

# Second Chances:

Re-engaging young people in education and training

Believe in children



Barnardo's

Full Report  
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By Jane Evans, Deborah Meyer,  
Anne Pinney and Barbara Robinson





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# Chapter one: Introduction

## Why have we written this report?

This report was prompted by Government policy in England which will require young people to continue in education or training until they are 18. Controversially, failure to do so without a ‘reasonable excuse’ will constitute an offence.<sup>1</sup> This policy is intended to reduce to a minimum the number of 16 to 18-year-olds who are not in education, employment or training (NEET) and more importantly, to improve the skills, job prospects and life-chances of these young people.

During 2008, Barnardo’s Policy and Research Unit lobbied on this ambitious programme of reform to ensure that it improves opportunities for the kind of young people our services work with. For example, how will it work for:

- the young man with challenging behaviour and no qualifications
- the young woman who refused to go to school because she was bullied
- the teenage mother whose main concern is for her newborn child
- disabled young people wanting to learn the skills for work and independent living, but unable to find suitable training locally
- homeless young people living in temporary accommodation
- young people with mental health difficulties whose education has been disrupted by illness and time in hospital
- young offenders who have spent time in custody?

Barnardo’s education, training and support services across the UK work with young people who for diverse reasons are, or have recently been, NEET. Most are from disadvantaged backgrounds and many face barriers to participation, like those listed above. This report draws on the experiences of these young people and those working closely with them, to shed light on what can help restore young people to learning and to take their first steps towards employment and active citizenship.

While the research was prompted by legislation in England, it is relevant to all the UK nations. In 2008 the Welsh Assembly Government consulted on a national strategy on this issue.<sup>2</sup> In Scotland, successive reforms since the 1999 Beattie report have sought to improve learning and employment opportunities for young people who face barriers to participation.<sup>3</sup>

Northern Ireland as yet has no national strategy to improve opportunities for young people who are NEET, but the experience of Barnardo’s services working there suggests that young people who are NEET in Northern Ireland are as much in need of policy solutions as elsewhere. The policy context across the four UK nations is discussed further in chapter two.

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1 DfES, March 2007, *Raising Expectations: staying in education and training post-16* and subsequent policy papers; Education and Skills Act (2008) sections 2 and 45.

2 WAG, May 2008, *Delivering Skills that Work for Wales: Reducing the proportion of young people not in education, employment or training in Wales* (consultation paper).

3 Scottish Executive (1999) *The Beattie Committee Report: Implementing Inclusiveness, Realising Potential*.

## Research approach

Both Barnardo's practice and this research start from a premise that young people should be enabled to take up their entitlement to education and training because of the social and economic benefits this brings to the individual and to society more broadly. In terms of the Every Child Matters outcomes, by continuing in education or training until they are 18, young people should be better equipped to 'enjoy economic well-being' and 'make a positive contribution'.<sup>4</sup>

The research aimed to learn from local practice and is solution-focused. Chapter three reviews the reasons young people give for disengaging, but does not view disengagement and exclusion as the end of the story. Chapters four and five describe the approaches and interventions that enable and sustain re-engagement in education and training, so improving opportunities to find a job and make a contribution to society: for these reasons the report is entitled *Second Chances*. Chapter six draws some conclusions from the research and makes recommendations to local and national policy-makers.

This report gives prominence to young people's voices and contributes a detailed picture of how Barnardo's services work with young people who have disengaged, helping them to make the transition back to education, training or employment. It interprets young people's experiences with the accounts of those working closely with them to understand what succeeds in re-engaging young people and what the barriers and challenges may be. The report is illustrated throughout with young people's stories about why they dropped out and how they view their progress.

## Research methods

Seventy-five young people were interviewed using a mixture of group interviews, and in-depth one-to-one interviews. Some young people felt more comfortable to be interviewed as a pair of friends. The interviews were semi-structured and used activities to prompt discussion.

Project workers were interviewed to explore how they interpreted service users' experiences of being NEET and how they supported re-engagement. Workers were almost always interviewed separately to enable the young people to speak frankly and confidentially about their contact with Barnardo's services. Managers were interviewed about the strategic and policy issues involved in working with this group.

The research was conducted at 15 different sites across the UK, with young people with diverse needs. Working with Barnardo's services gave the researchers access to a widerange of young people who were or had recently been NEET. Thirty-five were young women and 40 were young men. Depending on the nature of the service attended, their ages ranged from 13 years old to 20, with the majority being in the 16 to 18 age-range.

The services were chosen to reflect the key reasons for disengagement, identified from a literature review (and described in Chapter three). They included some of the most marginalised groups, including teenage mothers, young people who were homeless, young offenders and young people with mental health difficulties. With a few exceptions in London and Cardiff, the young men and women interviewed were from poor, white backgrounds.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> <http://www.everychildmatters.gov.uk/>

<sup>5</sup> Figures collated by the New Policy Institute confirm that this is characteristic of the NEET group as a whole, with white working class boys outnumbering every other group. <http://www.poverty.org.uk/32/index.shtml#def>

## Acknowledgements

This research was led by Dr Jane Evans, with Deborah Meyer and Barbara Robinson, under the direction of Anne Pinney. Our grateful thanks go to the many people who gave generously of their time and experience, in particular, the 75 young people interviewed and the project workers and managers in Barnardo's services; our interns, Ross Murdoch and Becky Tapper; and colleagues who commented on the draft report, including John Leicester, Tony Newman, Jess McEwen, and Ann Hodgson and Paul Grainger at the Institute of Education, University of London, and Mark Corney of Campaign for Learning.

Above all we would like to thank the staff and young people from the following Barnardo's services (see Annex A for more details):

Armagh and Dungannon Adolescent Partnership  
Caterpillar, Cardiff  
BounceBack, Cardiff  
Cwrt y Farchnad (Cardiff Young Families)  
Dr B's, Belfast  
Dr B's, Harrogate  
Indigo Young Carers, Ilford  
Marlborough Road Centre, Cardiff  
Newry Adolescent Partnership  
NI School Aged Mums Service  
Out There, Newport  
Palmerston Vocational Training Centre, Newcastle  
The Base, Whitley Bay  
The Blackpool Project  
The Hub, Stepney Green  
Windermere Construction Training Centre, Norwood  
Young Families, Wakefield  
Young Parents Group, Marlborough Road  
Youthbuild, Paisley.



# Chapter two: The NEET phenomenon and UK policy responses

## Chapter overview

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 under-achieved in school, teenage parents, young people who are in care, and young people with learning difficulties and disabilities or mental health problems.

The concept of NEET is problematic in defining young people by what they are not doing. The young people in this research defied popular negative stereotypes. Although many had fared poorly in school, they were motivated by having a second chance to gain qualifications and take their first steps towards gainful employment.

The average UK NEET rate has hovered at around 11 per cent, in spite of successive policy initiatives in Scotland, England and Wales to encourage increased participation and achievement in post-compulsory education and training. Young people who are NEET in Northern Ireland are fewer in number and remain a neglected group in policy terms.

## Introduction

This chapter looks behind NEET statistics and stereotypes to highlight the diverse lives and circumstances of the young people involved. As a concept NEET can be understood on three levels:

1. as a statistical construct
2. as real young people with diverse experiences
3. as a policy focus.

This chapter concludes with a brief overview of policy approaches across the UK nations to increase post-16 participation in education and training, and to reduce the proportion of young people NEET.

## What do the statistics tell us?

The NEET group is continually changing. Many young people in Barnardo's services had moved in and out of education and training, being out of education and training for short periods. It is estimated that only around one per cent of 16 to 18-year-olds are 'long-term NEET' at any time. Over half of the NEET group is

actively seeking education, employment or training.<sup>6</sup>

Policy interventions aim to include all 16 to 18-year-olds in education and training. The hardest groups to reach are the unemployed and those with significant barriers to participation, who together comprise an estimated nine per cent of the age group. These are the young people that Barnardo's works with.

This report gives particular prominence to the views and experiences of young people facing significant barriers to participation, estimated to comprise just one per cent of the age group. These young people face long-term barriers to employment, education or training arising from, for example, challenging home circumstances, being in care, being a young parent or a young carer, or having a disability. Many of these young people lack consistent support from a trusted adult (such as a parent) to help them through school and into further learning or work. They required specialist support to re-engage in education or training and to take their first steps towards employment.

<sup>6</sup> DfES (2007b) *NEET strategy*.

## Risk factors for being NEET

The chances of being NEET increase for young people with certain characteristics, for example, those from lower socio-economic groups.<sup>7</sup> Table 1 illustrates some of the characteristics of young people NEET, many of which overlap and reinforce each other. These illustrate the cumulative effects of disadvantage on opportunities for education, training and employment.

**Table 1:** Characteristics of young people NEET in England and Wales

|                       |  |
|-----------------------|--|
| Looked after children | In 2006/7 25 per cent of care leavers in England were still NEET at age 19. <sup>8</sup>   |
| Young parents         | About 10 per cent of NEETS in England are teen mothers. <sup>9</sup>   |
| Young offenders       | 28 per cent of young offenders in England and Wales have no access to education at all. <sup>10</sup>  |
| Low achievers at GCSE | 39 per cent of those with no GCSEs in England are NEET at 16, compared to two per cent of 16-year-olds who attained five or more A*-C GCSEs. <sup>11</sup> |
| Persistent truants    | Persistent absentees from school are seven times more likely to be NEET at age 16. <sup>12</sup>   |
| Excluded              | Young people NEET are over three times more likely to have been excluded from school than young people overall. <sup>13</sup>                              |
| Workless households   | Half of young people NEET in Wales are from workless households. <sup>14</sup>   |

## The reality of being NEET

Barnardo's researchers met a range of young people who were NEET or had recently been so, from those who struggled to attend support services on a regular basis and take part in informal activities, to those who had already achieved beyond their initial expectations, gained a qualification and taken their first steps towards employment.

While NEET statistics imply inactivity and exclusion, the great majority of these young people were motivated to find work and to support themselves (and for some, their family) financially. They regretted missed opportunities at school, because they knew they were capable of much more than they had achieved – and they had seen how this limited their options, in terms of work or further study.

As a statistical category NEET figures calculate a negative condition – those who are not in employment, education or training. Hayward et al (2008)<sup>15</sup> point out that this leads to a deficit model which risks neglecting the potential of the young people concerned. Potential and aspirations were confirmed by our research which listened to the experiences of 75 young people, many of whom had challenging backgrounds – including teenage mothers, young people who had been excluded from school and those who had been bullied.

7 Blanden, Gregg and Macmillan (2006) Quoted by Cabinet Office (2008).

8 Ofsted (2008) *The Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills 2007/08 report*.

9 DfES (2007b) *NEET strategy*.

10 Youth Justice Board (2006) *Barriers to Engagement*.

11 DfES (2007b) *NEET strategy*.

12 DfES (2007b) *NEET strategy*.

13 DfES (2007b) *NEET strategy*.

14 WAG (2008) *Delivering skills that work for Wales*.

15 Hayward, Wilde and Williams (2008) *Rathbone/Nuffield Review Engaging Youth Enquiry – Consultation report*.



### **Teenage mothers**

Chloë and Ella became friends after being involved with Barnardo's Young Families project in Wakefield (WYF). Ella is 20 and Chloë 18, and each has a little boy. They live independently and initially needed support from WYF with housing. The girls liked school and hoped to do well when they moved to college to take A levels. However they had both become pregnant at 16. Ella said 'I really didn't like college' and Chloë believed that moving house in year 10 had disrupted her education, so she got into the 'usual teenage stuff'.

Both girls were confident in their aspirations. Ella had spent her time doing voluntary work and had trained as a youth worker. She had accessed Care to Learn to continue with her studies at college and WYF had provided her with advice and guidance about continuing

with her education. A benefits adviser had helped her to calculate that she would be better off working than on Job Seekers' Allowance, so she had found a job as a healthcare assistant at the local hospital. She was proud that she had learnt how to plaster a broken limb. Although she was about to take up a university place, she knew that healthcare was flexible work that she could always return to.

After having a year off to settle down in a hostel with her baby, Chloë took an NVQ level 2 in childcare. Receiving Care to Learn meant that she could return to A level study and wanted to resit her maths and English GCSEs as well. Eventually she hoped to take an Open University degree; she had worked out she could fit this in with employment and childcare responsibilities. Both girls agreed 'If you're sat at home doing nowt, you're never going to get anywhere.'

### **Excluded from school**

Harry was a young man who had been a persistent truant and on the edge of criminal behaviour. Given a second chance, he had developed in just over six months into an articulate, if shy, young man who told us of his ambition to become a chef.

He had been training at Dr B's restaurant in Harrogate for 12 weeks. He reflected on how much he had grown up and calmed down in that time. The idea that he would eventually be able to apply for a job in a restaurant kitchen motivated him to work hard. He was even prepared to get up early every morning to be ready to clean the kitchens at 8:30 a.m. This hadn't always been the case.

Harry was left to his own devices by his mother from a young age. When he was 10 years old he threw a chair at the head teacher of his primary school and was excluded for the whole of year 6. He did not return to school until he started secondary school, when he

was unprepared for the transition. He admitted he'd got in with the wrong crowd and engaged in offending behaviour, but was pleased to say he'd 'never been arrested'. A home tutor refused to call because his mother was never in, so he was referred to the pupil referral unit (PRU). A taxi was sent to collect him, but he would watch out for it each morning and ignore the door bell. When the driver left, he went back to bed.

Harry heard about Dr B's through a friend who had been on the E2E programme. He signed up to the 22 week E2E course himself and was able to transfer to training at the restaurant when he had completed the course. Being able to see a clear pathway to the chef's training course motivated him to gain maths and literacy skills and he acknowledged that his behaviour and social skills had improved as well.

Harry now saw his future in catering. His signature dish was lasagne and he was writing his CV ready to start looking for jobs when he'd completed his NVQ.

### **Getting over bullying**

Brian had always been quite shy and often found school worrying, especially at times of change. He admitted to being a bit of a comfort eater. He had a habit of hiding away – at infant school he remembers hiding under a table. Secondary school came as a shock. He'd fallen behind in the last year of juniors' and found the work at secondary school challenging, but worse was the name-calling and teasing from other students. Sometimes he tried to retaliate, but he felt that the school didn't hear his side of the story about being bullied every day. His angry outbursts and poor attendance got him referred to the pupil referral unit, or as he put it: 'the school for naughty kids'. There, things went from bad to worse. He was anxious about the smoking – he didn't like

smoking, so once again he felt different to the other students and intimidated by them. Eventually he retreated to the security of his family home.

Brian's mother realised things weren't going well for him and took him to Connexions. The personal adviser referred him to a Barnardo's vocational training centre where he started an NVQ in retail. His work placement was just right for him, as it was only a two minute walk away from home. He had made two friends amongst his new colleagues: one of 26 and the other 31. Because they were adults he felt secure that they wouldn't bully him. The vocational training centre had a support worker who regularly visited him at his placement to make sure things were still going well. He knew she would help him, but he said 'I've got no worries now'.



