and motivated mainly because of working with their personal adviser.

Helping to remove barriers to access – the bursary

Beneficiaries received funding to cover activities, which were as varied as the needs of the individual, and rewards. For example, the achievement of planned goals triggered an agreed reward.

Central London Connexions was inspected by Ofsted in 2004 and within an overall grading of the Connexions Partnership as “excellent”, inspectors specifically praised the NEET to EET project performance, describing it as “an exemplary ESF project”.

As a result of the success of the project, Central London Connexions has secured a further ESF allocation via the LSC for the next two years to continue along the same lines.

- 23 The use of discretionary funding has had a similar impact in promoting greater flexibility and creativity both in terms of the types of provision that are offered as well as the partnership configurations that are deployed. For example, in London, the LSC has funded additional contracts through discretionary funds to support inclusion. One example is the funding of the National Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders (NACRO), to run a mobile outreach unit visiting specific London housing estates to engage with potential learners and attempt to re-engage them in learning. Also in London, discretionary funding in the form of a Local Intervention and Development Fund (LIDF) has been targeted at 14-19 age groups at the borough level to support initiatives tackling NEET by providing additional funding to E2E providers to supplement that provided through mainstream (LSC) means.
- 24 Put simply, funding methodologies can create the conditions for the local development of targeted, differentiated and therefore effective solutions

to problems of young people who are NEET, or they can serve as a brake on creativity and innovation.

- 25 Finding effective ways to link national funding to purposes (for example, a reduction in the number of young people who are NEET) rather than means by which those purposes then have to be achieved (for example, E2E) could free up local LSCs to work with partners to develop even more innovative and effective local solutions to the problem of NEET. Providers would be accountable for delivering outcomes that would really make a difference to groups young people, with local LSCs accountable for ensuring that the result represented value for money in terms of reductions of the number of young people who are not in education, employment or training.

4: Who Should Deliver Provision for the NEET Group?

- 26 A number of those we spoke to felt that the needs of young people who are NEET were often hard to address through college-based provision: “NEET young people don’t fit into the Monday to Friday, 9-5, 35-hour week timeline. In fact, many NEET young people don’t get active until 5pm”; “Colleges work on a one-size-fits-all basis. The staff are not trained to work with the sort of young people that are NEET.” The implication, implicit or explicit, was that the voluntary and community sector (VCS) might be better placed to address the needs of many young people: “The local community centre could very easily provide local provision that would suit NEET better than courses offered by colleges.” VCS organisations are often closer to the needs of specific groups, often have an organic relationship with the communities from which they come and may also have a much stronger sense of ownership in tackling their problems (a point to which we shall return later). Overall, it seems the VCS has much to offer in the way of targeted provision for key groups within the overall NEET population, and that its involvement should be encouraged.

Case study 3: Finding a clear role for the voluntary and community sector.

The Desi Girls project is run by Learning Works in Nottingham. It works with girls and young women aged 13-24 and operates alongside a mainstream E2E programme called Enthuse. Desi Girls takes place within Enthuse by using the resources Enthuse has secured through mainstream E2E funding, but Desi Girls focuses on other kinds of activities and outcomes that are important for young Muslim women's development and that would not ordinarily be permitted under the E2E scheme.

The Desi Girls project is additionally funded by the Ethnic Minority Student Achievement Grant and is designed for young Muslim women to participate in over the summer holidays. The project deals with issues relating to sexual health, mental health and drugs, all of which can be taboo subjects in parts of the Asian community.

The project was designed to address some of the specific problems relating to young Muslim women's participation in learning. The focus is on building women's confidence through activities such as health and beauty, henna tattoos and making videos. It is very much seen as an education project and therefore is much more attractive to the young women's parents.

