

Ways in which some schools outside West Norfolk are trying to reduce the numbers of young people becoming NEET

- 12.1 Although we found many examples of innovative and effective approaches to reducing the chances of students becoming NEET in West Norfolk, UEA's work with schools in initial teacher education, and its contacts with the county's advisory service made us aware that there was also much good practice in the rest of the county.
- 12.2 Although it was not possible to comprehensively explore work in this area in every school and college in the county, given the fairly short time scale for the research, members of the research team attempted to explore facets of good practice, and new approaches to preventative action in a number of schools and institutions in Norfolk. We are aware that some of these strategies, such as the extension of alternative curriculum provision, have been developed in the vast majority of schools in the county, but there may be some ideas and initiatives which are not familiar to all schools, and we hope that the report might help to disseminate some of these potentially useful ideas and approaches. An attempt was also made where possible to gain some insight into the factors which made these initiatives and interventions effective.
- 12.3 It is worth noting that many of the initiatives which have been developed have funding and resource implications. Creating small "nurture group" classes, having non-teaching year heads, running the KS 4 Engagement Project, enrolling pupils on the *Notschool* programme, costs money. One respondent with responsibility for the *Notschool* programme in one institution pointed out that although at around £5,000, the initiative was not cheap, in terms of its success rates, it was money well invested in terms of the costs associated with young people becoming long-term NEET. One of the suggestions arising from the report is that the LEA should lobby as strongly as possible, and construct as robust a financial case as possible for sustained investment in programmes which have been shown to have some success in reducing NEET numbers. Not all initiatives did carry a substantial financial cost, and some facets of successful interventions might be tailored to reduce the resource and capital costs involved.

12a The Key Stage 4 Engagement Programme

12.4 Currently in its fourth (and final year) this DCSF funded project, involving students in the central area (plus students from Downham Market) has had considerable success in working with (over 300) pupils who had been identified as having issues in attendance, behaviour and attainment. Although the figures for 2008-9 have not yet been collated, the 2007/8 figures suggested that 88% of the pupils involved in the programme emerged with positive outcomes when post-16 destinations were tracked, and over half the students involved were felt to have made progress in terms of their attendance, behaviour and attainment. Although the funded pilot was centred mainly on the central area, it was being extended to rural 'pathfinder' schools (Connexions Manager). Further research might focus on why the initiative had more success in some contexts than others.

The 2009-10 action plan gave the following reasons for the successful outcomes:

1. Student access to accredited external learning opportunities for up to 2 days a week, matched to their interests/needs.
2. Providers quality assured and listed in an electronic directory.
3. Two Service Level Agreements between the Local Authority and Schools and the Providers and Schools which clarify responsibilities involved.
4. The attachment of a "Trusted Adult" to each student on the programme, chosen from the student's host institution, and carefully selected to closely mentor the students on a weekly basis.
5. Funding of £1000 per student to support the processes involved.
6. Half-termly meetings with the providers, school keyworkers and the steering group.
7. Two Trusted Adult Support Workers to support the programme, hosted at The Hewett School and Sewell Park College and available to help other Trusted Adults and providers.
8. A transition programme which takes place during a week in the Spring term for students who are still unsure about what they would like to do post-16. Students have access to a variety of post-16 opportunities and Connexions' PAs (in partnership with Trusted Adults) design a personalised programme for each student

for the week. This is then followed-up with a support meeting to evaluate the programme and support the student with any decisions about their futures.

Funding for the programme will be significantly reduced for 2009/10 and will then cease. The Key Stage 4 Engagement Programme brand will no longer exist, although a version of it is likely to continue as one of the pathways within the Foundation Learning Tier. The electronic External Learning Opportunities Directory will continue to be maintained centrally and will list all Norfolk's external provision, Quality Assured by a central officer funded collectively by the schools.

This raises the question of what will happen to both the structures which have been developed, and the lessons which have learned from the programme when funding stops. To what extent can the good practice and systems which have been developed be disseminated across the county, and how easy will it be to sustain progress without funding?