## UK policy responses

Historically Britain has had a low staying-on rate in education and training post-16, compared to similar countries. The latest OECD comparison ranked the UK as 24th out of 30 countries on rates of 17-year-old participation.<sup>16</sup>

Increasing the participation of 16 to 18-year-olds in education and training and reducing the proportion of young people who are NEET is a high level policy objective in England, Scotland and Wales, with national targets:

- in England, to reduce the proportion of 16 to 18-year-olds NEET by two percentage points between 2004-2010<sup>17</sup>
- in Scotland, to reduce the proportion

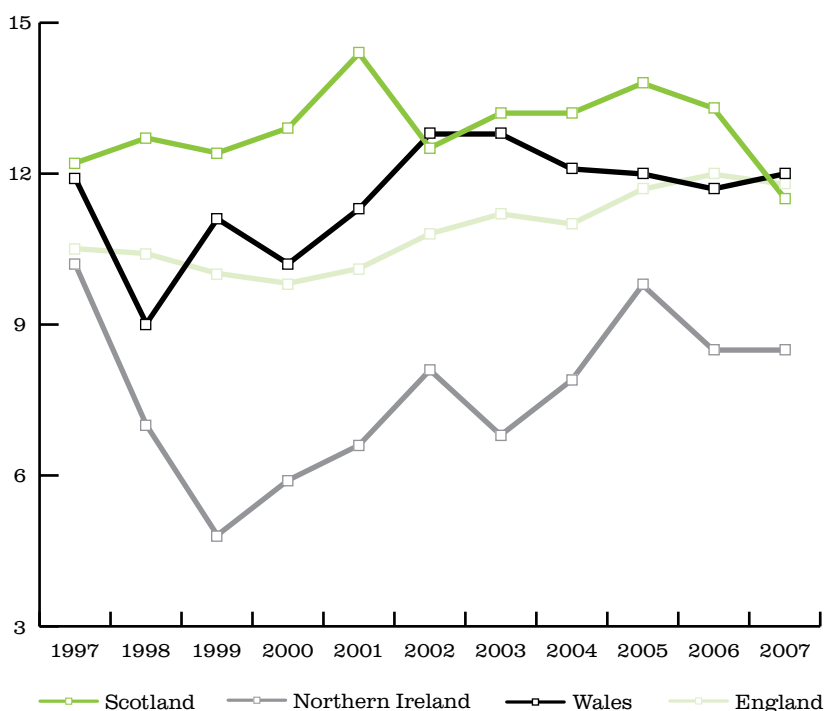
of 16 to 19-year-olds not in education, training or employment by 2008<sup>18</sup>

- In Wales, to reduce the proportion of young people aged 16 to 18 NEET by seven per cent by 2010.<sup>19</sup>

In Northern Ireland, there is as yet no specific strategy to increase participation by 16 to 18-year-olds or reduce NEET rates.

In spite of much policy attention in three of the four UK nations, the proportion of young people NEET in the UK has fluctuated between 10 per cent and 12 per cent of 16 to 19-year-olds over the last decade. In 2007, nearly 11 per cent of 16 to 19-year-olds in the UK were NEET – the same as in 1997.<sup>20</sup> Beneath the UK average lie some distinct national trends, illustrated in the chart.

**Figure 1:** NEET rate of 16 to 19-year-olds in the UK nations, 1997-2007



**Source:** Analysis of Labour Force Survey by Guy Palmer, New Policy Institute. Values for each year represent average of quarterly results.

<sup>16</sup> Cited in DfES (2007b) NEET strategy, para 4 (primary source could not be located).

<sup>17</sup> Comprehensive Spending Review 2004 Public Service Agreement target 14, now underpinning CSR 2007 target 14: to increase the number of children and young people on the path to success.

<sup>18</sup> Scottish Government (2008) *Closing the Opportunity Gap – Anti-Poverty Framework*

<sup>19</sup> Welsh Assembly Government, 2008.

<sup>20</sup> Analysis of Labour Force Survey (LFS) data by Guy Palmer, New Policy Institute. LFS uses 16 to 19 age grouping, unlike national education and training statistics which tend to focus on 16 to 18-year-olds.

Differences in data collection in each UK nation mean that comparisons should be treated with some caution. With that proviso, key trends are described below.<sup>21</sup> Between 1997-2007:

- Northern Ireland had a lower NEET rate than the other UK nations, with more 16 to 17-year-olds continuing in education. The proportion of school leavers staying in education rose by five percentage points between 2001/02 and 2005/06, while the proportion going into employment or training fell slightly over this period.<sup>22</sup>
- Scotland had a higher NEET rate than the other UK nations, but this fell in 2007 to just below that in England and Wales. School leavers in Scotland are more likely to go into employment and uniquely in the UK, employment of school leavers has risen steadily in recent years (from 2001/02).<sup>23</sup>
- NEET rates in Wales and England fluctuated over the last decade between those of Scotland (highest) and Northern Ireland (lowest).
- Data on participation in Wales is inconsistent. Data on the participation of 16 to 18-year-olds shows a fall in work-based learning between 1999-2006, with fairly static participation in education (dipping in 2004). Meanwhile school leaver data indicates more of an increase in participation in education, particularly among year 11 leavers.<sup>24</sup>
- In England, participation in education has risen in most years over the last decade, while participation in work-based learning and employment has generally fallen.<sup>25</sup>
- The English regions had widely varying NEET rates among 16 to 19-year-olds, but this has converged in recent years. In 2000, there was an 11

point difference between the South East (six per cent NEET) and the North East (17 per cent NEET). By 2007, this gap had narrowed to five percentage points – between the South West (nine per cent NEET) and the West Midlands (14 per cent NEET).<sup>26</sup>

### **Key planks of reform to 14-19 education and training in the UK**

Although there are some important differences in the policy approaches to increase participation post-16 – described later in this section – there is much in common in the underlying reform of 14-19 education and training being pursued across the UK. Key themes are summarised below (see Annex B for list of policy documents cited).

#### **1. Improving access to vocational qualifications and raising their status.**

Varied progress is being made towards unified qualifications frameworks that bring together vocational and academic pathways:

- Learning Pathways in Wales and the Welsh Baccalaureate
- On-going curriculum reforms in Scotland, beginning with Higher Still in 1999
- In Northern Ireland, a new Entitlement Framework will guarantee access to a wider-range of academic and vocational options at 14 and 16, supported by a Vocational Enhancement Programme in schools.
- In England 14-19 Diplomas combining vocational and academic elements have been launched, although as yet they remain unproven. More broadly, the September Guarantee pledges a suitable learning place (including vocational and work-based options) for all 16 to 17-year-olds, for the September after they leave school.

21 Sources used in this section are NEET statistics from NPI analysis of Labour Force Survey data, as above; and national sources, as referenced.

22 DENI, *Destination of School Leavers*.

23 Scottish Government Statistics, *School Leaver Destinations* (compared to other national sources quoted in this section).

24 StatsWales Participation Data (16 to 18-year-olds) and Leavers Data (year 11 and year 13 leavers).

25 DCSF (2008d) *Participation in Education, Training and Employment of 16 to 18-year-olds in England*.

26 Labour Force Survey, analysis by Guy Palmer, New Policy Institute.

The notion of a 14-19 phase is gaining currency across the UK, as young people will increasingly be able to opt for vocational routes from age 14.

**2. Increasing access to work-based learning.** Work-based learning (WBL) (where young people spend all or part of the week learning in the workplace) is being promoted in all four nations, reversing a period of long decline. Apprenticeships (and Modern Apprenticeships) are at the heart of this drive, together with a variety of programmes for young people who need to gain further skills and experience first. These include:

- Skill Build in Wales
- Get Ready for Work in Scotland
- Entry to Employment (E2E) programmes in England.

In England and Wales, WBL is an integral part of the qualifications framework, while in Scotland and Northern Ireland it forms a separate learning pathway.

**3. Improving collaboration between schools, colleges, training providers and employers, so that young people can access wider learning options** – in particular, more vocational and work-based learning opportunities:

- In Wales, providers work together in local 14-19 Networks to plan and deliver the 14-19 Pathways in their area.
- In England, area consortia have been set up to deliver the new Diplomas.
- In Northern Ireland, schools must work together in Area Learning Communities to deliver enhanced vocational opportunities.
- Scotland has developed a *Curriculum for Excellence*<sup>27</sup> and *Skills for Work*<sup>28</sup> programmes, which together aim to provide a broad curriculum including work-based learning.

This should make it easier for young people to put together a learning package that reflects their interests and aptitudes – for

example, combining classroom and on-the-job learning, or studying for both academic and vocational modules at different institutions.

**4. Improving advice and support for young people who are NEET or at risk of becoming NEET.** A wide-range of initiatives are being pursued to encourage and support young people's participation in education or training. These include:

- Educational Maintenance Allowances (in all nations) providing a financial incentive to participate for young people from lower income households.
- A variety of initiatives to improve information, advice and guidance; and systems for identifying and supporting young people who are NEET or at risk of becoming NEET. In England, Connexions advisers engage with the wide-range of learning and personal needs experienced by young people NEET. In Wales, working with Learning Coaches is being developed and in Scotland, young people are supported by Careers Scotland Key Workers.
- Innovative approaches to support re-engagement, including:
  - Activity Agreements and Entry to Learning Pilots in England – exploring financial incentives, contracts between young people and providers, personalised action planning and support from a personal adviser.
  - In Wales, there are new plans to trial targeted approaches for 'at risk' groups.<sup>29</sup>
  - Multi-agency projects in Scotland arising from the 1999 Beattie report have explored how best to support successful transitions beyond school for young people with additional needs, informing policy and practice.

<sup>27</sup> Scottish Executive (2004) *A Curriculum for Excellence*.

<sup>28</sup> <http://www.ltscotland.org.uk/nq/nqframework/skillsforwork.asp>

<sup>29</sup> WAG, May 2008.

## **Policy levers to increase 16-18 participation**

While there may be much in common in the broad thrust of reform to 14-19 education and training across the UK, the nations differ significantly in the policy levers being applied to reduce the proportion of young people who are NEET.

Most radically, the Government in England has legislated to raise the participation age to 18, placing a statutory duty on young people to continue in education or training on at least a part-time basis.<sup>30</sup> Failure to do so, unless there is a reasonable excuse, will constitute an offence liable to a fixed penalty fine. While the use of compulsion is controversial, it is intended as an inclusive measure, as explained by the Secretary of State in Parliament:

It is only by requiring that every young person participate in education or training until the age of 18 that we can ensure that they all have the opportunities they need and that all employers, schools and colleges are galvanised to play their part so that no young person falls through the cracks ... No one will be left out on the basis that it is not for them or that it is too hard to meet their needs.<sup>31</sup>

The legislation is underpinned by a wide-ranging and ambitious programme of reform to ensure that there is a suitable learning place and the necessary support for every young person. Major change to the machinery of government for the funding and delivery of 16-19 education and training will make local authorities responsible for driving forward this change programme, working in partnership across 'travel to learn' areas and on a regional basis.

The Welsh Assembly Government is also planning a new legislative measure but

has emphasised that this will introduce a legal entitlement for all young people, not a duty:

We want to ensure that as many young people as possible choose to stay in learning post-16, including those with multiple barriers to learning. Rather than introduce a compulsion to participate beyond the age of 16...by increasing the quantity and quality of the options available to young people during their education they will want to continue to participate in learning.<sup>32</sup>

Both Scotland and, more recently, Wales, have undertaken successive reforms to broaden the curriculum, with a stronger focus on removing the barriers to participation faced by some young people. This has been central to the Scottish approach, following the 1999 Beattie report *Implementing Inclusiveness, Realising Potential*.

Scotland and Wales also differ from England and Northern Ireland in that NEET policy is driven primarily by the employment and skills agenda, while in England and Northern Ireland, the emphasis is more strongly on education and training. This may reflect the historic pattern of participation across the nations – Scotland, in particular, has higher levels of employment among young people aged 16 to 18 and continues to emphasise employment as a positive option for school leavers.

In Northern Ireland, there is no national strategy to reduce NEETs, nor much evidence of political awareness of this group. Although Northern Ireland compares well to the other UK nations in terms of participation in education, the experience of Barnardo's services suggests that young people who are NEET in Northern Ireland are as much in need of policy solutions as elsewhere, but that they remain an unrecognised group.

<sup>30</sup> 280 hours over one year (Section 8) Education and Skills Act 2008.

<sup>31</sup> Rt Hon Ed Balls MP, Education & Skills Bill Second Reading debate, 14 Jan 2008, Hansard column 662.

<sup>32</sup> WAG, May 2008, The learning and skills (Wales) Measure 2008 (Para 1.35).

## Chapter three: Disengagement

### Chapter overview

Many of the young people interviewed in this research were alienated by their time in school and had under-achieved, leaving with few qualifications. Many had poor basic skills and lacked confidence in their own ability to learn. Key factors included poor relationships with teachers, boredom, bullying and an escalating cycle of challenging behaviour, truancy and exclusion.

They felt they would have done better if lessons had been more relevant to future work prospects, if they had had more support and encouragement, less bullying and fewer rules.

Wider life circumstances also had an impact, underlying and reinforcing some young people's difficulties in school. These included early parenthood, frequent house moves and challenging family circumstances, and living in a community with long-term unemployment and a poor infrastructure.

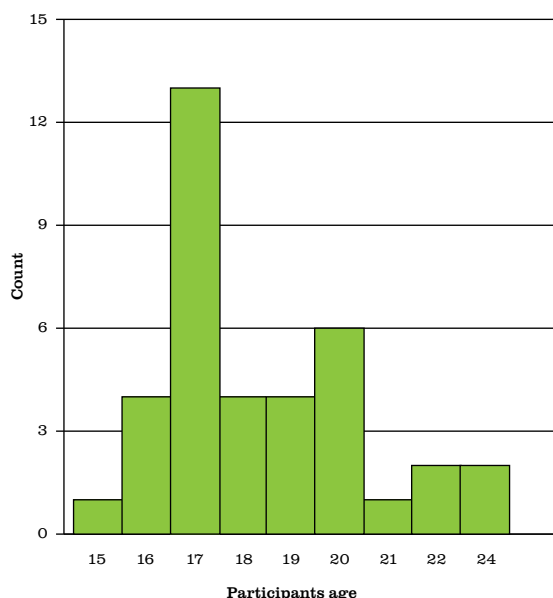


## Introduction

The main focus of this research was to explore how young people who are NEET can be helped to get back to education or training. To do this, the reasons why young people become NEET must first be understood: why do young people drop out of education or find themselves excluded and what are the implications for policy and practice? Two main sources of evidence are used to answer this question:

- a survey of young people in Barnardo's services, exploring reasons for disengagement<sup>33</sup>
- a review of the literature on youth disaffection and disengagement.

This chapter also draws on the views of young people and Barnardo's project workers interviewed during the research. Although the main focus of the interviews was on re-engagement, experiences of school in particular influenced young people's options post-16, as well as attitudes to learning and aspirations.



## About the young people

**Gender:** The survey was completed by 37 young people. Of those young people, 26 are male and 11 are female.

**Age:** The age distribution of the young people surveyed is shown below.

**Where do they live?** Just over three-quarters of the young people (75 per cent) lived with their parents, whilst 10 per cent lived in private rental/council/housing association. Two lived in supported lodgings. One young person lived with a grandparent and another lived with his girlfriend.

**Teenage parents:** Six of the young people had children. Three had two children and three had one child.

**Registered as homeless:** Three young people have been accepted/registered as homeless. Of these, two live in private rental/council/housing association properties and one lives with grandparents.

## Location

| Region                | Number of young people |
|-----------------------|------------------------|
| Scotland              | 14                     |
| London and South East | 7                      |
| North East            | 6                      |
| Yorkshire             | 4                      |
| North West            | 4                      |
| Wales                 | 1                      |

<sup>33</sup> The survey was completed by 37 young people aged 15-24 in England and Scotland. The majority were enrolled on courses in Barnardo's education and training services; a smaller number attended Barnardo's youth support services.



## Why do young people disengage from education?

This chapter explores the reasons for disengagement thematically:

- experiences of school
- individual factors
- family circumstances
- structural issues – economic decline and poverty.

### Experiences of school

The first – and main – part of this chapter focuses on young people’s experiences of school, which emerged as the strongest influence on their likelihood to disengage and on the barriers to re-engagement they now faced.

## How did young people feel about school?

The survey asked how much the young people liked school, using a scale of 1 (disliked school) to 10 (liked school) and asked them to comment on the score. Just over two-thirds had not liked school, (23 out of 34) choosing a score of 5 or below; 1 was the most common score (chosen by 7 young people). Some even rated their time at school as a zero. Reasons included being picked on; being labelled by teachers; a lack of support; sitting down all day, and feeling bored. One-third of the young people were more positive about school, choosing a score of 6 or above. Their comments centred on having friends and having a laugh.

