Young People Not In Education or Training

“I want to go to work, I want to pay my taxes, I don’t want to be a doley for the rest of my life, you know what I mean.”

Young Person
Not in Education, Employment or Training

A future programme of government should provide guidance and support to expand provision to engage young people with additional and complex needs to support their transition back to, or into, education, training or employment.

The term ‘NEET’ refers to young people aged 16 to 18 who are not in education, employment or training. The NEET population is diverse and continually changing and includes many young people who face barriers to participation. Those at risk of being NEET include young people from disadvantaged backgrounds, those who have underachieved in school, teenage parents, young people who are in care, young carers and young people with learning difficulties and disabilities or mental health problems.

Article 28 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child states that all children have the right to an education.

The United Nations Committee on the Right of the Child concluding observations

Although none of the concluding observations apply directly to young people who are NEET, the following are relevant:

The Committee recommends that the State party:

(a) Continue and strengthen its efforts to reduce the effects of the social background of children on their achievement in school
(b) Ensure that all children out of school get alternative quality education

The Assembly Government Learning and Skills (Wales) Measure 2009 provides the driver for the implementation of the Learning Pathways 14-19 strategy in Wales. The strategy involves individual Learning Pathway, wider choice and flexibility, a learning core and greater learning support through Learning Coaches for those in greatest need, personal support and improved career advice and guidance. These changes offer a potential way to supporting better educational experiences for young people, including those with additional needs. The Welsh Assembly Government strategic approach to reducing the number of young people aged 16-18 years not in education, employment or training, Delivering Skills that Work for Wales was published in 2009. The strategy sets out the ways in which better support in schools through the Schools Effectiveness Framework, efficient processes for identifying and re-engaging young people, wider learning options, effective learning support and guidance and targeted and intensive personal support for those with additional barriers have been identified as mechanisms for reducing the numbers of young people who are NEET. These policy changes are relatively recent and are being implemented against the backdrop of an economic recession that has been particularly disadvantageous to young people in Wales.
What remain as major concerns?

According to a survey by the Office of National Statistics (ONS), almost 13 per cent of 16-18 year olds – more than 15,700 individuals – were not in education, employment or training as of June 2009. The figures indicate a significant rise since the last official statistics for the end of 2007, when 14,000 16-18 year olds (11.5 %) were estimated to be NEET.

Young people not in education, employment or training have often had a poor experience of compulsory schooling. The main issues which have been identified are difficulties in the transition between primary and secondary school, poor interaction with teachers, feeling bored and falling behind, special education needs, experience of bullying, behavioural problems, truancy and exclusion. They are more likely to come from complex backgrounds involving experience of being looked after, of homelessness, of the youth justice system or of being young carers or young parents.2

Young people with complex needs

The recognition within the Welsh Assembly Government NEET’s strategy that some young people face additional barriers and may have complex needs is significant. We welcome the Assembly’s approach in terms of broader, more flexible learning options, matched by enhanced support and guidance. The implementation of the NEET’s Strategy will only succeed if a system is put in place which recognises that young people with additional and complex needs must have access to support to overcome poor childhood experiences, build self-esteem and achieve stability in other areas of their lives before they are ready to fully engage in education, employment or training. Attempts to push young people forward at the ‘wrong speed’ will not secure the sustainability of outcomes that the NEET’s strategy aims to achieve.

Young people with additional and complex needs often have to make a ‘fast-track’ transition to adulthood losing family support and living independently at a far earlier age than their peers without adequate financial resources. They are likely to experience a protection deficit – unable to receive adequate support from any source. The work that is undertaken by the voluntary sector in Wales means that we are acutely aware of the barriers faced by young people with additional needs when trying to engage in education, employment or training.

Young people need appropriate support for their additional needs in order to provide them with the personal resources and stability required to engage in education, employment and training. The Social Exclusion Unit3 suggests that for young people with complex needs, work to address thinking and behaviour directly is often a necessary first step on the road to harder outcomes, such as engagement with education or labour markets.

A future programme of government should include a review of the financial barriers to participation for young people in difficult circumstances.
Financial barriers

The implementation of the NEET’s strategy must take account of the costs associated with participation in education, training and employment, in particular when the young person first engages in any activity. Learning and Skills Network research (2008) found that students have to look mainly to their own earnings and to family and friends for financial support; most respondents reported incurring costs as a result of participation. Training allowances in Wales stand at £50 per week: this is not sufficient to support young people who cannot live with their families. While young people living independently may qualify for housing and other benefits, the systems for applying for benefit entitlements are complex and divided across different sections of the benefits agency.

Implementation of the NEET’s strategy will only be successful if it includes practical support. Vulnerable young people not in education, training or employment and living independently have access to very limited resources. Similarly, those coming from low income households may find that their families are unable to support the costs of participation. For example, they are not in a position to pay travelling expenses in advance; they will not have access to money for equipment, lunch money or to a fax machine for the return of training timesheets.

| A future programme of government should ensure that clear and accessible benefits advice is available to young people in difficult circumstances, especially during the period of transition into or out of an education or training placement or employment. |
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This briefing is supported by Children in Wales

1 UN Committee on the Rights of Child, Consideration of Reports submitted by State Parties under Article 44 of the Convention, Concluding Observations, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, 3 October 2008.
2 Evans, J. et al (2009) Second Chances: Re-engaging young people in education and training, Barkingside, Barnardo’s
3 Social Exclusion Unit, (2005), Transition: young adults with complex needs a Social Exclusion Unit final report, London: ODPM