- 27 However, some VCS respondents feel they can sometimes be at a disadvantage compared to colleges and other more mainstream providers, in accessing LSC funds: "The LSC needs to level the playing field on the bidding for LSC contracts." One of the major concerns in this area was that the LSC's contracting and monitoring processes are more geared to mainstream providers than those in the VCS: "Issuing standard contracts to suppliers across the sub-region isn't the way to do it." As a result, some respondents believed there was effective provision for the NEET group which was neither funded nor accredited by the LSC.
- 28 This is not the only problem facing greater VCS involvement. Concerns were raised from outside the VCS about the quality of provision offered by some providers within the sector. Indeed, the very strong sense of ownership some VCS providers feel may even become a problem if, as one respondent suggested, such provision ends up being "a destination

for learners rather than a route into other kinds of provision". Making greater use of the capabilities provided by the voluntary and community sector also means putting in place appropriately robust monitoring and quality assurance mechanisms. And extending these mechanisms to cover more esoteric provision will inevitably make them even more time- and labour intensive than they are currently.

29 The question of who to involve in delivering provision for young people who are NEET by no means produces a straightforward answer. On the one hand, the value of flexibility and creativity in developing solutions targeted at specific groups of young people who are NEET provides a rationale for extending partnerships more and more widely, and in particular into the voluntary and community sector. On the other hand, the need to monitor and assure quality, and to keep the costs of such activity under control, provides a rationale for limiting partnerships.

30 The opposition between these two considerations raises some fundamental questions about the use of public money which lie beyond the scope of this report to settle. The case set out so far suggests that effective solutions to the NEET problem require considerable creativity and flexibility, which in turn implies a measure of risk that some putative solutions will not be as effective as hoped. On the one hand, the responsible use of public money requires this risk to be minimised. On the other hand, minimising the risk would also mean minimising the very creativity and flexibility which would add so much value elsewhere. When it funds provision, the LSC is investing in solutions to the NEET problem, and the returns on its whole portfolio of investment will depend in large measure on its attitude to risk in making individual investments. It may be that the LSC as a whole may be getting poor returns on its investments owing to naturally high levels of risk-aversion in the disbursement of public money. Whether this is the case or not, "investment" and "risk" may be useful concepts in thinking about who to involve (and fund) in the provision of solutions to the NEET problem.

5: How can Effective Information-flow be Ensured?

- 31 Delivering tailored solutions that are effective in engaging young people who are NEET requires an efficient flow of information within and between partner organisations for reasons both of accountability and responsiveness. An example of information-sharing working well is the September Guarantee initiative in London. This initiative is designed to respond to the fact that there is a significant jump in the NEET group between the ages of 16 and 17 as a result of young people not getting onto the right course for them in their first year of post-compulsory education. The September Guarantee aims to provide a single, coherent offer to young people, and to guarantee them an appropriate learning place or employment no later than September after they have completed Year 11. The challenge is to ensure that young people are given accurate information about the opportunities available to them at 16, which obviously relies on very accurate, comprehensive and timely information exchange between the local LSC, Connexions, schools, and WBL and college providers.
- The local LSC needs accurate information from Connexions and from research data about the nature and extent of demand among young people.
 - Connexions personal advisers need accurate information about the learning opportunities available to young people from learning providers.
- 32 Information-flow becomes especially critical at the transition points between institutions, given the increased risk of young people becoming NEET at these points. “It’s important to deal with the NEET group as soon as the young people leave school. After six months they become ‘not knowns’. In London, we’ve got the list of not knowns from 22 per cent to 6 per cent because we deal with NEET [young people] immediately.”

- 33 Where information flows efficiently, the results are powerful. In all three areas we visited, the efficient flow of information to and from Connexions was cited as a key success factor: “Connexions reviews the effectiveness of provision from the learners’ point of view. We’re there to respond to advice and feedback. The E2E passport was evolved in this way.” Such information is important not only in evaluating existing provision but also in the development of new solutions to the problems of specific groups of young people who are NEET. As one respondent put it: “We need to listen to ... people who have hands-on experience with young people.”

Case study 4: Effective information-sharing strengthens links between partners – LSC Central London September Guarantee initiative.