**Table:** How did young people feel about school?

| Rated school | Number       | Comment   |
|--------------|--------------|---|
| 0            | ☹☹☹          | I didn't enjoy school because of the teachers and lack of support.                          |
| 1            | ☹☹☹☹☹☹☹      | I didn't like school because I got bullied and I didn't get the help I needed in lessons.   |
| 2            | ☹☹☹☹         | It was boring; sat down all day.  |
| 3            | ☹☹           | Did not have the help I needed.   |
| 4            | ☹☹           | Changed school at 14 when moved to a new town.  |
| 5            | ☹☹☹☹☹        | I got labelled straightaway.  |
| <b>0-5</b>   | <b>23x</b> ☹ | <b>TOTAL: Did not like school</b>   |
| 6            | ☺☺☺          | I enjoyed seeing my friends and a few lessons.  |
| <b>6</b>     | <b>3x</b> ☺  | <b>TOTAL: Indifferent to School</b>   |
| 7            | ☺☺           | Because it was a laugh.   |
| 8            | ☺☺☺          | My school was well organised, I got on with most of my teachers and I had a lot of friends. |
| 10           | ☺☺☺          | It was a laugh.   |
| <b>7-10</b>  | <b>8x</b> ☺  | <b>TOTAL: Liked school</b>  |

**Source:** Barnardo’s survey of young people’s views N= 34

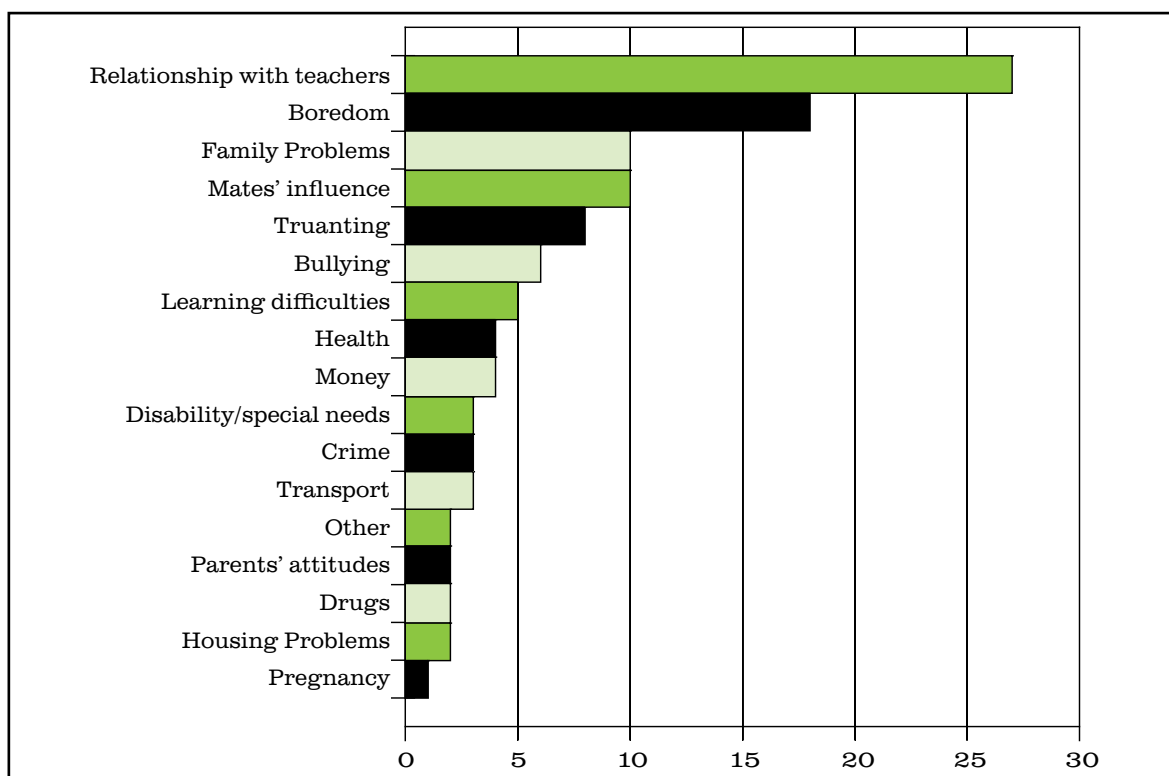
### Barriers to achievement at school

The young people were asked what prevented them from doing well at school, ticking as many issues as were relevant. The six most common issues were:

1. relationships with teachers
2. boredom
3. family problems
4. the influence of peers
5. truanting
6. bullying.

When asked to rank the issues in order of importance, difficult relationships with teachers and boredom emerged as the most significant factors, by a long margin. Next most significant were the influence of peers and family problems followed by bullying. Ranking the issues suggests that some factors which emerge as significant influences in the literature are not as significant for the young people in this survey. For example, truancy and parents' attitudes are not among the top three reasons that they claim prevented them from doing well in school.

Chart 1: What did young people say prevented them doing well at school?



Source: Barnardo's survey of young people's views N= 34

*What would have helped at school?*

The survey asked young people what would have helped them to do better at school. The top six answers were:

1. lessons more relevant to future work
2. more encouragement from teachers
3. work experience
4. more relaxed atmosphere/fewer rules
5. more help with studying to catch up
6. less bullying.

These correspond well with the barriers to achievement identified [see chart 1]. For example, young people felt they were held back by poor relationships with teachers and would have liked

more encouragement from them; they complained of boredom and they would have liked lessons more relevant to work and the opportunity to do some work experience.

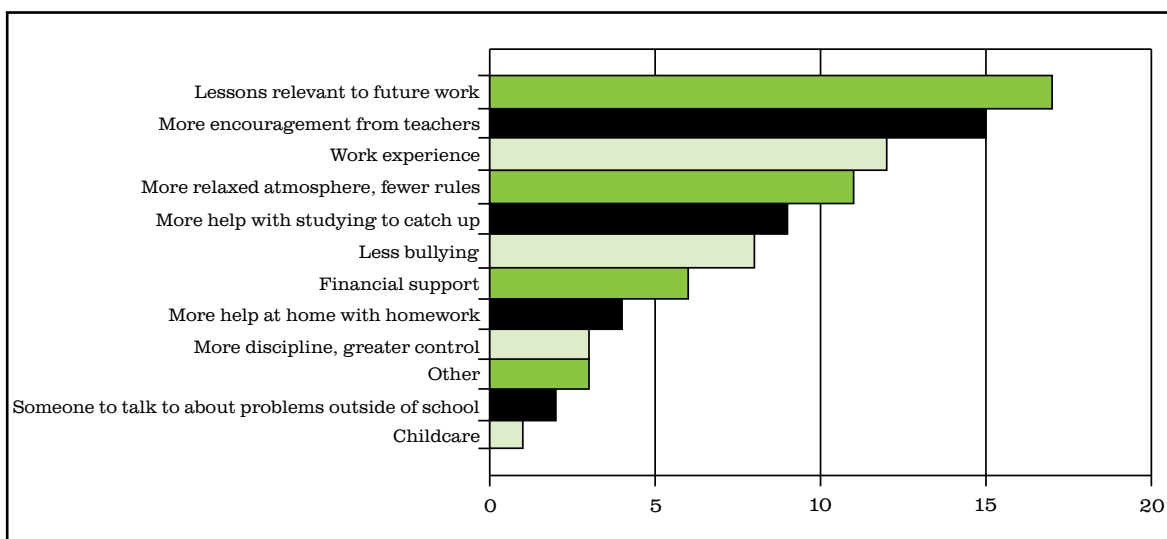
Interviewees wanted learning to be relevant. A group of young carers who were taking GCSEs, A levels and college courses said that they could not see the point of much school work and suggested that more practical lessons, classes on how to manage a budget, and better sex education would have maintained their interest and benefited them as they became more independent. Niamh said that at her school:



“The work had no relation to what we were doing. There were a lot of worksheets. I would have preferred more practical stuff. And more hands on creative stuff. There’s no point just writing about stuff and not actually doing it.”

Young carer, 18,  
group interview

**Chart 2: What would have helped?**



**Source:** Barnardo’s survey of young people’s views N= 35

*At what age do young people disengage?*

The young people were asked if they had stayed interested in school until they were 16. Nearly two-thirds reported they had not. Just under one-third (11 out of 34) of the young people who responded to the survey said they had left school before their sixteenth birthday. Some had lost interest in school from an early age.

**Table 2:** At what age did you lose interest in school?

| Years          | Young people |
|----------------|--------------|
| Primary School | 4            |
| Year 7-8       | 4            |
| Year 9-10      | 5            |
| Year 11-12     | 6            |

**Source:** Barnardo’s survey of young people’s views N= 19

These survey results confirm other research which found disengagement could occur as early as primary school.<sup>34</sup> Ravet (2007) explored this with 10 young people in a small primary school in Scotland. The children in the study had no diagnosis of special needs, but they all expressed negative feelings about school, often complaining of boredom. They were aware that they were falling behind their classmates but did not feel they could do anything about it, and would resort to challenging behaviour.

In one-to-one interviews several young people in Barnardo's services described what lay behind their early disengagement from school. One had liked primary school until year 6 when:

“Everything was getting harder and the teachers stopped listening to you if you weren't smart enough.”

One-to-one interview

At secondary school he rapidly found he didn't understand the lessons and started getting into trouble.

Some authors note how much some children struggle with the transition to secondary school.<sup>35</sup> In a study of transfer from primary to secondary education, Galton et al (2007) estimated that up to two out of every five pupils fail to make expected progress during the first year in secondary school. Leadbeater (2005) explains this as follows:

One cause of children disengaging from their education is the disruption of passing from a small primary school, which feels like a close-knit community, to a large secondary school that seems harsh, impersonal and faceless. In this hiatus many children, particularly boys, seem to decide to lessen their engagement because education becomes far more system-driven, less personal and aspirational.<sup>36</sup>

Some of the young people in Barnardo's services spoke about feeling daunted by the transition from primary to secondary school. They found the work more difficult and the rules harder to stick to. A project worker observed that young people need to be in a safe environment to learn – yet big secondary schools, with large classes and different subject teachers, who cannot easily get to know individual students, may not provide this security.

#### **School factors involved in disengagement**

As described above, the young people responding to our survey cited relationships with teachers, boredom, the influence of peers and bullying as issues that prevented them from doing well at school. These mirror the themes described in other research with young people who have disengaged from education. For example, a group of teenage mothers involved in a recent study (Hosie, 2007) highlighted difficulties with particular teachers, being bullied, feeling bored, dislike of some subjects and struggling with the schoolwork.

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34 Kemp, 2008; Ravet, 2007; Horgan, 2007.

35 Sodha and Margo, 2008.

36 Leadbeater (2005).

A brief overview of relevant literature is provided below, focusing on the key (school-related) issues identified by the young people in Barnardo's research:

- interaction with teachers
- feeling bored and falling behind
- inadequate Personal Social and Health Education (PSHE)
- special educational needs
- bullying
- behaviour, truancy and exclusion.

### Interaction with teachers

*'Teachers have first impressions as well as pupils; if they don't like you it can cause problems.'* (Barnardo's survey)

Hosie's research suggests that difficult relationships with teachers were the strongest factor influencing young people's experience of school. Individual teachers were mentioned by 36 of the 93 young women she interviewed. Key complaints that Hosie noted included 'being shouted at, being 'spoken to like children' or being humiliated and many felt that the behaviour of certain teachers constituted bullying'.<sup>37</sup>

Sometimes Barnardo's interviewees met a strong character like Greg, who had risen above the disadvantages he faced at school as a 15-year-old African-Caribbean boy caring for his mother. He was keen to learn and agreed with others during a group interview for this research that getting on with teachers was sometimes difficult, but said:

*'Even though you don't like the teachers, you should still make an effort.'*  
(Group interview)

### Feeling bored and falling behind

*'Was bored, wasn't interested in most classes, found some things hard.'*  
(Barnardo's survey)

Boredom was high on the list of reasons that prevented survey respondents from doing well at school, echoing the findings of other research. Several studies indicate that many young people find the content of lessons boring and irrelevant to their future lives.<sup>38</sup> For example, a report from the Social Exclusion Unit:

found plenty of evidence in its consultations with young people who did not see the relevance of academic learning to their future lives. Many believed qualifications were unimportant either because they would not need them to succeed, in their terms, or because they did not believe they would succeed in any way.<sup>39</sup>

Young people are more likely to become disaffected with school if their aptitudes are more practical than academic. One solution is to extend vocational and practical learning opportunities.



“They gave me a second chance like, because I didn't exactly work well the first time I was here.”

Service user, Dr B's,  
Harrogate

<sup>37</sup> Hosie, 2007.

<sup>38</sup> Macdonald & Marsh, 2005 (p57); Cassen & Kingdon, 2007 (p29).

<sup>39</sup> Social Exclusion Unit, 1999, (p39).

Vocational courses and work-related learning experiences before the age of 16 do contribute to improving young people's motivation in school and the likelihood of their continuing education after 16.<sup>40</sup>

One young male responding to Barnardo's survey commented:

*'I didn't like (school) because it was too much ... the only time I liked school was when I done construction.'*  
(Barnardo's survey)

A number of studies suggest that target-setting and national tests have contributed to an increase in disaffection and disengagement from education,<sup>41</sup> in part because this encourages schools to focus more of their resources on students thought capable of achieving the benchmark A\*-C grades at GCSE. Findings from the Nuffield Engaging Youth Enquiry indicate that the emphasis on academic attainment and particularly, the five GCSEs at A\*-C benchmark creates an 'ingrained sense of failure'<sup>42</sup> among some young people, affecting their motivation and reducing their chances of realising their own potential.

### **Inadequate PSHE and sex and relationship education**

Some commentators link the narrow focus in some schools on GCSE attainment with shortcomings in the provision of a broader education in life skills:

Competition between schools – which is reflected in competition between the league table status 'academic' subjects and the lower status personal and social education (PSE) obstructs the delivery of good sex and relationship education.<sup>43</sup>

Inadequate PSHE and in particular, sex and relationship education, was a criticism made by some of the young people in Barnardo's services:

‘Sex education should be better to stop teenage pregnancies. Talk to girls who have been through it. They should get people who've been through it in to talk to young girls. I'm now struggling, because I've got no qualifications; I can't go off and work because I don't have any GCSEs.’

One-to-one interview

Some of Barnardo's service users had not had supportive or encouraging parents to help them gain life skills and boundaries, like coping with sex and relationships, that other young people learn in the family home. Key workers in Barnardo's services were in effect filling this gap.

### **Bullying**

Bullying emerged as a significant reason for disengagement, from the survey, individual and group interviews, and from the literature.<sup>44</sup>

40 McCrone and Morris, 2004.

41 Cassen and Kingdon, 2007.

42 Nuffield, 2008 (p6). Also reflected in other studies eg Archer and Yamashita (2003).

43 David, 2006.

44 Cooke, 2005, Macdonald and Marsh, 2005.

In a group interview, Adam told the researchers he didn't get on with anyone at school, because the bullies didn't like him. In one incident, bullies had thrown lit cigarettes at him and allegedly staff took the attitude that if they hadn't seen it, it wasn't happening. He became a persistent non-attender.

Bullying was a common reason for losing touch with learning: young people felt angry, isolated and let down by those in authority, which affected their concentration and behaviour. A few said they had become depressed or started to self-harm; others retaliated. These behaviours led to exclusions – official and unofficial. Ceri told researchers she was told not to come back to school until she had stopped cutting herself. She was later admitted to hospital for two years.

Young people who had been bullied usually missed a lot of school. Schools were reported to be uninterested and unsupportive, leaving the young person feeling let down. Brian suffered from name calling at school and he got into fights. The school responded by giving him a special card that allowed him to leave the classroom when he felt angry or upset. Although this was meant to help him – giving him the chance to get away and calm down – he ended up missing a large proportion of his lessons.

In recent years, research has started to explore the connections between gender, sexuality and bullying. Research illustrates that 65 per cent of young lesbian, gay and bisexual young people have experienced direct bullying in school and were used to hearing the word 'gay' used in a derogatory way ('that's so gay', 'you're so gay').<sup>45</sup> Research with 60 young people on the impact of homophobic bullying by a youth-led think-tank found:

homophobic bullying can affect any young person, straight or {Lesbian, Gay

and Bisexual}. In addition, a third of the project's young people who identified as straight said there was a negative attitude towards sexuality in their schools. Half of those said this impacted on their personal development.<sup>46</sup>

### **Special educational needs, (SEN) learning difficulties and disabilities**

Nearly one-quarter of the young people responding to the survey indicated that SEN, learning difficulties or disabilities prevented them doing well at school. This also emerged as a theme in many of the interviews with young people in Barnardo's services – with examples of young people whose special educational needs had gone undiagnosed until late in their education (if at all). Most commonly mentioned were dyslexia (many still had poor literacy skills) and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), affecting their behaviour and ability to cope in a large classroom.