12b The Pathways Project

12.5 The project operates a Youth Engagement centre based in two industrial units. The units are jointly managed by three high Schools. The centre provides resources for a range of need. Some students access the provision instead of a mainstream school for as much as two or three days a week, whilst others access specific activities for as little as an afternoon. Participants are from the ages of 13 to 16. At any given time the unit provides provision for no more than 20 students, however in combination the centre is able to offer provision to over 70 across the course of a week.

In essence this project aims to incorporate the best practice from current alternative provision into a new provision for the area, which is operated and managed by the three High Schools themselves. Students on alternative curriculum programmes often become dislocated from their school and in many cases have been permanently excluded from it. This project aims to show that this is not necessary and that schools working in collaboration with the voluntary and community sector can provide resources to meet the needs of this group whilst maintaining them as part of the school community. This project aims to provide a localised model of

delivery in a small scale unit close to the home schools, thereby maintaining the connection with the resources and provision available at the home site. This massively enlarges the potential for the project to offer a wide range of learning opportunities and importantly maintains the young people within their home community. At the same time the project demonstrates the benefits to the school of investing in these vulnerable and challenging young people. Early evaluation of the programme suggests that it will be helpful in reducing the prospects of some of these students becoming completely disengaged from education and drifting into social and educational exclusion.

12c “The Lunchtime Club”

12.6 One school operates a very successful lunchtime provision for its most vulnerable learners. Staffed by specially selected staff ideally suited to forming relationships with young people, the lunch club gives refuge and support for young people with a range of issues, from special educational needs to emotional health issues. The Lunchtime Club has provided support and stability for students who find the unstructured environment of lunchtimes very hard. In this way it has had a great impact on reducing lunchtime incidents of poor behaviour, and it has also helped potential isolates to make friends and gain in social confidence. Many of them have started to develop friendships with pupils outside those who regularly attend the club. It is simply called “The Lunchtime Club”, and no further explanation of its purpose is given in order to avoid any stigma that might be attached to those attending. Initially invitations were sent out to a number of pupils identified as being potentially “at risk” by the Special Needs Department. It simply explained that a room would be available for pupils to eat their packed lunches if they just wanted somewhere to sit, and that games would be available for anyone who wished to socialise in the room after eating their lunch. The club is supervised by a number of Learning Support Assistants and part of the success of the club is the skills of interaction of these LSAs in talking to the pupils who attend. There are fairly strict rules of behaviour and anyone engaging in disruptive, aggressive or anti-social behaviour is excluded. This provides a safe space for pupils to relax and enjoy the dinner break and in the course of this many of them are encouraged in a low key way to develop their skills of social interaction with other attendees and with the LSAs who supervise

the club. The club has proved to be extremely popular and attendance is often in excess of 30 pupils, occasionally presenting problems of overcrowding and limited access to the games and activities which are available in the room. Initially, the membership was by discreet invitation, but as other pupils passed by the room, many of them thought the atmosphere in the room seemed attractive and asked if they could attend, so the club has evolved into being "open access". One teacher acknowledged that pupils sometimes complain about the quality of the games and resources provided, but the club has in a low key way become an unremarked but stable part of life at the school. One of the teachers who has been involved in observing the club in operation reported that in addition to reducing incidents of misbehaviour and bullying over the lunch hour, it had helped to improve pupils' attitudes to school as a whole, and had developed their confidence and skills of interaction with others. Unlike some of the initiatives to improving student engagement and commitment to school, it was not expensive to resource and there is a general consensus that it has played a helpful part in improving the atmosphere at the school in addition to helping some pupils to become more socially integrated into school life.

12d Peer Mentoring

12.7 The head, a senior member of support staff, and a pupil from another Norfolk school came into the university to give a lecture to PGCE students about the school's use of peer mentoring to support pupils who might in one way or another need support. As well as the head teacher and a lead Learning Support Assistant, one of the pupil peer mentors also led part of the lecture, which was to the whole cohort of the secondary PGCE course. Students from the school also took part in the professional development seminars following the lecture, to give advice about class management. The session received exceptionally positive evaluations from the students and was a very effective demonstration of the potential of such approaches for improving the ethos and working atmosphere in the school, and developing pupils' confidence and leadership skills. The headteacher said that the scheme had been extremely helpful in improving the overall performance and climate in the school, and that it had helped to improve the attitudes to school of many of the pupils who had been involved in the project.