Launched in March 2005, the London regional September Guarantee initiative, proposed jointly by the Central London Connexions and LSC Central London seeks to engage pre- and post-16 providers, to prevent young people falling into NEET. In addition, it aims to improve data-handling between Connexions and schools and colleges, and enhance planning for appropriate provision.

The September Guarantee aims to ensure that all Year 11 students following careers education and guidance have recorded an intended destination with Central London Connexions. Young people with no clear destination are then offered additional support including further guidance, skills development, tasters and visits. The guarantee is that every Year 11 learner will be supported into an offer of an appropriate learning programme or employment by the end of September after they have completed Year 11.

The initiative enhances individual, targeted support during the transition from pre- to post-16 learning, and enables provision to be more responsive to the needs of the learners.

In addition to acting to prevent those most at risk of falling into the NEET group, the September Guarantee improves data exchange between Connexions and schools and colleges, and gives LSC Central London a better opportunity to match the young people with appropriate provision.

- 34 However, ensuring that information flows efficiently can be a significant challenge. Respondents cited a number of challenges, as follows.

- **Trusting the frontline:** “Too often, historically, there has been mistrust in partnerships and an unwillingness to listen to those with experience.”
- **Timeliness:** “The LSC learner directory relies on providers to post up-to-date information. Sometimes, though, the courses are over before the information is posted.”
- **Limited networks:** “College principals spend more time talking to other college principals across London than they do talking to school heads in their own borough.”
- **Practical issues:** “The Data Protection Act limits the information we can share.”
- **Volume of information:** “There’s more research out there than you can shake a stick at”; “Our research is well received externally but I don’t know to what extent it is used.”

35 Particularly striking is the extent to which effective information-flow depends not only on the systems in place but also on the relationships between the organisations and individuals that take part in those systems. For instance, respondents commented that in other areas (other than the three studied for this piece of research), the LSC and Connexions lack a good working relationship, and that this impacts on the flow of information between them. Good working relationships of this kind are founded on a **shared sense of ownership of the problem**. The quality of working relationships appears also to be critical when the supply of information is linked to funding. In the absence of a good relationship, the flow of information between the funding body and those it funds can become focused on *justifying* rather than *informing*. Good working relationships of this kind are founded on **faith in each other’s commitment to finding a solution**.

36 In some ways, this is a pessimistic conclusion, as ownership is not always present and faith not always justified. The final section of this report will look in greater depth at the issue of ownership.

6: How can Wider Ownership for the NEET Problem be Promoted?

37 Drawing together the themes of the preceding sections, we can identify two broad classes of ownership that are critical in addressing the NEET problem.

Strategic ownership of the NEET problem

- **Identification of local need and initiation of the process** by which provision is developed (and collaboration with delivery agencies)
- **Planning and co-ordination** of a balanced strategic portfolio of provision to address the needs of all young people who are NEET in the area
- **Monitoring quality** across all provision.

Operational ownership of the problems of specific NEET groups

- **Development of learning provision** to tackle the needs of a specific group of young people who are NEET
- **Active recruitment and retention** of the relevant group (and signposting of others towards more appropriate provision), or provision of information to others who can recruit
- **Delivery of the provision** to high standards.

38 In the three areas we visited, the LSC's strategic ownership of the NEET problem was not in question. At the level of operational ownership, however, the picture was far more patchy. Connexions clearly takes ownership for its piece of the puzzle, but beyond the LSC and Connexions, it is clear that many who hold part of the solution to the NEET problem do not feel a corresponding sense of ownership.

Case study 5: Taking ownership.

LSC Nottinghamshire has dedicated some of its core funding to establish a centralised learner support function within the training provider network. As a result, all 34 training providers in the local area can tap into the resource.