Barnardo's vocational training services in Harrogate and Belfast support young people with moderate to severe learning difficulties to gain the skills and confidence they will need to work in the catering industry. Some of the young people interviewed at these services described problems at school, linked to learning difficulties. Even though they had been offered extra support and lessons away from mainstream classes, some still struggled to make progress.

Several studies have established a link between disengagement and SEN, learning difficulties or disabilities including McIntosh (2005),<sup>47</sup> who found that among lower achieving pupils, those with learning difficulties were more likely to become disaffected, lose confidence and suffer from low self-worth. There are also well documented links between SEN and exclusions. For example, the latest

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45 Hunt and Jensen, 2007.

46 Parle et al, 2008.

47 McIntosh (2005).



national statistics for schools in England show that seven in every 10 permanent exclusions involved children with SEN; pupils with statements accounted for nine per cent of permanent exclusions, while pupils with SEN but no statement accounted for 61 per cent.<sup>48</sup>

### **Behaviour, truancy and exclusion**

*'I wasn't a very good girl. I was very bad. I was only there two months: I spat at a teacher.'* (One-to-one interview)

Young people from a range of backgrounds talked during interviews about how they had behaved badly in school – getting into fights, swearing at teachers and arguing back all the time. For some, this led to exclusion.

A range of factors lay behind this: some said it was because they had ADHD or other social, emotional and behaviour difficulties; some that they had 'anger management problems'. Feelings of anger were a common experience among the young people interviewed; some said they were simply retaliating to the bullies in school; while others linked their behaviour to feelings of boredom, perceptions that school was pointless and poor relationships with staff.

While no young person responding to the survey identified truancy as the top issue preventing them from doing well in school, several said it was the second or third most important factor. Not bothering to go to classes, preferring instead to 'hang out' with friends was common among the young people interviewed. Several interviewees said they had stopped attending school regularly in year 8 or 9. It was evident that truancy reinforced their difficulties: falling behind with the work and feeling

bored were given as reasons for truancy, but missing classes only led them to fall behind further and some were drawn into offending and drug use in their time out of school.

Truancy and exclusion from school emerges as a major risk factor associated with disengagement, under-achievement and a range of poor outcomes, including offending behaviour. According to the Youth Justice Board for England and Wales (YJB), excluded pupils are almost three times more likely to commit crimes than their peers who are in school.<sup>49</sup>

Some of the young people interviewed said they had spent long periods out of school following exclusion. Some had had home tuition, but this appears to have been patchy. Others had been sent to a Pupil Referral Unit, but it appeared that the same difficulties they had experienced in school – anger, bullying, boredom, poor relationships with staff and peers – were replicated there.

### **Other factors influencing disengagement**

The next section looks at individual, family and structural issues associated with disengagement, which may have underpinned and reinforced the difficulties young people experienced in school.

### **Individual circumstances and choices**

#### **Poor health**

Health problems – individual or in the family – can lead to disengagement<sup>50</sup> and had a continuing impact on the ability of some of the young people interviewed in this research to re-engage in learning.

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48 Estimates taken from DCSF (2008e) Statistical First Release.

49 MORI for Youth Justice Board (2002).

50 Cooke, 2005, McIntosh 2005.

A survey respondent had become ill in year 10 just before his fifteenth birthday. He was diagnosed with ME. He described the difficulties he had at school.

‘The school didn’t believe I was ill despite the opinion of two doctors. I eventually returned to school for an hour a day towards the end of year 11 but couldn’t take my GCSEs as I hadn’t any support or work sent home from the school.’

Barnardo’s survey

Mental illness could be a barrier to staying in education, sometimes because of a hospital admission where treatment took priority over learning, or because schools found it hard to cope. Researchers heard from several cases where self-harm had caused stigma and alarm.

### Teenage pregnancy

*I would tell my son not to leave school. I wouldn’t want him to go through what I went through. I want him to have a better education and better life than me. I left*

*in year 9 at 14; I was being bullied. When I returned I got bullied again. Then I got pregnant and left.’*  
(One-to-one interview)

Group interviews with young mothers in Barnardo’s services provided evidence of early disengagement from school, but also of positive aspirations for themselves and their young children – echoing themes in wider research with this group. Hosie (2007) suggests that teenage pregnancy is not just a cause for disengagement from education but rather, a consequence of disaffection and under-achievement in school. She conducted research with 93 young women who were pregnant at school in England, 55 of whom said they were not attending school regularly when they found they were pregnant.

A strong dislike of school, pre-pregnancy, is often at the root of disengagement before pregnancy, a situation often exacerbated when the news of pregnancy is met with prevailing negative attitudes within school.<sup>51</sup>

The same study also indicated that motherhood, far from being an insurmountable barrier to future learning, may motivate young women to return to education and gain qualifications:

The realisation of the responsibility of motherhood...reinforced the importance of getting an education and...encouraged them to attend and try hard in order to be able to provide for their child and be a good role-model as the child grew up.<sup>52</sup>

<sup>51</sup> Hosie, 2007.

<sup>52</sup> Hosie, 2007.

## **Alcohol, substance misuse and offending behaviour**

Alcohol and/or substance misuse and offending behaviour prevented a small number of the survey respondents from doing better at school. The young people interviewed often reflected regretfully on the choices they had made in their early teenage years and what in retrospect they wished they had done differently.

The relationship between disengagement from learning and getting involved in risky behaviour is complex. Qualitative studies show that risk factors such as living in poverty, family difficulties and bullying can lead to disengagement, which in turn increases the likelihood of disruptive behaviour, drug and alcohol misuse. Young people are unlikely to experience such factors in isolation and they tend to become mutually reinforcing.

### **Learning choices**

Some of the young people interviewed at Barnardo's services said they had made the wrong choices in leaving school and consequently had dropped out of college or training. This had reinforced their sense of failure. One young man offered this advice to school leavers:

*'They should figure out what they want in their life and what they're going to do, because once they make that choice...well, they can change their mind but that would take a lot of stress...so they may as well pick something they are going to like.'*  
(Group interview)

Education and training for over 16s is characterised by multiple providers

and a complex array of qualifications.<sup>53</sup> Some suggest that disadvantaged young people may find it hard to deal with this complexity and to progress to further education or training without the necessary entry qualifications or information and advice on the right options. Fergusson's research (2004) with 800 young people found a pattern of 'unpredictable and unpatterned short-term engagement with courses, training places and jobs.'<sup>54</sup> Ill-informed choices, approached with little commitment, rapidly turn out to be unsuitable, so young people move on to further options in quick and unfruitful succession.

### **Family circumstances**

There is a considerable body of research demonstrating the impact that family circumstances can have on young people's education. Factors which increase the likelihood of disengagement include:

- bereavement
- caring for a child or a sick family member
- domestic violence
- abuse and neglect
- having an alcoholic parent
- poor parenting, being rejected by a parent or coming from a chaotic home.<sup>55</sup>

Although family difficulties during school had been significant for some of the young people in Barnardo's services, the young people interviewed in this research were more likely to attribute their disengagement from education to school or individual factors, than to difficulties at home.

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53 Pearce, N and Hillman, J, 1998.

54 Fergusson, 2004.

55 Cooke, 2005, Jordan, (2001); Scottish Executive Social Research study (2003); McNeil, (2003); NFER (2005); McIntosh, (2005).

For example, Lizzie related her difficulties in school to frequent house moves despite some evidence of a difficult early life. She had since moved house three times, as a result going to several different schools. But she was also fostered from birth and moved for the first time at age two, when she was adopted. Now she wished to search for her birth mother as soon as she turned 18. She said she hated school: she had been bullied and ended up being expelled from middle school.

### **Structural issues – economic decline and poverty**

International comparison data shows that the UK has the strongest link between socio-economic disadvantage and disengagement from education.<sup>56</sup> Factors associated with disengagement include:

- poor housing, living on a large housing estate
- homelessness
- local deprivation, poverty and high unemployment.<sup>57</sup>

Parental income remains a strong predictor of educational performance,

which in turn affects the likelihood of staying on post-16. Only about a quarter of students receiving free school meals gain five good GCSEs or equivalent, compared to over half of the overall population.<sup>58</sup>

MacDonald and Marsh (2005) conducted research with young people in an area with some of the lowest levels of educational achievement and post-16 progressions. They found that low educational attainment may be related to the young people's expectation that they would not get a good job on leaving school. The research suggested that school disengagement may be an effect of social exclusion caused by attending 'failing' schools in poor neighbourhoods.

Researchers were told about low aspirations in Blackpool, where young men in particular, could not see the point of learning or trying for jobs, tending to think that service jobs would not be for them. The section on structural barriers in the next chapter shows how young people can become disillusioned when there are few opportunities.



56 Steedman and Stoney, (2004) citing data from the OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA).

57 Bosworth, (1994); Cooke, (2005); Furlong et al (2000); JRF, 2007; Nuffield Engaging Youth Enquiry (2008).

58 DFES, (2006) cited JRF, 2007 *Experiences of poverty and educational disadvantage* <http://www.jrf.org.uk/knowledge/findings/socialpolicy/2123.asp>

## Chapter four: Re-engagement – young people’s perspectives

### Chapter overview

Poor experiences at school exerted an on-going influence on young people in Barnardo’s education, training and support services. Project workers needed to build young people’s confidence in their own ability and turn around attitudes to learning. Work-based learning could be a powerful motivator – feeling different to school and making it easier for young people to accept rules and routines.

Many young people faced barriers to participation, requiring targeted approaches and extra support. Young people with learning difficulties and disabilities benefited from being able to take more time to learn the skills of the catering trade in small, achievable steps. Teenage mothers with access to childcare and financial support were able to resume their education and some aspired to go on to university; without such support, they were an isolated group. Homeless young people had such pressing needs that their education tended to be put on hold until they were securely housed. Structural factors – such as living in a deprived area and poor transport infrastructure – created practical barriers to participation and eroded young people’s aspirations.

Nearly all the young people were glad they had returned to learning and had clear aspirations for the future. Positive role models, the opportunity to gain qualifications, learn new skills and gain workplace experience, as well as voluntary and social activities were all helping them to move forward.

### Introduction

The NEETs are the jobs hanging around the off-licence late into the night. They are the graffiti artists who cannot spell and the drug-dealing pit-bull owners. They are also the Vicky Pollard types who become single mothers. (Smith, D *Sunday Times*, 07/01/07)

Caricatures of young people who are NEET portray them as ‘idle’ and ‘feckless’ and often view them with suspicion. This research reveals a different picture: young people alienated by their experiences of school, many of whom face real barriers to continuing with their education or finding a job. Despite the considerable challenges some faced, almost all were motivated by having a second chance to gain some qualifications and improve their employment prospects.

This chapter is based on the first-hand accounts of 75 young people in Barnardo’s

services, aged 13-20 years, who were or had recently been NEET. It describes their experience of re-engaging in education or training in two stages:

1. barriers to coming back into learning
2. moving forward: positive influences, small steps and hopes for the future.

### Barriers to re-engagement

All the young people interviewed faced barriers to getting back into learning – some relating to the reasons they left school at 16 or before, while for others there were recent events and circumstances, such as being ‘kicked out’ of home or the onset of mental illness. Active intervention was required to overcome such barriers to encourage and support each young person’s re-engagement with learning.

This section describes the barriers to participation described by the young people interviewed and what they said helped them to re-engage and make progress, under four headings:

- poor experiences of school
- personal difficulties
- life circumstances and events
- structural barriers.

This chapter focuses on the views and experiences of the young people themselves, reflecting the issues they felt mattered most. Chapter five offers a detailed picture of the work and practice in Barnardo's services to support these young people back into learning and towards future employment.

### **Poor experiences of school**

A bad time at school put a lot of young people off learning, leaving them alienated and lacking confidence in their own ability to succeed. An early task for services was to turn around these negative perceptions and start the process of re-engagement with small steps. Some of the most disengaged young people still needed to learn how to manage their emotions and improve their behaviour, and gain some basic skills before they would be ready to embark on a course or work placement. For those young people, formal vocational courses would not work on their own; social skills needed practise and support too.

Young people wanted a second chance – many had matured since leaving school and regretted missing out, now recognising that they needed qualifications to get a job.

*'I realise that there are quite a lot of opportunities at school that I missed.'*  
(One-to-one interview)

To learn well, young people needed to form trusting relationships but many indicated that the relationships with staff at school had been difficult. Large classes and rules they did not agree with contributed to poor relationships

and problems coping in big institutions persisted for some. For example, Lizzie, who was keen to become a paramedic and had flourished with St. John's Ambulance cadets, felt overwhelmed when she enrolled to study Health and Social Care at a further education college where there were 50 students in the class.

Past experience of bullying remained a barrier to re-engagement because young people remained apprehensive about mixing with their peers. A worker explained that:

*'For a lot of them the challenge is interaction with peers.'*  
(Project worker interview)

These young people benefited from extra support to build up their confidence to take small steps back into learning. Gradually, they were introduced to working with other young people.

### **Personal difficulties**

#### **Learning disabilities**

At Barnardo's two training restaurants in Belfast and Harrogate, young people with learning disabilities were working towards NVQs in hospitality and catering and front of house skills. They sometimes had to face prejudice from the public, but were helped to develop confidence and social skills through one-to-one guidance and team work. Key workers created an ethos of mutual support.

In Belfast, 90 per cent of the trainees had come from special schools, and in Harrogate, young people with learning disabilities were referred to the restaurant by Social Services. They needed specialist support and approached their learning in small steps, strategies which could prevent them from becoming NEET at a later stage. They took longer than average to complete their training, while a few were only able to complete parts of the qualification.

At several services, researchers were told about young people who had special needs



‘The staff are really nice and you can talk to them about anything that’s on your mind, and they just listen.’

Service user, Dr B’s,  
Harrogate

which had gone unrecognised at school, affecting their ability to cope in class and their behaviour. A 15-year-old boy with Asperger’s syndrome and trouble retaining information explained:

*‘It’s hard to study because so much distracts me. You can learn so many things but you end up forgetting them.’*  
(Group interview)

Sixteen-year-old Leah participated in a group interview with five other young people, but giggled loudly, called out and discussed her sex life when others were speaking. In a class of 30 students hoping to get GCSEs this would have been hard to manage. On her E2E course she was able to work in a small group and start to acquire the necessary social skills for the world of work.

Many of the young people had literacy difficulties and late recognition of dyslexia

was raised in several interviews. Learning support had been provided too little, too late, or not at all. Ryan believed that he had received the wrong support with his GCSEs. This perception continued to hold him back.

*‘I was given help with reading, but it’s my writing that’s really terrible.’*  
(One-to-one interview)

LearnDirect basic skills courses and E2E courses allowed young people to gain literacy skills at the same time as a qualification. One-to-one attention and patience helped young people recognise they had a chance to catch up.

### **Mental illness**

Mental illness could be a long-term barrier to participation. This was not just because the illness prevented the young person from going to college or taking a job, but because of the associated stigma. Mental health workers told us that the illness could become a focus of the young person’s identity. They countered this by exploring instead what the young person was good at and building on their strengths and interests. Young people at the Caterpillar service in Wales were involved in campaigning for better understanding of young people’s mental health issues. This empowered them and helped them to gain transferable skills.

### **Life circumstances and events**

#### **Teenage parenthood**

*‘I was excluded by year 9 because I was pregnant.’* (One-to-one interview)

Being pregnant or having a baby should be no barrier to learning or employment. Adult women commonly continue to work until a late stage of pregnancy.<sup>59</sup>

59 Maternity leave for working mothers cannot begin until 11 weeks before the expected week of confinement.

In the case of teenage mothers, however, there appeared to be some prejudice around their continuing to study while pregnant. A few school-age mothers had been told they should not continue at school for health and safety reasons. Seventeen-year-old Morgan was advised by the school (not the midwife) that she should not sit her GCSEs at seven months pregnant, in case the stress brought on an early labour. She left school with no qualifications and at the time of the interview she was heavily pregnant with her second child. She regretted her lack of opportunities and was wistful about her former aspiration to become a choreographer.