12e Non-teaching heads of house supported by non-teaching academic mentors

12.8 One Norfolk school is moving towards a complete system of non-teaching Heads of House, supported by non-teaching academic mentors. Although the resource implications of the move are clearly substantial, it was felt that the system has started to make a significant difference to the atmosphere and ethos of the school and the aspirations of pupils. The Head felt that in addition to massively increasing the amount of pastoral support for pupils, the change enabled much more time and attention to be focused on influencing students' ideas about future and feasible career options, and about what they might hope to get out of being at school. An assistant head reported that the change had helped to change attitudes to school and to attainment with some, but not all pupils. "I came here from a school where most of the pupils were self-motivated and wanted to succeed academically.... A lot of pupils here have to be supported in moving towards this attitude to education, some of them need a lot of help and support but their attitude to school and to education can be turned round with skilful and sensitive support.... This system means that year heads are not spending most of their time being reactive... fire fighting and responding to behaviour incidents... together with the mentor they can be much more constructive and focus on other things.. and develop more positive relations with pupils who could go either way". Many of the Heads of House had particular skills-sets, such as counselling, mentoring, and in one case mental health issues, and this meant that the school was less reliant on having to bring in outside agencies. The move towards non teaching Heads of House started off as a pilot, but the outcomes have been sufficiently encouraging for it to be extended so that from September, it will run across the whole age range.

12f Courses for young offenders, young people considered at risk of becoming young offenders and for cared for children run by Norfolk Museums Service

12.9 Norfolk Museums Service runs three different courses for young people who are considered to be at 'high risk' of becoming NEET. They are currently of the seventh cycle of a 10-12 week course for young offenders.

This involves attendance for two hours a week at the Castle Museum and participants "sign up" as part of their community supervision order and attend instead of reporting to the Youth Offending Team Office. A museums educator explained that "they are very varied in nature... some have tags, one has to report daily to the Youth Offending Team, even on Christmas Day.. there is one 15 year old who is a delight to work with, has a beaming smile and appears to have a very nice nature – but he is on a two year supervision order so presumably he must have done something quite serious".

"The students work on Arts based projects and some of them do get quite involved... they can do the Bronze Arts Award and one boy is working on his Silver Award. 80% of the award can be done at the Castle... it includes helping to host the final celebration at the end of the course, and helping with the catering. Some of them help with the editing side of things, animation and filming, doing video diaries. Some of them use the collections for inspiration.... some of them do research projects on Crime and Punishment".

There is also the YISP Course (Youth Inclusion Support Panel)... this is multi-agency preventative work with children aged 8-12, for pupils identified as being at risk of offending. This is a 3 month programme which also involves working with parents as well. The youngsters are identified as being at risk of offending by the police or by headteachers. Parents or carers come with them to the first session and someone from school comes to the last session so they can be involved and witness or celebrate the positive outcomes.

Another museums' educator reported that many, but not all of the pupils involved in the courses had made progress in their social skills and general confidence over the course of the 12 weeks, and that most of them had been positive about their experiences on the course. The Youth Offending Team had also reported positively on the progress of pupils who had attended the courses for those who had offended or who were considered to be at risk of offending.

The museums service also run a course for cared for children. "This can involve work on the Egyptians which some of them know a bit about from

primary school. Again it is based on a creative arts based approach including filming and animation work. One of the youngsters on the course has started to attend Museum Club and we are hoping that others will follow suit. We also run a summer school for the same target audience. We try to give them support to take responsibility for their behaviour but it can also involve practical support in terms of helping them with bus fares. We try to get them to see the museum as a safe space and a public, community place where they are made to feel welcome”.

The Museum is also currently in the process of developing courses for young people who are NEET.

12g Finding part time employment and voluntary work opportunities for young adults with learning difficulties: The Assist Trust

12.10 The Assist Trust is a charity which works to help young adults with learning difficulties to become independent and to move on to employment. Part of their approach to the long term goal of moving members into full time employment is to provide part time work to develop members’ confidence, skills of interactions with others, sense of responsibility and the ability to cope with more extensive integration into work.