The resources available include: mentors, a key skills specialist, a support worker for members of black and minority ethnic groups, a specialist in learning difficulties and/or disabilities, and a specialist progression worker for young offenders who are at risk of becoming NEET. The progression worker is being piloted by young offender institutions (YOIs) in Warrington and Stoke and funded by youth offending teams (Yots) in resettlement and aftercare. The worker is working with young men in Nottingham, most of whom are aged 16.

- 39 For instance, our respondents suggested that ownership among FE colleges is at best patchy. “There are examples of colleges taking their responsibilities seriously, but this depends on factors such as how active they are in their particular local partnership, the charisma and professionalism of managers and headteachers, and the historic stance of [local education authorities].” Similarly, few schools take ownership of the NEET problem seriously: “Schools are generally more concerned with and focused on achievers than the non-achievers, whom they see as the responsibility of Connexions and the LSC.” And finally, work-based learning providers, whom many see as being among the primary means of engaging young people who are NEET, may not be sufficiently well-equipped to take ownership even if they want to. “WBL organisations are lean, mean machines. They tend to do away with engagement staff in order to focus on their core training activities.” It is for this reason that LSC Nottinghamshire, for example, has established a centralised learner support function within the training provider network.
- 40 Addressing the ownership deficit is complex. It is worth first noting that the solution to the lack of *operational* ownership is not likely to be found in new *strategic* partnerships, for example children’s trusts.
- 41 Instead, it seems likely that some of the gaps in ownership of the NEET problem, in particular those surrounding schools, require changes at the

level of national policy to ensure that schools and colleges come on board with the local authority and/or local LSC to solve the problem. It could even be that the degree to which institutions take steps to work in partnership to tackle the problem of NEET in the local area could be covered by the inspection and performance management regimes.

- 42 In the case of those providers for which the LSC is the funding body, the question of ownership brings us back to the issue of funding. As noted earlier, providers experience the LSC's national funding apparatus in different ways. Insofar as funding is perceived as *constraining*, rather than enabling, this is likely to undermine the ownership of the recipients in those constraints. If, by contrast, providers were able to perceive tackling the NEET problem as a way of gaining access to more funds – as has happened in some cases with ESF – this would tend to increase ownership. There are significant challenges, of course, to repositioning funding in this way, since “enabling” funds will invariably also represent cuts in other areas. Unless it can tackle this issue, however, it seems likely the LSC will continue to rely on the leadership and commitment of individuals, rather than a genuine sector-wide commitment to the problem of NEET.

7: Recommendations

- 43 The personnel of local LSCs we spoke to have a very clear understanding of the need to tailor solutions to the requirements of specific groups of young people, and have been involved in developing innovative solutions that have had a significant impact on the number of young people who are NEET by tackling the real problems and challenges such young people face. Much can be learned from reviewing their successes and the obstacles they have encountered. Given everything that has been said previously about the need to recognise diversity within the NEET group, and taking into account a range of further differences between local areas, it should come as no surprise that we believe it inappropriate to suggest a definitive blueprint for the way the LSC should work with partners to tackle the NEET problem. There are, however, some clear lessons to be drawn about the overall approach that the LSC and its partners, nationally and locally, need to take towards the NEET problem.
- 44 Four key themes are set out below. The implications listed under each combine both best practices and next steps; for instance, some providers are already doing the things suggested, others need to start doing them.

Recommendation 1: Define the NEET problem nationally, but solve it locally

- 45 For the **LSC nationally**, this means ensuring that local LSCs' accountability for reductions in the number of young people who are NEET is backed up by greater freedom in using funds to achieve outcomes *tailored* to specific groups of young people who are NEET identified locally.
- 46 For **local LSCs**, this means proactively sharing and identifying best practices with and from other areas to ensure that effective solutions continue to be spread where appropriate.

- 47 For **providers**, this means taking ownership of the problems faced by young people who are NEET, and recognising their role in developing solutions to these problems.