Fourteen-year-old Amber had been signed off school indefinitely for post-natal depression. She had not been sent any work by the home tutor. She was isolated at home with her four-month-old baby, so enjoyed the chance to meet a group of other young mothers three times a week at a Barnardo's support service in Wales for mothers under 17.

In Northern Ireland, the Young Parents' Network has spent 10 years addressing this isolating stigma. Its purpose is to ensure that young mothers' health, education and emotional needs are met. The manager reported that when the service first started, young women in Northern Ireland were automatically suspended from school when they became pregnant. Now expectations are high: young women are supported by the Department of Education and Social Services and many young mothers in Northern Ireland are gaining good qualifications and going on to college, work or university.

### **Childcare support in the four nations of the UK**

One important reason for being NEET was being a teenage parent. However, lack of affordable childcare could be a

barrier to re-engaging with education. Approaches varied across the four nations of the UK. The situation in Wales and Scotland is quite uncertain, meaning that young mothers were less likely to pursue education and training after having a baby, while in England and Northern Ireland there is effective financial support to continue in education.

In **England** the Care to Learn benefit funds childcare and travel costs for young women up to the age of 20. It was well regarded by services that worked with young parents but hard to find out about and young women needed help to claim it.

The School Aged Mums Service (SAMS) works with the Department of Education and Social Services across Northern Ireland. Pregnant teenagers up to 18 years old are assessed as a child in need by the Social Services department. This process links them to registered childminders or nurseries and the Department of Education, then funds the childcare enabling the young woman to return to study. Funding is only provided if the young woman attends school, college or an alternative provider such as a women's centre and only if a registered provider is caring for the child. In some cases funding for childcare had been provided for as long as five years (but not beyond the age of 18). This ensures that young mothers in Northern Ireland continue to attend school and gain qualifications.

In **Scotland** previous arrangements for funding childcare such as the Lone Parent Grant have been superseded by new localised arrangements which means that all funding for childcare is at a local level. A new Early Years Framework is to be implemented by local authorities.<sup>60</sup> It currently remains unclear what funds a young mother could access to fund childcare so that she could return to education or training.

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<sup>60</sup> Scottish Government (2008) *The Early Years Framework*.



In **Wales**, there appeared to be no dedicated funding to help teenage mothers with childcare. A project worker reported:

*'There is no system where childcare is automatically funded for young people to return to education, which is a major barrier. It falls to the goodwill of family members.'* (Key worker interview)

Sixteen-year-old Lowri in Cardiff has a nine-month-old baby. She wants to go to college to gain a qualification in childcare and the college provides a crèche. Lowri could pay for the crèche out of child tax credit and child benefit. This would give her a maximum of £89.86 per week for all aspects of her baby's care including nursery fees.

Compare this with Lauren in England. She could receive the same £89.96 to help feed and clothe her baby, but if she wants to go back to college up to the age of 20 she can access Care to Learn which will pay up to £160 per child, per week directly to the childcare provider (or £175 in London). If Lauren is apprehensive about returning to college, Care to Learn will cover her childcare costs to try short taster courses, giving her the opportunity to build confidence to re-enter the world of learning and get accustomed to placing her baby in childcare. She may also be helped with travel costs (which will be free if she lives in London).

### **Homelessness**

Homelessness and poor living conditions created pressing needs for young people and their support workers – taking priority over their education. Until housing issues were resolved, young people were typically unable to find or

sustain a work placement, education or training. Some of the research was conducted in neighbourhoods described as 'bed and breakfast land' with a transient population of young people with insecure living conditions. This made it difficult to attend training courses consistently. Not being able to maintain personal hygiene is a barrier to going to college or getting a job.

In one such area, interviewees described unsuitable conditions in hostels for young people who had been in care or 'kicked out of home'. Two young mothers told the researchers about the hostels where they and their babies had lived:

“The room was OK, but there were crack heads on the landing.”  
Group interview

“It was horrible. There was all shit going up the bathroom walls.”  
Group interview

### **Structural barriers to re-engagement**

Some commentators, such as Wolf, suggest that being NEET is a matter of 'very clear and definite' individual choice.<sup>61</sup> However, the local economic context can create structural barriers which limit young people's ability to access education, training and employment and therefore constrain the choices open to them.

61 Wolf, A (2008).

Some such barriers may be readily addressed by improving transport and financial support. Others are more complex and enduring, such as the economic decline of some regions and in particular, the lack of employment for unskilled young people. Research participants were motivated by the possibility of getting a job, but in the absence of suitable opportunities locally, their motivation could easily turn to disaffection. As Hayward, Wilde et al observe:

Those who are unemployed either do not have the skills needed and/or live in the wrong place to fill job vacancies<sup>62</sup>

The current economic downturn is likely to worsen such structural barriers, making the development of relevant learning and employment opportunities for young people at risk of being NEET all the more urgent.

The research was carried out in 15 Barnardo's services across the UK, most working in disadvantaged areas. Workless poverty in the regions where the research was carried out averaged 24 per cent and was as high as 52 per cent in Bethnal Green, with only Harrogate and Knaresborough<sup>63</sup> in single figures, at seven per cent. In some areas this economic deprivation was manifest in the wholesale loss of industries like coal mining, textiles or shipbuilding. Traditional low-skilled employment opportunities had declined, leading to unemployment which had affected more than two generations. Several young people in deprived areas thought their best available option would be to join the Army, which would also give them the opportunity to gain qualifications they wanted like a driving licence. In Paisley, many young people spoke of:

*'Applying for lots of jobs and getting nowhere.'* (Group interview)

These experiences can be contrasted with the optimism of two young men in Harrogate who explained:

*'There are a fair few restaurants in Harrogate. All you have to do is go into one of the big restaurants with your CV.'* (Pair interview)

### **Financial barriers**

The UK-wide education maintenance allowance (EMA) is intended as an incentive for less well-off young people continuing in education and training. The majority of young people interviewed in this research who were on training or education courses were receiving an EMA of up to £30 per week, but many said they were paying a large proportion of this to their parents, to help with household costs.

Although the effectiveness of the EMA as a financial incentive has been questioned (eg Wolf, 2008, p15), many of the young people in Barnardo's research were motivated to participate by the EMA. A 16-year-old boy with an offending record and no literacy skills said:

*'I'd still come [to the service] if it was only for a tenner, but if I didn't get paid I wouldn't bother to come.'* (One-to-one interview)

He was learning how to use a computer for the first time – a skill that would improve his employment prospects.

More broadly, analysis by the Institute for Fiscal Studies indicates that the EMA has contributed to improved participation rates and attainment levels for young people from disadvantaged areas.<sup>64</sup>

However, Barnardo's research shed light on several issues which need to be addressed to increase the EMA's effectiveness as a financial incentive:

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62 Hayward, Wilde and Williams (2008).

63 <http://www.endchildpoverty.org.uk/why-end-child-poverty/poverty-in-your-area>

64 Chowdry, Dearden and Emmerson, (IFS), 2007

- Young people on work placements often found themselves working alongside waged employees undertaking the same tasks, but earning much more money. This was demotivating, particularly for those working long hours in demanding conditions, such as on a construction site.
- If young people were homeless, claiming EMA was challenging, because the forms require an address and bank account details. Banks vary in the discretion they apply when opening an account for someone with no fixed address and some are reluctant to open bank accounts for homeless young people.
- Missing one day's attendance at training or education means that the whole week's EMA is stopped. For less motivated young people this could provide an excuse to stay away for the rest of the week. Administrative delays in processing EMA payments during autumn 2008 were also reported to have discouraged some service users from attending courses.

Barnardo's services helped young people to access the EMA, along with other benefits to which they were entitled. Without the distraction of money worries, it was easier to learn and focus on training.

Some training courses require the young person to have tools, equipment and specialist clothing, which services might also help out with. For example, in Youthbuild Paisley, which supports young people into placements in the construction industry, boots and hats were provided. Elsewhere, workers applied for a grant for uniform and equipment for one young woman to study nail care.



### **Work-focused interviews**

Like many other young people, young mothers Ella and Chloë (see p.9) thought they would be better off on Income Support than going to work, but discovered after a 'work-focused interview' that there were additional benefits available to them if they started work and in fact they were much better off going to work than staying at home. They received a Job Grant of £250 because they were single mothers. On top of this their prospects improved because they had a good work record; Ella had accessed work-place training as a healthcare assistant which could be credited towards a nursing degree if she chose.

### **Moving forward**

Contrary to popular perceptions of young people who are NEET, the majority of young people interviewed felt they had made a positive choice in coming back to learning; were motivated to achieve more than they had done at school (valuing a second chance) and articulated realistic aspirations for the future. This section describes how young people in Barnardo's services were moving forward, looking at:

- influences and role models
- small steps to success
- hopes for the future.

### **Influences and role models**

#### **Parental involvement**

This chapter opened with a quote which caricatures young people's apparent lack of motivation. Poverty of aspiration is sometimes attributed to the influence of parents who do not work, but this assumption was generally not backed up in interviews with young people, many of whom were supported by their parents. Those who were not – for example, young people who had been 'kicked out' of home or had been in care – needed

more practical and emotional support from key workers.

Some parents actively encouraged their son's or daughter's return to education and training. For example, one young man training for an NVQ in retail had begun to appreciate the way his mother nagged him to get up in the mornings to go to his work placement at ASDA. He had already learnt that:

*'If you're late for work, they give you the worst jobs.'* (Group interview)

His mother's encouragement was a sign to him that he was going to get on and at last he had started to appreciate the importance of her support with his continued progress. He said 'now mum knows I'm getting somewhere'.

At services working with young people with learning disabilities staff were concerned that parents had a tendency to be 'over-protective'. For example, trainees at Dr B's Belfast need to be able to travel independently to the service and work placements, but some parents were reluctant to allow them to do so. The service encourages parents to 'let go' a little more, to enable their son or daughter to develop the confidence to use public transport themselves.

#### **Role models**

Some young people wanted to follow their parents' career path; Greg wanted to emulate his mother who had been a science teacher, although now she was too unwell to work.

Several of the young people selected their role models from the professionals they had most contact with. One young man who had been in trouble with the law now wanted to become a lawyer. At a construction training centre, a young man wanted to teach at the centre in future. In a group of teenage mothers, two young women wanted to become midwives:

*'I'd like to be a midwife. I will need GCSEs so will have to go to college for a year. Then they stick you in a hospital to do the practical.'* (Group interview)

Two young mothers were keen to go into childcare and one pregnant 13-year-old had an ambition to become a social worker. These were not pipe-dreams – with the right courses and consistent support, they could make great progress. In Yorkshire, a 20-year-old young mother – who had missed some exams through having a baby in her mid-teens – had continued to study through Care to Learn and was about to start a social work degree. But she admitted:

*'I'm scared about going to Uni.'*  
(Pair interview)

There were several examples of young people who came from homes where aspirations were said to be low, who were defying expectations and taking positive steps to improve their prospects. For example, Hayley had signed up to do E2E. She got pregnant while still at school and most other people in her family had not worked. At first, workers found her shy and withdrawn. With encouragement, practical support and the right course offer, she became one of the first in her family to want to get a job and support her son. Her support worker said 'she's really going for it'. Interviewers were told:

“She’s changing her little boy’s life; she’s inspiring her partner to go out and work; she’s setting a fantastic example.”

Project worker interview

Some young people went on to become role models themselves, like Kirstie, whose success in a construction apprenticeship had built her confidence so

much that she was now mentoring other girls who wanted to get into the industry.

### **Small steps towards success**

This section reflects what young people said about being successful and making progress on their own terms. The range of individuals interviewed means that definitions of success and progress were varied and personalised, but often included gaining self-confidence.

### **'Distance travelled'**

Success was not always acknowledged in terms of qualifications, a job or a college place, but simply having the confidence to make eye contact or to phone about a job advertisement. Some young people needed to increase their attention span or improve their social or functional skills, before they could embark on a course involving more formal learning.

Developing maturity and independent living skills were particularly important for this age group: the majority of young people interviewed appreciated 'being treated like an adult' at the service they attended. In reality, many were already managing the demands of adult life – such as being a parent, living independently or caring for a family member.

### **Gaining qualifications**

The young people in this research often had no experience of academic success. Like Leanne, whose education was disrupted by mental health problems:

*'I did my GCSEs, but I did crap actually.'*  
(Pair interview with mental health worker present)

At Barnardo's services they were able to grow in confidence, experience success in learning and gain a certificate for the first time, on practical courses like first aid, ASDAN, parenting skills, driving theory, or a Duke of Edinburgh award.

Achieving learning modules or unit assessments such as AQA were particularly valued by those who had not gained any GCSEs. E2E courses gave young people who had been labelled failures at school the chance to gain a qualification. Certificates and portfolios could be used as an incentive to achieve:

*'For one very young person I worked with, I introduced certificates for him and he's kept them all in a scrap book.'*  
(Project worker interview)

Being credited for their achievements and competencies improved their self-confidence as learners, helping them aspire to further learning.

### **Employability**

Specific job-related skills were the focus of young people on training courses. They were proud of learning how to 'meet and greet' the public, drive a forklift truck, cook a lasagne or tile a wall. A young person with ADHD impressed his work mates and instructors with the precision of his bricklaying technique. Having access to a computer for the first time had improved one young man's prospects:

**I couldn't use a computer before. You can do a CV on the computer; I'm going to do one.**

Group interview

Young people gained an understanding of the attitudes needed to progress into a job. These ranged from punctuality,

problem-solving and team-working to being clean and presentable, and appropriate language and personal habits.

Work-based learning was a potent motivator. The importance of discipline and team work – together with the need to be punctual and reliable – became apparent once young people started training for their chosen occupation or embarked on a work placement. Two young men who had been 'kicked out of school' were at work cleaning a restaurant kitchen at 8.30 each morning because:

*'At the end of the course you can go and get a decent job with qualifications and money.'* (Pair interview)

### **Moving into work**

Most of the young people who took part in the research were motivated by the idea of getting a job. Those who had attended vocational training courses usually understood what jobs they could expect to obtain. For those who needed more support 'anything at all' was often the broad aim. They first needed to assess what was realistic and benefited from specific guidance and opportunities to try out taster courses and work experience.

Some of these young people took time to discover the right job or course and made changes or dropped out before settling. Leanne suffered from depression and anxiety after a traumatic assault at the age of 14. She had tried a few different jobs, but found positive working relationships hard to maintain. However with help from her mental health worker she obtained a call-centre job and found security in the clear boundaries and routines of that work.

## **Voluntary work**

Taking part in voluntary work seemed to be a positive support to aspirations. It often provided young people with an opportunity to apply the skills they had learnt and gain in confidence. They also gained new skills and an experience of work in an encouraging setting.

For example:

- Betty had done some voluntary work with the Ulster Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, so knew that she wanted to become a veterinary nurse.
- Lizzie was a long-term member of the St John's Ambulance cadets and wanted to be a paramedic.
- Ella volunteered at a youth centre, and gained some youth work qualifications.
- Muhammad was teaching younger teenagers to cook and realised the extent of the skills he had gained running the household for his disabled parents.

Young people could add their volunteering experiences to their CVs and made contact with a range of adults, some of whom would be able to provide them with a reference. Volunteering is also a component of a Duke of Edinburgh award – a sought-after qualification that is often valued by employers.

## **Positive leisure activities**

Most families encourage their children to take part in a range of educational, leisure and sporting activities from a young age, but such opportunities are limited for young people from less supportive

families and those living in poverty. The skills and confidence gained through such pursuits contribute to young people's success in school and later, in the workplace.

Barnardo's services provided a range of social and sporting activities for the young people they were working with, often relying on charitable funding and volunteers' time. The choice of activity was important, especially where resources were limited. One service was careful to offer realistic activities that a young person would be able to sustain for themselves, rather than very exciting, but perhaps inaccessible or expensive pursuits.