Three “Job Coaches” look for employers and organisations who will be prepared to offer members the opportunity of part time or voluntary work. At present this supports 12 members in paid work and 49 members in voluntary work. Members do on average 6 hours per week, but some have moved on to full time employment. “We believe that everybody has the right to opportunities in life. We also believe that if you don't try you don't know what you are capable of, so we encourage some managed risk taking. This means the members are allowed to make mistakes, so they can learn from those mistakes”.

The organisation generally looks for small independent organizations who are more likely to support a small local charity: “They are mostly sensitive and more patient with people with learning difficulties and easier to deal with... When asking for a placement we emphasize the level of support (from all three job coaches) how long the support is available (as long as the member and employer feels it is necessary) and that we are only

asking for a small amount of time the member will be with them per week" (average of 2 hours per week to begin with). Several members do paid work acting as reception managers for a few hours a week at the city headquarters of the charity. This provides valuable opportunities for several members to move towards fuller forms of employment. The Trust offers strong levels of support to members to support their development and to reassure the employers providing these opportunities: "We operate a properly organized review process and share all relevant info with the staff group. This means we take into account the information collated over the years the member is growing until they and we feel they are ready to try this step into independence". The provision of "small steps" towards independence is thought to be an important element in the success of this work.

12h Advanced bridging courses at a sixth form college in Norfolk

12.11 The college has been selected by QCA as one of four case studies on best practice in developing post 16 advanced bridging courses. The course is funded through the LSC and the local authority.

Students who are not ready to progress to level 3 courses, usually because they do not have the required grades at GCSE, take a bridging year at level 2. Applicants can choose from a range of BTEC courses including Leisure and Tourism, Business, Countryside Management, ICT, and Health and Social Care. As part of the level 2 programme, students also have the opportunity to retake qualifications in GCSE maths or GCSE English Language if necessary and to undertake extended work experience. They can also choose an apprenticeship programme and, from September, sport and other programmes. About 40 students are on the bridging course each year and the "bridging course" is a number of options rather than a prescribed course.

A number of factors may lead to a student undertaking a bridging course rather than going straight onto a level 3 programme: poor GCSE grades, lack of confidence, or not yet quite ready for level 3. The teacher works hard to develop their academic and social confidence and their learning skills, and believes that their experiences on the course help to develop their emotional maturity and willingness to apply themselves wholeheartedly to the challenge of succeeding in whatever elements of the

course they are pursuing. Motivating students by responding sensitively to their different needs and personalities is seen as crucially important to their progress. There is a learning support assistant to help students with particular learning needs. The teacher who leads the course believes that many of those who have been disaffected and disengaged in the mainstream school have a good chance of being successful on the bridging programme.

Between 80 and 90% of the students on the course go on to level 3 programmes, others go into employment. It is clear from talking to the students that they enjoy the course and there is a very positive classroom climate in teaching groups. It is apparent from talking to students and the college principal that although the course does provide the opportunity for applied and active learning, the success of the course depends in large part on the exceptional skills of the lead teacher. Several of the students unabashedly tell me that she is a wonderful teacher and how much she has done for them. The success of this course makes the important point that it is not just about course content and course design. The skills of interaction which the lead teacher possesses, and the very strong trust and working relationships she has developed with the students are an important element in the success of the venture.

12i Exchange visits with an independent school

12.12 This was part of a broader strategy to raise pupil aspirations in an area of high social and economic deprivation. Selected pupils spend a week at an independent school and then host a return visit for pupils from the independent school. It might be supposed that there are risks involved in such approaches but the head and assistant head both reported that there had been several gains from the project and no apparent "collateral damage".

"Our exchange programme with Gresham's has built up gradually from a link through the Arts. It has recently culminated in a small group of students completing a residential for a week - the primary intention of this was to raise aspirations. Some of the students who attended could be classed as being disaffected and truly benefitted from the experience. They will be visiting again for the second phase.

It is essential for children to understand the 'bigger picture' - that there is a world of opportunity from which they are not excluded. Gresham's Bac students completed a 4-day long visit to Oriel to study provision for predominantly SEN students and we have received very positive feedback from them regarding their experience" (Headteacher).