Recommendation 2: Reposition funding as enabling rather than constraining

- 48 For the **LSC nationally**, this means finding ways to detach funding from the means of delivery, giving local LSCs and their partners greater opportunities to innovate.
- 49 For the **LSC, both nationally and locally**, this means thinking about funding in terms of investment and risk, and opening a wider debate about the appropriate level of risk to ensure maximum return on investment across a portfolio of local delivery.
- 50 For **providers**, this means a shift of mindset, that is, seeing local LSCs as *partners* who work with providers to enable access to funds, rather than planners who allocate or withhold resources.

Recommendation 3: Foster greater links with the voluntary and community sector

- 51 For **local LSCs**, this means finding ways to make application and monitoring procedures more accessible to smaller VCS organisations, without compromising the quality of provision.
- 52 For **providers**, this means proactively reaching out to VCS organisations to develop joint bids for LSC funding in the area of provision for young people.
- 53 For **VCS organisations**, this means recognising their role as a stepping stone in the progression of young people who are NEET, as well as their interest in a particular group.

Recommendation 4: Get greater buy-in from the pre-16 sector

- 54 For the **LSC nationally**, this means raising the role of the pre-16 sector at the level of national policy to ensure schools take greater ownership of their part in the NEET problem.

- 55 As far as **providers** are concerned, colleges could do more to reach out to young people who are considering further education or training but who are not yet signed up to it, including informing them of the education maintenance allowance (EMA) and supporting them in the application process.

Case study 6: Preventing those at risk of offending and helping them to re-engage in learning – New Horizon project, Nottinghamshire County Council Youth Service.

The project is part of, and largely funded by, Nottinghamshire County Council Youth Service. The New Horizon project works with young people aged 13–19 who have been identified by a referring agency as being at risk of becoming involved in crime. The project aims to reduce offending by young people by creating opportunities and support structures that assist them. It aims to provide support from other agencies for parents or carers and siblings within the household, to create opportunities for young people to develop confidence and self-esteem, and guide them in becoming more aware of the consequences of their actions.

The project has been successful in re-engaging young people because of its one-to-one approach and the time spent developing the relationship not just with the young person but with other agencies involved and their immediate surrounding support structures. For example, the first contact by the youth worker is always done in the young person's home with their parents or carer.

The work in the initial stages is undertaken very regularly – at least once a week, sometimes twice – and it eventually tapers off altogether. However, the workers are always able to go back if things break down or more support is needed.

The one-to-one work concentrates on developing a relationship between the worker and all involved. It focuses on agreeing areas of work that the young person wishes to address. In short, the value of this project is in the intensive one-to-one work with the young people and the time and ability to develop a relationship with them. Re-engaging young people in education is a slow process – six months is the average time from when the youth worker first meets the young person.

The E2E programme in Nottinghamshire is part of the Nottinghamshire Youth Service, so the relationship between the two is good. Many young people involved in the New Horizon project are directed to the E2E programme.

Annex: Overview of Activity in Three LSC Areas

- 1 This annex provides an overview of what is currently happening within the local partnerships in the three areas we focused on in this research.
- 2 The partnerships in place in each of the three areas have been effective in tackling the levels of young people who are NEET. Local LSCs report dramatic reductions in the number of young people who are NEET in each area. In **Nottinghamshire**, LSC colleagues report that NEET reduction has been “a spectacular success.” In **Merseyside**, through concerted effort, the local LSC and its partners have reduced the NEET group from 19 per cent to 9 per cent. In **Central London**, which has the biggest NEET group in the country, approximately 3,000 out of 4,000 young people moved from NEET into EET in 2004-05, a 75 per cent increase from the previous year.
- 3 LSC colleagues report that tackling NEET is one of the top priorities for their organisation. They also recognise that solving the problem of young people being NEET requires joined-up working and integrated education provision. For these reasons, rather than have dedicated NEET teams and individuals solely responsible for tackling NEET within the organisation, LSCs indicate that addressing the priority has been embedded across a range of functions. Largely as a result of the fact that work to tackle the NEET group is embedded (or mainstreamed) within existing work programmes, LSC colleagues were unable to give us a sense in quantitative terms of how much time they, their teams and partners spent on the issue.