Fourteen-year-old Shirelle in East London had gained a lot through sports. She had gained a PE award and was in the County netball team. One of her ambitions was to play for England; another was to do better with maths. Sport had helped her to understand how to apply herself to achieving her aims.

A young man at a service in a depressed town in Wales had not attended school since year 8. Barnardo's introduced him to a summer DJ workshop. For the first time in years he took part in a constructive leisure activity. He now had an ambition to become a DJ. More importantly, he was learning to focus on a future beyond the next drug deal; he was reducing his drug use, mixing with new friends, developing his creativity and visiting a new part of town.

All these examples show how a virtuous circle of engagement can be encouraged. Through participation in one area, formal or informal, young people were able to develop their aspirations and grow in confidence.

## Hopes for the future

*'They all have aspirations. Very few actually have no aspirations...they're very nervous of it, it frightens the life out of them, but all of them can see that's the way they want to go.'* (Project worker)

For some young people, articulating any aspiration at all was a big step forward, after feeling they had been written off as 'useless' or 'hopeless'. However, interviewers rarely met young people who felt disaffected and demotivated. Most expressed an ambition to have a particular job. Their aspirations were realistic and achievable: a job with a decent wage, a house, a family, a car, and holidays.

A mental health worker found developing young people's aspirations a rewarding part of his job:

**‘If you ask them what they want to do, a lot of our young people, when we first work with them, say they just want to die. So to get them to a point where they say I want to work in a garage, I think that's about giving them something to aspire to, which is very important.’**

Mental health worker  
interview

**‘Five years down the line, I would like to see myself either having my own business or really going into politics. If I can achieve this I can achieve anything.’**

Service user, The Hub,  
Stepney Green



How Barnardo's works with young people to get back into education and training and develop realistic ambitions for employment is the focus of the next chapter.



## Chapter five: Re-engagement – work and practice

### Chapter overview

Barnardo's works extensively with young people who are NEET or have recently been so, offering two main types of service: supportive 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; and vocational training and work-based learning services.

Some young people needed much individual attention to build their confidence and develop the interpersonal and life skills that they would need to take the next steps towards more formal learning or work; others coped well with just a little advice and support from project workers.

A common set of values was evident in every service, underpinning their work in getting young people 'back on track'. These were:

- flexibility – for example, with '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 made mistakes or thought about giving up.

Funding and reporting requirements could run counter to these values: failing to reflect the fact that some young people need more time and more support to succeed on their chosen course and progress to further learning or work.

This chapter describes the range of methods used in Barnardo's services which help young people to make the transition back to education, training or employment and more broadly, promote their economic and social well-being. It concludes with a short section describing the funding, reporting and partnership arrangements within which these services operate.

There were two main types of provision:

1. services supporting the most vulnerable young people, working to address the immediate challenges they face and facilitating their return to learning
2. services providing education, vocational training and work placements.

There was much overlap between these two types of services, with nearly all providing an element of social support

and of learning provision, however informal. Differing methods and techniques – reflecting type of provision and the needs of the client group – were underpinned by some common values and approaches.

### Who attends which type of service?

#### Support services

The young people attending Barnardo's services that mainly provided support appeared more vulnerable than those attending vocational training services. These services tended to work with smaller numbers of young people with more complex needs, which sometimes took priority (in the short-term) over their learning needs. Young people accessing such services included homeless young people, teenage mothers, young people with mental health difficulties, care leavers, young carers and young offenders.

Support services were working with young people from a wide age-range. A young carers' project was working with children from seven up to 18 years old. Projects supported young people from about 13 if, for example, they were pregnant, offending or looked after, or up to about 25 if they had a disability.

A housing support worker explained that her work was frequently 'crisis driven' because many of her service users had chaotic lifestyles. These young people did not always consider their education a priority. For example, in Wales one of the girls stated:

*'We don't learn, not English and maths. We have babies, why would that matter to us?' (Group interview)*

In fact the centre they attended was re-introducing them to learning through first-aid and parenting courses, and talks from health professionals. They were willing to engage with this low-key approach, involving learning that was directly relevant to their lives.

### **Vocational training services**

The young people attending vocational training services had had varied experiences at school, with many leaving with few GCSEs. While many had felt bored and alienated at school, they were ready to apply themselves to courses which involved more practical learning and a clear relevance to future employment, in industries such as construction or catering.

At most vocational training centres there was an open door for referrals. This meant there was no selection process, so these services served a diverse group of young people, some of whom faced considerable challenges. They worked with a range of age groups:

- Dr B's restaurants in Harrogate and Belfast worked with young people from 16 to 25 if they had a learning disability.
- Palmersville in Newcastle worked with 16 to 18-year-olds, and offered taster courses to 14 to 16-year-olds.
- Youthbuild in Paisley worked with young people age 16 to 18.
- Windermere Construction training centre in South East London worked with young people aged 14 to 16.

### **Why it's important to have both types of service**

Both supportive and vocational training services are necessary to meet the diverse and changing needs of young people who are NEET. Some young people need intensive one-to-one support and others are ready to begin training for a job. In some areas, the two types of Barnardo's service worked together to advance young people's prospects:

- In Harrogate, the E2E programme supported young people who had done badly at school, some of whom were young offenders or at risk of offending. They followed a 22-week programme designed to develop skills leading towards a Level 1 qualification; at the same time, the young people were developing social skills and attitudes which would enable them to engage in more formal learning again. At the end of the E2E course young people had the opportunity to train with the Dr B's Restaurant.
- In the Newcastle area, the Base project had a similar connection, with E2E graduates potentially progressing to vocational training at Palmersville. Specialist staff in both services were able to work together to support young people through the transition to more formal learning.

## What do they provide?

### Support services

As well as providing practical, social and emotional support, support services used a range of approaches to encourage young people back into education, training or employment. Key elements of this involved:

- practical support and advice
- working towards level 1 qualifications and other awards
- learning in small groups
- signposting to further education, training and guidance providers
- confidence-building and 'soft skills'<sup>65</sup> development.

### Practical support and advice

The young people who attended support services often experienced 'super-barriers' to re-engagement, such as homelessness, so services often made sorting out the pressing practical difficulties a priority over more formal education.

One service was installing a shower for people who were homeless or in unsuitable housing. Several services provided the use of a washing machine. This illustrates the sort of practical help young homeless people may need before they can focus on education or training.

In Yorkshire, housing support workers helped negotiate the bureaucracies of housing agencies. At the same time they were introducing young parents to education and training opportunities.

Supported lodgings were an effective way to get young people back into learning from being homeless. In South Wales several teenage mothers each had a self-contained flat in a block managed by a social worker. She was able to assess the support they needed and encouraged them to attend a family learning programme based in the local primary school. The girls supported each other and, when they were ready, moved into their first independent homes and often on to college courses.

Several services regularly provided food – cooking where facilities existed, or providing sandwiches or access to a food cupboard for those who needed it.

### Qualifications offered

The majority of young people attending support services had not obtained GCSEs at the A\*-C grades considered to be a 'pass' and some felt this defined them as a failure. As many of them had missed a lot of school and were distracted by their personal problems, they were often not ready to re-take GCSE exams or other level 2 courses, so several services delivered courses leading to entry level and level 1 qualification or certificates of achievement. These included E2E, AQA unit awards, LearnDirect, ASDAN certificates, Bronze Duke of Edinburgh award and Open College accredited courses. Such awards can be tailored to an individually designed programme rather than following a set syllabus and key workers considered that flexibility an advantage in working with young people whose confidence was low and who were distracted by other problems. As one teacher in Northern Ireland explained:

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<sup>65</sup> Social skills that supported learning and employability.

*'The AQA unit award scheme is good because they can achieve in a short space of time. That's important in terms of a teaching method. The young people need to see they're making progress so everything is broken down into small steps. ADHD affects their need to see progress.'* (Tutor interview)

Another basic skills tutor explained that her favoured teaching technique was to keep changing the pace and provide lots of different activities. She used 'short sharp activities' but said that she also expected her students to learn how to sit still occasionally and concentrate.

Another value of these awards was the opportunity to gain certificates for stages passed. For some, this was the first certificate they had ever received and although young people may have 'acted cool' about it, services celebrated each achievement as a means of motivating them to further success.

### **Learning in small groups**

A drop-in service for young people with disrupted lives in Whitley Bay offered E2E courses, basic skills education and GCSEs along with some informal learning opportunities. The tutors were keen to distance their approach from the adverse experiences many of the young people had at school. They taught young people in a maximum group size of six, so were able to give them the individual attention that they needed to make progress. Students were on first name terms with the key workers and although attendance was a

condition of their financial support, some flexibility was allowed because of the challenges service users experienced.

Several services described their methods of working. One tutor explained:

**I don't stand at the board and 'teach' very often...if they do good work they get a reward...I look after all the environmental factors of the classroom and take breaks regularly. It works that we're not too rigid.**

Tutor interview

While it may seem trivial, the researchers heard over and over from young people who appreciated being able to take a short break from learning at regular intervals, for example, not having to ask permission to use the toilet. In small-scale settings it was possible to allow young people this degree of autonomy that adults take for granted and the young people responded well to the 'respect' they felt they were shown, in small ways like this.



## Guidance to education services

Improving functional skills in literacy and numeracy were a priority for a large number of young people attending Barnardo's support services. About half of the services delivered basic skills tuition, for example, through E2E courses.

Other services guided young people towards other institutions providing such courses. For example, a supported housing project in Cardiff directed young mothers to a learning-for-life programme based at the local primary school. There they could learn maths, English and computing free of charge with books, folders and a crèche all provided. The centre assessed them to see what level they were at and worked with them until they achieved a GCSE. For those who lacked the confidence to begin formal learning, there were opportunities to take parenting courses and bring their babies to messy play for a charge of only 50p. From there, they were introduced to a basic skills centre in the city where they could take exams when ready and try out other subjects. The social worker explained:

“The young people are keen to go there, because a lot of them feel that they can't do things. They've had a bad experience at school.”

Social worker interview

Another service supporting young families referred people to the LearnDirect distance education programme. A Connexions worker based at the

Barnardo's service for young families in Wakefield said:

*'LearnDirect maths, English and ICT courses are free and are particularly good for young people who don't like a school setting. However LearnDirect only take a limited number of people at 16 so places can be hard to find.'*

(Connexions worker interview)

Workers explained that because of negative experiences at school, some young people were reluctant to attend anything held on school premises. They therefore valued the support offered by children's centres and other community settings.

## Building confidence through skills development

As well as formal skills like literacy and numeracy, a number of 'soft' skills are needed to cope in modern society and to find and sustain employment.

These include:

- life skills
- social skills
- employability skills.



### Life skills

*'It's not just about academic achievement. What they lack is social understanding.'*  
(Support worker interview)

Key workers in support services worked to develop social and independent living skills amongst their service users. Young people had commonly experienced inconsistent parenting. By the time they were 16, some were living independently but still lacking some basic competencies – from food hygiene to anger management, budgeting to sexual health. Most young people learn these in the family home, but many of the young people accessing Barnardo's support services needed focused support and guidance from a trusted adult to gain them.

### Social skills

Strong social skills bring economic and social benefits. They are important for gaining and sustaining employment and being a valued member of the community.

For young people who have not benefited from supportive parenting or have become alienated and marginalised by difficult childhood experiences, such skills may be difficult to acquire. Support services therefore offered activities and programmes geared to building these skills, often in quite simple ways, such as joining workers and other service users for a tea break or going to the shop to buy milk. A few young people were nervous about travelling on the bus and needed practice. A group doing art and photography courses got inspiration from visiting galleries; young people at risk of offending visited the local fire station and so gained an insight into how some of their behaviour affected other people.

At a more advanced level, a group of young parents in Wales put on a

community get-together for 150 local people and dignitaries and earned praise for their organisation and catering. They learned a great deal through the process and the event linked them with the community they lived in. Their social worker told us that:

‘Rachel [a 17-year-old mother of two] is going to give a speech at an event; she has a vivacious personality and this sort of activity boosts her confidence.’

Social worker interview

This young woman benefited from opportunities like this which helped her to regain her confidence following the domestic violence she had experienced from her babies' father.

Young people with a mental illness had particular requirements and sometimes needed to learn how to make and keep friends. This was done through group work, drama and role play and creating a safe environment for them to meet. As well as this they needed to have fun, which was also an important purpose of an after-school club for young carers in east London. They were going to make a short film together and would have their work accredited with a certificate. Greg had been attending the club since he was seven.

*'It's a nice break to get away from mum for a few hours. A place to relax and take your mind off things: home and school.'*  
(Group interview)

## Employability skills

The life skills and social skills discussed are important to gaining and sustaining employment. Specific job-related skills are needed too. For some it was simply being able to use a computer or speak to a stranger on the phone. Building on these, E2E courses included assignments on 'how to find a job'. At one service in Starbeck, North Yorkshire for example, young people researched jobs and college courses, checked travel information, did a presentation, produced a CV, learnt about interview skills, personal presentation (including 'what not to wear'), body language and communication. Lastly, they had a mock interview in formal clothes with a senior administrator at the service who provided feedback. The young people on this course evaluated their own performance and discussed how they did with the group.

A graduate of this course was working as an administrator at the service and confidently and courteously taught researchers how to get the best out of the photocopier. Later workers told us that her mother had addiction problems and had not been able to care for her. She had previously sworn at workers and still struggled with self-harm.

Punctuality and attendance needed to be constantly promoted by project workers. Young people regularly reported difficulties getting up in the morning and some had responsibilities for younger siblings or their own children that meant they could not always make appointments on time. Others had had chaotic backgrounds where routine, boundaries and security had not featured. Attendance was usually the first priority, with punctuality encouraged later. A tutor explained that she took a:

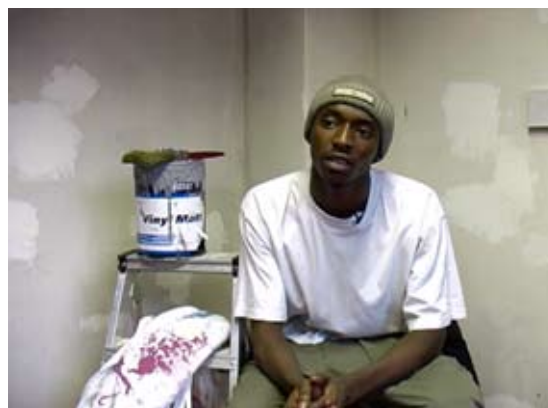
*'Flexible approach to attendance. They need to understand timekeeping, but once they get into a routine they appreciate the structure. When they build up a*

*relationship with us they'll start to come more regularly.'*  
(Basic skills tutor interview)

## Vocational training providers

Barnardo's has a history of over 100 years of providing vocational training and work-based learning to disadvantaged young people. This tradition continues strongly today, adapting to new opportunities and requirements. This section describes the work of Barnardo's vocational training and work-based learning services across the UK, in terms of:

- qualifications offered
- occupational skills, social skills and basic skills development
- small-group instruction with experienced trades people
- enabling progression to employment and further learning
- social support.



“You just get opportunities. B's bring you places, to meet other people, tell you about jobs, tell you things you need to know.”

Service user, The Hub,  
Stepney Green

### Qualifications offered

Vocational training providers offered a range of qualifications which focus on occupational skills. Qualifications were delivered at the following levels:

- pre-vocational employability awards (taster courses for 14 to 16-year-olds)
- Foundation award equivalent to three GCSEs (two-year course for 14 to 16-year-olds)
- NVQ levels 1-3 (for 16+)
- programme-led apprenticeships (for 16+).

The work-related areas covered by these qualifications were numerous. At Palmersville in Newcastle, the occupational areas offered included floristry, painting and decorating, business, horticulture and hair and beauty. Windermere in South East London, the Hub in East London, and Youthbuild in Paisley offered the opportunity to train in construction. At Dr B's restaurants young people gained qualifications in all aspects of catering, including cooking, business administration and front of house skills.

In addition to this, providers ensured that young people obtained literacy and numeracy qualifications where required. Dr B's in Belfast was planning to add English and maths GCSEs to their suite of qualifications.