Composition of the local partnerships

- 4 The driving force of the partnership in each of the areas we visited is the relationship between the local LSC and Connexions. **In all three areas**, we found strong relations between these two bodies, and a commitment to shared ownership of the NEET problem. This relationship manifests itself in reciprocal governance arrangements: in **Central London** and **Greater**

Merseyside, the chief executive of the Connexions service sits on the LSC's local council, and the executive director of the local LSC sits on the Connexions board. These reciprocal governance arrangements are reflected in other area-based panels and committees. In

Nottinghamshire, for example, Connexions and LSC staff are represented on each of the conurbation's geographical steering groups. Staff of local LSCs and Connexions are involved jointly in the strategic planning of new and alternative provision for Pre-entry and Foundation levels to meet the needs of young people who are NEET, and for the most part, respondents describe a strong "culture of shared responsibility" for the problem between the two organisations.

- 5 At the strategic level, in addition to Connexions, local LSCs are increasingly consulting with other partners at the frontline such as youth offending teams (Yots), drug action teams, the voluntary and community sector, and learning providers and their networks such as the Work Based Learning Alliance in **London**. The alliance is represented at joint LSC and Connexions meetings. LSC Central London funds the alliance to provide forums where good practice can be shared between E2E and Apprenticeship providers to support provider engagement with centres of vocational excellence (CoVEs). In **Merseyside**, the local LSC has recently appointed a strategic co-ordinator to improve access to information on provision among the five Yots in the area. Also, in response to the Working Together initiative, LSC Merseyside is working with the Sefton Council for Voluntary Services to appoint a co-ordinator to work alongside LSC colleagues on various issues to do with NEET, including the procurement and commissioning of different types of provision. In **Central London**, the local LSC has funded a post for one year specifically to support the development of WBL and E2E providers and their capacity to support the needs of young people in the area.
- 6 At the frontline, Connexions works closely with Yots and the voluntary and community sector. In **Merseyside**, Connexions personal advisers work alongside youth offending officers one day a week, but the two agencies are negotiating to increase that collaboration. In **Nottinghamshire**, the

Yots have one Connexions personal adviser on each team who is responsible mainly for the education side of things. Similarly, Connexions and Sefton Council for Voluntary Services are jointly funding adviser-type posts to work with VCS organisations to encourage young people who are NEET into VCS provision.

- 7 Overall, the partnership ethos is strong. The commitment to tackling NEET is evidently present, but the difficulties lie, as one respondent commented: “at the operational level, with the main problems being both funding and the capacity within existing providers to meet the needs of young people.” Our recommendations in Section 7 are geared to addressing such local operational challenges by establishing greater funding flexibility at the local level to enable partnerships to develop targeted approaches to meeting the needs of young people who are NEET.

Data gathering

- 8 Broadly speaking, there are two types of data gathered by local LSC partnerships that are relevant to their attempts to engage the NEET group: data on the number of young people who are NEET, and data on the education and training provision available. This is the case not just for LSC partnerships in the three areas studied but for LSC partnerships around the country. We discuss here the main data-gathering model we came across in the course of our research in the three areas, but we have no doubt that similar systems take place elsewhere.

Data on the NEET group

- 9 Connexions gathers data on individual young people via the personal adviser relationship and also through Connexions’ links with local schools and local authorities. Often the data from schools is not complete, particularly when it comes to recording the ethnicity of the young person. However, this data does enable Connexions to monitor individuals’ progress and identify trends in engagement over time. The local LSCs are very much reliant on Connexions providing data on the NEET group and it is generally acknowledged that the quality and availability of the data has improved greatly since Connexions began its work. This data is

complemented by research commissioned by local LSCs more generally. Such research uses various methods including learner and household surveys and literature reviews, and looks at particular groups as well as a broad cross-section of the local community.

- 10 Overall, respondents said they had a very detailed grasp of the profile of the NEET population in their areas as a result of the evidence available to them.

Data held by local LSCs on the education and training provision available

- 11 Data on education and training provision is available to frontline partners and young people online through the local LSC's website. It relies on the learning providers to input the relevant information on the courses and training available. Some respondents commented that the system lacks accuracy as information on courses is not always posted in a timely fashion. Some of the courses are rather short, and one problem is that by the time the information is posted, the courses have already begun. Another respondent commented that for a young person, navigating the website was difficult: "It's not user-friendly for a young person."

Communication and information-sharing

- 12 In all three regions, we found that the main focus of the partnership is on getting accurate information *from* Connexions about the nature and extent of the young people's needs, and *from* providers on the availability of provision, and getting accurate information *to* Connexions and other partners about the learning opportunities that are available for the young people with whom they have contact. The ongoing challenge is to generate and share high-quality data to enable more effective planning. Connexions aims to gather as much information as possible on the young person (for example, behavioural problems, personal circumstances) in order to build the most accurate profile of individual members of the NEET group and their needs, but respondents commented on the restrictive nature of data protection regulation, particularly in the relationship between Jobcentre Plus and Connexions, which has made people more cautious about the information they feel it is legitimate to share. This caution generally

restricts the flow of essential information upwards from the frontline engagement.

- 13 In terms of communication with the young people, Connexions and the voluntary and community sector take the lead on communication and outreach, and have a strong face-to-face relationship with young people. At the planning level, Connexions consults with young people on the design and development of their programmes and projects. Young people sit on Connexions youth boards, which are composed of three committees focusing on marketing, quality and training.
- 14 As one respondent noted: “Our success in reducing the NEET group has been dependent on getting accurate management information from Connexions, and about making sure the right provision is available.” The **Central London September Guarantee initiative**, which seeks to ensure that every Year 11 learner will be supported into an offer of an appropriate learning programme or employment by the end of September after they have completed Year 11, not only improves communication and the exchange of data between Connexions and schools and colleges, but also enables LSC Central London to plan appropriate provision to match the demand from Year 11 students.

Provision

- 15 The main type of provision that all the respondents commented on in relation to the NEET group is the E2E programme. There is a sense that E2E works really well for a lot of young people, but a “one-size-fits-all” approach excludes many young people falling with the NEET group. The imposition of constraints on E2E is also making it harder for providers to cater for those young people with higher level needs, such as young offenders. All learners are now expected to be able to go through the programme in 22 weeks, which is widely felt to be unrealistic. Although there is some flexibility on the time limit, with colleagues recognising that 22 weeks is technically “an average”, in practice, the 22-week period is perceived as a “limit” and a “restriction”. In addition, respondents commented that if a young person stays beyond 22 weeks, this reduces the number of places open to newcomers.

- 16 Respondents commented that work-based learning (WBL) for post-16 learners was old-fashioned, in that it is not flexible or responsive enough to meet the needs of some young people in the NEET group. Others commented that the imposition of nationally engineered projects, especially academies, is felt to be unhelpful. There is a feeling that provision needs to be genuinely locally led for it to work effectively.
- 17 As a result, LSCs are being extremely creative in finding new sources of funding such as the ESF to fund other forms of provision that cater to the more specific needs of the young people, such as their personal development in terms of social and behavioural skills or building self-confidence. In **Merseyside**, the Preparation for Progress project was deemed a success due in part to its flexible and open-ended approach to the young person's progression route. In **London**, the Central London Connexions ESF NEET to EET project was successful in particular due to the intensive one-to-one support and advice the young people received from Connexions personal advisers.
- 18 Across the regions, it is widely felt that mainstream funding was often inadequate to meet the learning needs of the NEET group, who by their nature demand a more flexible and tailored approach. The recommendations in Section 7 of this report call for measures to be taken to enable this kind of flexibility in delivery at the local level.

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