### Occupational and social skills

Young people took pride in the occupational skills they acquired on their courses. At Windermere, Carl said he was most proud of his cutting-in skills – a tricky aspect of painting and decorating that he had successfully mastered. At Dr B's, front-of-house skills did not always come easily to young people with learning disabilities. They had to learn to take orders, set tables, handle cash and deal with customer complaints. As well as gaining occupational skills, such work developed the young people's social skills, empowering them to manage their lives outside work.

Individual learning programmes were an important aspect of the training for some young people. For example, at Dr B's, an initial assessment would find out whether the young person needed literacy and numeracy support. Regular one-to-one sessions and observations helped them to progress and build up evidence for their portfolios. At Palmersville Training, every young person has an individual learning plan and:

*'No two young people have the same programme.'* (Service manager interview)

Windermere, in contrast, followed a set syllabus where young people spent 16 weeks on each of three aspects of construction, all following the course at the same rate.

At vocational training centres, life skills, social skills and employability skills training was usually rolled into the occupational training programme. Instructors assessed what was needed in the group. A manager explained what young people need to become employable, apart from formal qualifications:

“They're the generic elements that allow you to succeed, such as self-presentation, punctuality, personal hygiene, interview techniques, working out money. Things that employers tell us that they want. They want honest, reliable, punctual, well-presented etc.”

Service manager interview



Services worked flexibly to organise special sessions where needed, for example on budgeting or respecting workmates, or to promote good behaviour on site. In one service, horticulture trainees were refurbishing the garden at a local primary school, which provided an opportunity to reflect on the language and behaviour they should use in front of small children. Young men studying a retail course explained that they had learned about teamwork both through activities at the centre and on their work placements.

### **Basic skills**

Many of the young people interviewed lacked basic skills in literacy and numeracy. Vocational training providers helped to improve these skills, sometimes in formal sessions or by supporting course work. For example, in the Windermere construction training centre, instructors began by acting as scribes to support the written component of the qualification. Gradually they withdrew this support and usually found that the young person was able to complete their written work independently. On this City and Guilds course, photographs and diagrams of the work were assessed alongside any written work.

### **Small-group instruction with experienced trades people**

One of the ways in which services deployed their charitable funds was to provide a larger staff to trainee ratio. This enables them to teach in smaller groups and to provide more individual attention. The young people interviewed appreciated this and commented how different it was from school or colleges they had attended where some felt they had been left behind in a large group.

Another thing that they appreciated was being taught by experts in their chosen occupation. They frequently commented that the instructors “treated them like adults” or were “on the level” with them’. Paul said:

‘It’s different at Palmersville because you get treated like an adult. They don’t treat you like crap here like the teachers used to do.’

Group interview

There was no sense of hierarchy, instead a working environment was created in most settings, where the chance to learn with someone with experience was valued. This does not mean that slapdash work was approved. Instructors said they would tell a young person if he or she had completed a poor piece of work, but they were then given the advice and opportunity to improve on their efforts.

In many of the occupational settings, health and safety were a primary concern. This meant that an early qualification for the young person would be the safety certificate of their trade for example, Food Hygiene, or CSCS in the construction trade. It also meant that dangerous or disruptive behaviour could not be tolerated. The Hub had a written agreement with young people emphasising the necessity of safe behaviour. Instructors stressed the need to behave safely in the work place, but recognised that young people sometimes felt frustrated. They were usually given the opportunity to step outside until they felt calmer.

Instructors impressed researchers with their patience and calm manners. They all claimed that humour helped the work along. One trainee said:

*‘You can have a laugh but at the same time you get all your work done.’*  
(Group interview)

Instructors had chosen to work in Barnardo's projects and acknowledged the stresses faced by colleagues elsewhere who worked with very large groups. They felt that working in small groups and providing one-to-one tuition made their work more effective, especially with young people who might otherwise have been considered 'hard-to-engage'.

### **Enabling progression to employment and further learning**

An important aim of Barnardo's vocational training is to enable young people to progress to employment or further learning. To this end, many of the services had established a strong working relationship with local employers. In the case of Youthbuild, this was integral to the operation of the service. The service effectively introduces young people to employers and subsidises young people in the initial stages of employment and training with a construction company. The expectation was that the young people would be taken on by the company that had given them their work placement or that the experience would be good enough to impress another employer.

Dr B's restaurants had built up good relationships with potential employers in the local area. In Belfast, it was with Premier Inns and Botanic Hotels: both employers who would continue to support young people with learning disabilities and who offered them the work they had been trained for rather than menial tasks. In Harrogate, Dr B's was well known amongst the town's many restaurants and hotels as a good training provider and connections had been made with some big names in catering, such as Mitchell and Butler. These employers and supporters recognised the value of the restaurant and outside catering experience provided by Dr B's:

*'It's a major pat on the back for our young people that they can cope with the pressure involved etc. Employers also*

*recognise this and we have an 85 per cent success rate: they stay with their employer for two years.'*  
(Service manager interview)

At Palmersville the manager was able to claim that their progression rates to apprenticeships were comparable with other training providers, but

*'with a more difficult client group.'*  
(Service manager interview)

In addition to this they had undertaken an innovative social enterprise model where they had funded a young woman for a year to develop her own painting and decorating business for vulnerable and elderly people. That funding and support with facilities enabled her to establish the business.

### **Providing social support**

Some services, like Dr B's and Palmersville, had dedicated staff members who could focus on the social and wider support needs of young people enrolled on their training courses. This enabled them to offer open-door enrolments to training, working with young people whom other providers would find too difficult. At Palmersville they had a social worker and a community worker who could help to overcome the barriers to learning. In addition to this they delivered a group work programme on social skills. For example when there had been an incident of homophobic bullying they held a session around respectful language and attitudes. They also provided training about housing and budgeting. They ran a planned programme but could adapt it to the needs of students and also ran individual sessions if these were necessary. This flexibility was important as Palmersville took in a new group of students every Monday. Some of the other services simply offered a listening ear and help to find advice and support from specialist services.

In many services, project workers spoke about how they would support young people to make a success of their placements, in much the same way that a parent would: reminding them of the need to be punctual, reliable and polite, and smoothing over difficulties should they arise. Support provided included accompanying the young person on public transport for the first few days, helping them to buy appropriate clothing, help with improving basic skills and gaining qualifications such as a driving licence or the CSCS card needed to work on a building site.

### **A common set of values**

Barnardo's support services and vocational training providers each took a different approach to enabling young people to re-engage with education and training. However, despite the variety in provision and service users needs, it was clear that the services shared a common values base. This was founded on the following core features:

- flexibility
- positive relationships
- belief.

### **Flexibility**

Flexibility was integral to practice in both types of project. In vocational training centres the open-door policy enrolled young people who previously had no qualifications and may have been rejected

by other providers. The fact that most services had frequent start dates meant that when young people were ready to take up the place they would not have to wait. Dr B's would even take new starters on a Saturday morning. Training services were also prepared to adapt programmes to suit the needs of individual trainees.

Services providing E2E programmes, where the funder dictated a course length of 22 weeks, drew on other funds to allow young people to stay longer where necessary. Marie moved from her home with an addicted mother to foster care, and then to her grandparents while working on her E2E. The service allowed her much longer to complete the assignments and continued to support her and fund her, and then found her a job in the administration team where she was flourishing. She had not stayed at another job for more than two weeks. Support services also took a reasonably relaxed attitude to young people dropping in and out of courses, recognising that eventually they would settle and attend more regularly. This could mean that they would take longer to start the work and longer to complete it.

Underlying some of these flexible approaches was the offer of a second chance. Although young people could be badly behaved and walk out of services, they would be welcomed back, encouraged to reflect on their behaviour and the choices they had made and supported to improve.



“ If I don't know how to do something I can always ask and they'll show me. ”

Service user, Dr B's,  
Harrogate

## Positive relationships

A service manager working with chaotic young people with disrupted lives said:

Some of these young people won't engage with any other service, but they will engage with us. That's because we work at their pace. But we don't collude with them. It's about trying to build a relationship of trust.

Project worker with service user

For many of the young people who took part in the research, relationships at school and college had been characterised by varying degrees of hostility and anxiety. In support services, young people had the opportunity to build a strong relationship with a key worker – for

example, trusting them enough to feel able to leave their babies in a crèche for the first time, so that they could take a short course. Services could select a key worker who would be most likely to get on with the young person and meet their needs, but if that did not work out, there was usually some flexibility.

Good relationships also entail boundaries and a tutor explained this well:

*'A good relationship with the teacher is the key to learning. But you can't be their mate. It's a fine line. They need to know there's a line they can't cross. I let them know when we're not getting on.'*  
(Tutor interview)

Understanding boundaries and learning the rules of acceptable behaviour in a safe setting was a social skill that young people from chaotic backgrounds needed to learn in order to progress in education and employment.

Most of all, young people at both types of service felt that they were treated with respect and listened to. In turn they were more likely to respond to adults with respect themselves and they learned how to form a good relationship.



## Belief

*'We do not let them drop out easily, essentially we try to get to the bottom of the decision to drop out and then adapt accordingly to deal with it and turn the decision around.'*

*(Service manager interview)*

A value held by all the services was that, although sanctions were sometimes needed and young people did walk away occasionally, the workers and management believed in the young people and were prepared to persevere even when, perhaps especially when, things got very difficult.

Young people were allowed to try again if they made a mistake; they could have a second chance if they left and realised they had made a mistake; they were allowed to try a different course if the first choice had not worked out. A manager explained the lengths she went to, to ensure the young person would be properly provided for:

*'I ring young people if they stop attending, send letters and texts, and attempt to engage mum and dad. Dr B's operates an 'open door policy', meaning that the young people can jump off the 'roundabout' and get back on it again at the right time for them. I may also attempt to refer the young person on elsewhere, to ensure that they are getting support of some nature.'*

*(Service manager interview)*



As well as perseverance, services emphasised that they did not judge or label young people. For example, once given the label of 'young offender' it was felt that a young person might live up to that unhelpful identity. At Windermere the students were not:

**Judged for what they've done; it's their behaviour once they're here that counts.**

Service manager interview

A powerful demonstration of the principle of belief was heard in a project for young people with mental illnesses. Rather than, judging, labelling or seeing the young person as deficient they focused on what the young person could do:

*'Professional care is focused around the problem, the eating disorder or the self-harming behaviour, but no-one is actually that interested in what your talents are. Like if you are good at art, writing or a brilliant mathematician. We try to focus on knowing that they are the funny one, or the one that's good at cooking. Yes, the problems are important, but the person is more important. It's not necessarily about solving the problems but helping them live around the problems. Make them feel less ashamed, less self-conscious about who they are and make them feel proud.'*

*(Mental health worker interview)*

## Funding, reporting and partnership arrangements

The final section of this chapter briefly discusses local and national frameworks within which Barnardo's services operate and how this influences their work with young people who are (or have recently been) NEET. Key elements of this include:

- funding and commissioning
- outcomes measurement
- local partnerships.

## **Funding and commissioning**

Education and training services were funded mainly by the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) in England (or the devolved governments and local authorities in the other three nations) with clear expectations about how the provision is to be made and the outcomes expected. For example, the LSC expects E2E courses to be completed in 22 weeks and to lead to a positive destination, defined as employment, an apprenticeship, a level 2 course or a college course. As one service manager observed, progressing from an E2E course in the small, supportive setting such as the Base in Whitley Bay to an E2E course in a larger, work-based setting such as Palmersville Training, might be a big step forward for a young person, but this would not count as a positive destination in LSC terms.

Support services drew on a wide-range of funding pots:

*'I've been here a month now and we have probably done four different bids for different monies.'*

For example, the large complex of services in Marlborough Road, Cardiff received funding from Cymorth, Fframwaith, Big Lottery, New Philanthropy Capital, Admiral Insurance, Frank Buttle Trust and Newport County Council. While this was beneficial in allowing greater flexibility in meeting the needs of service users, it also led to unstable funding, complex reporting requirements and consumed much senior management time.

## **Measuring outcomes**

All Barnardo's services work towards a set of specified outcomes for children and young people – some set by funding bodies, others reflecting broader outcomes relating to health, education, safeguarding and so on, based on the four UK outcomes frameworks: Rights to Action (Cymru), Every Child Matters (England), Our Children and Young People – Our Pledge (Northern Ireland) and Getting it Right for Every Child (Scotland).

Barnardo's services use 'service user recording' systems to report on progress towards achieving outcomes for individual children and young people. This helps them to make sure that they are making a positive difference to the lives of those they work with. Examples of outcomes used by both types of Barnardo's services working with young people who are NEET are set out in the table on the right.

Outcomes specified by funding bodies could be a source of frustration in services working with young people who faced a lot of challenges, if they failed to present a fair picture of the progress made. Several managers expressed concerns that the emphasis on 'positive destinations' specified by the LSC (and linked to funding) could create disincentives for working with the most needy young people, who were less likely to meet the required outcomes within the specified time.

In one Barnardo's service in Scotland, funding was heavily weighted to reward successful completions, meaning that they would be financially penalised if they took on young people who were unlikely to succeed in their work placements. They still operated an 'open-door' policy, but they needed to be convinced that a young person was work-ready before taking them on and they actively monitored their progress, providing additional support where needed. If more time was needed, they would draw on their charitable funds to prolong the placement.

Multiple funding sources could create difficulties as they involved outcomes reporting against different criteria. This was time-consuming for services to collate and seldom yielded useful new management information.

While education and training outcomes are relatively straightforward to measure, it is harder to demonstrate progress in the softer skills crucial to success in the workplace. For example, for the most vulnerable young people, progress might constitute regular attendance, being able to speak to a stranger on the phone, maintaining eye contact and travelling independently on public transport.

| <b>High level outcomes</b>   | <b>Sub-headings (25 in all)</b>                                       | <b>Examples of service specific outcomes</b>                                |
|------------------------------|---|---|
| Not disadvantaged by poverty | Engage in further education, employment or training on leaving school | Achieve accredited qualification  |
|                              |   | Access to employment, education or training                                 |
|                              |   | Enter and sustain employment, education or training                         |
|                              |   | Acquire vocational skills   |
|                              | Ready for employment  | Engaged in personal action planning   |
|                              |   | Access to work experience and placements                                    |
|                              |   | Positive attitude towards employment, education or training                 |
|                              |   | Understanding the requirements of the job market                            |
|                              | Have access to transport and material goods                           | Own/access resources essential for employment and educational opportunities |
|                              |   | Access to high quality childcare  |
| Active                       | Achieve personal and social development and enjoy recreation          | Social skills gained/improved   |
|                              |   | Development through new experiences/interests                               |
|                              |   | Positive socialisation with peers   |
| Healthy                      | Mentally and emotionally healthy                                      | Improved knowledge of parenting/caring                                      |
|                              |   | Increased resilience  |
|                              |   | Increased confidence  |
|                              |   | Improved behaviour  |
|                              |   | Ability to express feelings   |
|                              |   | Improved social networks  |
|                              |   | Improved mental health and well-being                                       |
|                              |   | Improved self-esteem  |
| Improved peer relationships  |   |   |

Some services drew on assessment tools developed in other sectors, for example the Rickter Scale,<sup>66</sup> to provide a fuller and truer picture of progress.

### **Local partnerships**

Barnardo's services do not attempt to meet the full range of service users' needs alone. Partnerships of all kinds enable them to provide access to specialist support and wider learning, employment and social opportunities, through links with local employers, third sector groups and statutory services. This enables services to draw upon a wealth of local experience for the young people they work with.

Strong relationships with local employers help to ensure that sufficient work placement opportunities are available and that if necessary, some support will be offered to help the young person to make a success of their placement. Key partners for the vocational training and work-based learning providers were local businesses, who were willing to give young people the opportunity to gain work experience, to work towards an apprenticeship or take them on as apprentices. They were supportive and patient employers who worked with the young people's potential. Partners included ASDA, Wilkinson's, Premier Inns, Botanic hotels, Mitchell and Butler, Carillion, Wates and many more. Working with Barnardo's forms a part of some organisations' commitment to corporate social responsibility, with foundations and trusts such as the Wates Foundation, Scottish and Southern and the Taylor Woodrow Trust contributing valuable funding and work opportunities for the young people.

Barnardo's supportive services often involved multiple partnerships, reflecting the needs of the young people involved.

Examples included:

- The Blackpool Project supported teenage mothers, working closely with health partners and local children's centres.
- Marlborough Road in Cardiff supported young people with mental health difficulties, working closely with CAMHS; delivering tier 1 and 2 support in secondary schools, and providing support at tier 4 to young people in local hospitals.
- The ADAP project in Armagh was a multi-disciplinary team, involving teachers, social workers and community workers, liaising closely with youth justice colleagues.
- The Young Parents' Network in Northern Ireland worked in partnership with Social Services and the Department of Education to deliver the School Aged Mums provision across the country.
- In Wakefield Young Families, a Connexions PA worked exclusively with their service users from the Barnardo's office.
- The Blackpool Project worked with the Prince's Trust to put on Energiser Weeks-taster sessions to different businesses and occupations.

In several areas, such as North Tyneside, Barnardo's services played an active role in local strategic partnerships, working together to address priorities, such as reducing numbers of 'NEETs'. Strong working relationships between local providers and a shared commitment to improving outcomes for young people facing barriers to participation helped to ensure appropriate placements and flexible working to help young people to succeed.

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<sup>66</sup> Using this tool, services develop a personalised evaluation scale with the young person and involve them in assessing their own progress. The tool measures progress from an individual starting point and can be used in conjunction with therapeutic models of intervention like Cognitive Behavioural Therapy.





## Chapter six: Conclusions and recommendations

### Enabling participation

Caricatures of young people who are NEET portray them as 'idle' and 'feckless' and sometimes view them with suspicion. This research reveals a very different picture: young people alienated by their experiences of school, many of whom face real barriers to continuing with their education or finding a job. Despite the considerable challenges some faced, almost all were motivated by having a second chance to gain qualifications and improve their employment prospects.

But for those who had already spent months or years outside the education system, the path back to learning was rarely straightforward – and in the context of an economic downturn, their motivation to work risked turning to disaffection.

**Recommendation 1:** To engage 'hard to reach' young people and support their transition back to education, training or work, local authorities need to plan for an expansion in provision with the following characteristics:

- a high ratio of staff to young people to enable one-to-one support from keyworkers and small group activities
- outreach capacity to engage young people and sustain their participation
- flexibility eg 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.

**Recommendation 2:** Government and local authorities should map the support needs of 'NEET' population and

plan growth in services to enable their participation in learning. Government should identify and disseminate models of effective practice for vulnerable groups such as teenage mothers and care leavers.

**Recommendation 3:** 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.

### Extending alternative, vocational and work-based learning

There is a need to think creatively about what would work better for those young people who leave school as soon as they can, with few qualifications and lacking confidence in their own ability to learn and succeed. This research points to the value of alternative and vocational opportunities offered alongside school, such as the courses provided by two Barnardo's services in London, the Hub and Windermere. Studio schools offer another such model.<sup>67</sup>

**Recommendation 4:** Alternative and vocational pathways should be available in every area as a positive 14-19 option, for the many young people whose potential is not unlocked by mainstream education. Barnardo's would like to work with others in central and local government and third sector partners to develop this concept further, building on the experience of our services.

The young people involved in this research were strongly motivated by the possibility of improving their job prospects and many aspired to gain an apprenticeship. But

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<sup>67</sup> DCSF (2008) *Back on Track* and DCSF (2007) *The Children's Plan*.

labour market opportunities for unskilled young people are limited and competition for apprenticeships is keen. Most needed help to improve their skills and grow in confidence to have a chance of making a successful transition to work or an apprenticeship.

**Recommendation 5:** Government needs to drive a growth in work-based learning and vocational opportunities (including apprenticeships) for 14 to 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.

#### **Commissioning, funding and reporting arrangements**

Government policy in England, Wales and Scotland to encourage young people to carry on learning until they are 18 will necessitate an expansion in provision for those young people historically lost to the education system at 16. Vulnerable and disadvantaged young people – many of whom face barriers to participation – are over-represented in the NEET population.

Third sector organisations such as Barnardo's play an important role in supporting such groups and facilitating their transition back to education, training or into work, often working in partnership with statutory services. Growth in capacity will be required to support the goal of full participation. Current funding disincentives for working with young people who need longer to achieve a qualification

or make a successful transition must be addressed.

**Recommendation 6:** Growth in third sector provision for young people who are NEET, or at risk of being so, would be facilitated by:

- realistic assessment of the additional costs of working with the most vulnerable and disadvantaged young people
- greater funding flexibility to enable providers to put together learning packages tailored to individual needs and allow more time to complete modules
- 'intelligent commissioning'<sup>68</sup> by local authorities, involving third sector partners in shaping provision for 'hard-to-reach' young people who tend not to use statutory services
- access to capital funding to create new services where there are none, including the development of outreach services
- integrated strategies (with joint planning and commissioning) to support the participation of the most vulnerable young – including homeless young people, young people with mental health difficulties and young offenders.

**Recommendation 7:** Government should work with third sector partners to develop outcomes measures which fairly reflect the progress of young people who face significant barriers to participation and achievement.

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68 See Audit Commission 2007, *Hearts and minds: commissioning from the voluntary sector*.

**A last word ...**

Barnardo's Policy and Research Unit in England supported the Education and Skills Act 2008 because it represented such an important opportunity to improve provision, and in turn, outcomes for young people currently lost to the education system at 16. Disadvantaged and vulnerable young people are more likely to leave early, lacking the skills and confidence that they need to find a job, provide for themselves and their family and thrive in today's society.

The Act will require all young people in England between the ages of 16 and 18 to participate in education or training. Some have suggested that, at a stroke, this

abolishes the NEET population. In reality, there is a long way before every young person – whatever their prior experience of education and their needs – is able to participate.

While the duty to participate is controversial, Barnardo's hopes that it will create clear accountability for meeting the needs of young people who currently opt out of education as soon as they can. No young person should be excluded from learning for want of suitable provision or assumptions about what they are capable of and what their future will entail. We look forward to working in partnership with others in the third sector and central and local government to make a reality of this ambitious agenda.



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## Annex A: Services visited for research

**Armagh and Dungannon Adolescent Partnership** (Northern Ireland) works with the families of children aged 11 to 17 years, who are considered to be at risk of offending, going into care or into custody. It provides community-based alternatives to custody and post-custody support, both aimed at preventing re-offending.

**Dr B's, Belfast** (Northern Ireland) provides training in the catering trade for young people with learning disabilities aged between 16 and 21 years. It also supports employment placements. The restaurant is open to the public.

**Dr B's, Harrogate** provides training in catering and clerical skills in a real work environment for young people aged between 16 and 24 with a wide range of learning needs. The restaurant and coffee shop are open to the public.

**Indigo Young Carers, Ilford** provides a range of community-based services to disabled children and young people and, in doing so, provides support to their families, in partnership with Redbridge Social Services. It also provides a service to support young carers and their families.

**Marlborough Road Centre** (Cardiff and Newport) provides a range of services for vulnerable and disadvantaged young people in Cardiff and Newport. Researchers visited:

**Caterpillar, Cardiff** supports young people aged 14 to 25 who are experiencing a mental health crisis. The service works in partnership with the Mental Health Foundation using individual and group work to provide direct services to young people, and to raise awareness of the stigma and lack of provision for young people experiencing mental ill health.

**BounceBack, Cardiff** provides early intervention for mental health problems in secondary schools in Cardiff.

**Cwrt y Farchnad (Cardiff Young Families)** provides housing and support for vulnerable young families where the primary carer is aged 16-21 years.

**Young Parents' Group, Marlborough Road** supports young parents aged 13 to 17-years-old.

**Out There, Newport** provides vulnerable young people, aged 14 to 19 years, with extensive support and access to other key agencies. It is a service for disadvantaged young people who currently have difficulties engaging with other agencies and who have multiple and complex needs.

**Newry Adolescent Partnership** (Northern Ireland) works with young people aged 13 to 18 years and their families who are in need of family support, in conflict with the law and vulnerable.

**Young Parents' Network** (Northern Ireland) works throughout Northern Ireland providing community-based support to young parents aged 25 or under and their children. Other services include: the continued development and expansion of an education programme for school age mothers (SAMS), and an outreach advice and information service for young parents. It aims to influence the development of services for young parents.

**Palmersville Vocational Training Centre, Newcastle** offers training to young people aged between 14 and 21 years who have a range of needs including physical disabilities, learning difficulties and behavioural problems.

**The Base, Whitley Bay** provides a range of individual advice and support services, and group activities and learning programmes to meet the needs of unemployed, socially excluded young people aged 16 to 24 years.



**The Blackpool Project** provides parenting advice, skills, information and support to teenage parents aged 19 and under and also parents of 5 to 17-year-olds living in the Blackpool area. Outreach and Leisure activities are also provided in communities throughout Blackpool for children and young people aged 5-17 years. Support is also provided to young people aged over 16 years living in Blackpool to access education, work and volunteering opportunities.

**The Hub, Stepney Green** construction skills centre providing training in electrical installation, carpentry, plumbing, painting and decorating. The centre acts as a springboard into work-based-learning for 16 to 18-year-olds and an alternative education provider for 14 to 16-year-olds who are not achieving their full potential in mainstream schooling. Students can choose from a range of City and Guilds-accredited qualifications as well as the Construction Skills Certificate Scheme. In addition to hands-on courses, students also learn a range of numeracy, communications and language skills.

**Windermere Construction Training Centre, Norwood** works with schools and units in several South London boroughs offering work-related learning in Key Stage 4. Courses are tailored to meet the specific needs of each individual young person and are

fully accredited by the Construction Industry Training Board and the City and Guilds.

**Young Families, Wakefield** supports pregnant teenagers and young parents aged under 20 years in their own communities. It provides information, advice, help in accessing relevant services, (particularly education and training), childcare and a supported housing service to young parents and pregnant teenagers.

**Youthbuild, Paisley (Barnardo's Works Renfrewshire, Paisley, Scotland)**

(Since we visited this service, it has changed its name from Youthbuild to Barnardo's Works Renfrewshire.) Enables disadvantaged young people from Renfrewshire's most deprived communities to access sustainable employment in the construction industry. Provides young people aged 16 to 24 years with direct work experience over a six month period. This is supported by on-going, relevant training and personal support to overcome barriers to employment. The project utilises the resources and skills of a wide range of partner agencies, including the construction companies who host placements and offer sustainable employment to Barnardo's Works graduates.

## Annex B

### Key policy documents referred to in Chapter Two: UK policy overview

*This annex does not attempt to provide an exhaustive list of relevant policy documents, but highlights key documents and suggests websites for further reading.*

#### England

Department for Education and Skills (2005) *14-19 Education and Skills White Paper*, The Stationery Office.

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DCSF (2008) *Delivering 14-19 reform: next steps*, The Stationery Office.

*Education and Skills Act 2008*, The Stationery Office.

*Children, Learners and Skills Bill 2009* (unpublished at time of writing; to be available on [www.parliament.uk](http://www.parliament.uk))

Website for further reading: <http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/14-19/>

#### Wales

National Assembly for Wales (2001) *The Learning Country: A comprehensive education and lifelong learning programme to 2010 in Wales*; updated in Welsh Assembly Government (2008) *The Learning Country: Vision into Action*.

Welsh Assembly Government (2003) *Learning Country: Learning Pathways 14-19 – Action Plan*.

WAG (2008) *Skills that work for Wales – A Skills and Employment Strategy and Action Plan*.

WAG (2008) *Delivering Skills that work for Wales – Reducing the proportion of young people NEET in Wales* (consultation paper).

Websites for further reading:

[http://new.wales.gov.uk/topics/educationandskills/policy\\_strategy\\_and\\_planning/learning\\_pathways/?lang=en](http://new.wales.gov.uk/topics/educationandskills/policy_strategy_and_planning/learning_pathways/?lang=en)

[http://new.wales.gov.uk/topics/educationandskills/policy\\_strategy\\_and\\_planning/skillsthatforwales/?lang=en](http://new.wales.gov.uk/topics/educationandskills/policy_strategy_and_planning/skillsthatforwales/?lang=en)

#### Scotland

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<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/library2/doc04/bere-00.htm>

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Scottish Executive (2006) *More Choices, More Chances: A Strategy to Reduce the Proportion of Young People not in Education, Employment or Training in Scotland*.

Scottish Government (2007) *Skills for Scotland: a lifelong skills strategy*.

Website for further reading:

<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Education/Life-Long-Learning>

#### Northern Ireland

Department for Employment and Learning (2006) *Success through Skills: The Skills Strategy for Northern Ireland*.

Department of Education (2006) *Strategic plan for education, April 2006 – March 2008*.

Websites for further reading:

<http://www.delni.gov.uk/index/successthroughskills.htm>

<http://www.deni.gov.uk/index/80-curriculum-and-assessment/22-14-19-policy.htm>

## Annex C: Glossary

| Abbreviation            | Full version   | Explanation/Definition  |
|-------------------------|--|---|
| ADHD                    | Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder                 | Childhood-onset behavioural disorder. Reduces ability to maintain attention, control actions, words and physical activity.  |
| AQA unit awards         | Assessment and Qualifications Alliance Unit Award Scheme | Recognises students' achievements in enrichment activities, personal development and personal and social health education.  |
| ASDAN                   | Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network       | Promotes personal and social development through awards and qualifications that enhance self-esteem, aspirations and individual contribution.   |
| CAMHS                   | Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services              | Statutory services to promote mental health and psychological well-being of children and young people.  |
| Connexions PA           | Connexions Personal Advisor                              | Provides information, advice and guidance for 13 to 19-year-olds including help with careers, training and employment; personal and social difficulties.                                    |
| CSCS card               | Construction Skills Certification Scheme card            | Proof of occupational competence in the construction industry.  |
| Duke of Edinburgh Award |  | An award which aims to inspire, guide and support young people in their self-development.   |
| E2E                     | Entry to Employment                                      | Qualification in England in basic and key skills, vocational, personal and social development for 16 to 18-year-olds to enable progression to an apprenticeship, further learning or a job. |
| EMA                     | Education Maintenance Allowance                          | Up to £30 a week during term time. Available to 16 to 18-year-olds enrolled in full-time education or training, with a household income of less than £30,810.                               |
| GCSE                    | General Certificate of Secondary Education               | Main qualification taken by 14 to 16-year-olds. Can be taken in a wide range of academic work-related subjects.   |
| LearnDirect             |  | Offer flexible online courses and qualifications to help both individuals and businesses build the skills they need to reach their potential.   |
| Learning difficulties   |  | Learning impairments that are significantly greater than those among the majority of children of the same age.  |
| Learning disabilities   |  | Inabilities to acquire, retain, or broadly use specific skills or information resulting from deficiencies in attention, memory or reasoning and affecting academic performance.             |
| NVQ                     | National Vocational Qualifications                       | Work-related, competence-based qualifications.  |
| SEN                     | Special Educational Needs                                | Children of school age who have learning difficulties or disabilities making it harder for them to learn. Usually still in mainstream education but receive extra support.                  |
| WBL                     | Work-based learning                                      | Qualifications obtained by people in employment through significant elements of work-based assessment.  |
| Young carers            |  | Children or young people who help look after a family member who is sick, disabled or has mental health issues, or is misusing drugs or alcohol.  |

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Re-engaging young people in  
education and training*

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The research was carried out by Dr Jane Evans, Deborah Meyer and Barbara Robinson, directed by Anne Pinney. Barnardo's will build on this research over the coming year, to drive further improvements in policy and practice across the UK for young people who are NEET.

Download the full report from:  
[www.barnardos.org.uk/  
resources/research\\_and\\_  
publications/books\\_and\\_tools\\_  
school\\_and\\_education.htm](http://www.barnardos.org.uk/resources/research_and_publications/books_and_tools_school_and_education.htm)

Watch the *Second Chances* DVD of young people in Barnardo's services.  
For further information, email [jane.evans@barnardos.org.uk](mailto:jane.evans@barnardos.org.uk)

Some images posed by models.  
Names have been changed to protect identities.



[www.barnardos.org.uk](http://www.barnardos.org.uk)

Head Office,  
Tanners Lane,  
Barkingside, Ilford,  
Essex IG6 1QG  
Tel: 020 8550 8822

Barnardo's Registered Charity Nos.  
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