The visit had radically transformed the attitude to school of some of the pupils on the exchange: "I'm not quite sure why it has worked but there is one pupil who would be in trouble at this school most days who I now rarely hear about in terms of trouble. The visit seems to have transformed his ideas about what schools are for... about it being 'for them rather than for us'". Another incidental benefit of the visit was the fact that many pupils for the first time appreciated how much their teachers did for them: "Because teachers came across as being more detached and could perhaps rely on pupils just getting on with their learning... perhaps not feeling they had to work as hard to capture the attention of their pupils.... Some of our pupils started to realise that a lot of their teachers do try to go the extra mile to make the lessons interesting and to show an active interest in them".

12j Developing the quality of work placements and links with the local community

12.13 This school had also made a big effort to improve the quality of their work experience placements, and to make the work experience that their pupils undertake more challenging and interesting:

"Many of our students do a chunk of their timetable - so if they're not school shaped, we build an element of the school to fit them. This helps to build good links with local businesses. We also participate in a working partnership with businesses who are looking to offer jobs for the students who attend at Key Stage 4. Our community relations are improving with links with multi-national businesses in the area and getting pupils exhibiting their work in prestigious public institutions. Improving our NEET figures is essentially about raising students' aspirations, and I feel that in spite of

our issues, we have increased our focus on meeting their needs”.

This was felt to be partly about being more explicit with providers of work experience about the ways in which it could be helpful to pupils, and many placements had responded very positively to this in a way that had strengthened community links with the school. “Work experience can really help many of our pupils but if they are low quality, boring and do not stretch or engage them, they can almost do more harm than good... if they end up thinking that work is going to be as boring and negative as the bits of school that they don’t like... but when they work well they can transform what the pupils are like back in school... they seem to be much better at putting up with the bits that don’t suit them... they can see that we are doing our best and they appreciate that”. The school also works assiduously to develop its links with the university as part of raising pupil aspirations. Even having an experienced member of the police on the premises and a PC support officer is seen as being helpful (apart from the presence of the police car in the school car park), in terms of helping students understand the adult world and the possible consequences of their actions: “They are very accomplished in talking with our pupils and they get across to them the seriousness of things, they bring home to them what the consequences of things will be in the grown up world in a way that we can’t do.... They begin to see that in many ways, school is quite a sheltered and artificial environment”. The school also has close links with Connexions and Aim Higher, and has generally been seen as making good progress partly as a result of these initiatives.

The school has also tried to dissuade pupils from settling for ‘resits’:

“More often than not, students receive the message that D grades are enough to access particular courses - or that retakes are always possible if they fail at 16. We have worked hard to dispel the myth that retakes are acceptable - young people need to understand the social implications of actively disengaging and retaking. We hope they now understand how detrimental and wasteful this time period can be. I also try to insist that the local colleges tell students they need C and above to get college places... not doing retakes as a fall-back position”.

12k Reducing exclusions by improving the mechanisms for 'internal exclusion'

12.14 Many schools have worked hard to try to keep pupils within the school system and on the school premises, even if they are not able to keep them in ordinary classrooms. One school had tried to move to a position of not excluding pupils at all, and developing on site but detached provision for very challenging pupils. "We were not able to maintain that policy because sometimes there are safety issues, if for example, two pupils have been in a fight and there is clearly going to be further trouble if they come into contact again".

"Our Exclusion Unit is run by a single member of staff to ensure consistency. To emphasise that the time spent there is officially an 'exclusion', the timings of the day are different. Students complete work appropriate to their levels of ability whilst in situ to highlight the difference between being excluded to home, where we are unable to track their progress adequately - clearly, parents/carers are often at work when exclusions to home take place. However, if we have to exclude to home, we have a duty to provide work for students so do not fall behind".

12l A one day a week course to support NEET youngsters in Norfolk

12.15 This is a 16 week one day a week course supported by a high school and Connexions which provides an off school site equipped with a suite of computers for NEET youngsters to work to improve their qualifications. The course is run by a very experienced and effective teacher who is particularly accomplished in her interactions with the young people on the course. There is also a Connexions advisor who helps with refining CVs and goes along with youngsters who have interviews or who are starting on new courses. In the course of the visit to the centre, several of the youngsters sat the ALAN test (some passed, some failed. One student failed by one mark and there was real support and sympathy from the other students).

"We pay them £5 a day to come on a Wednesday, and we pay their travel expenses and we provide them with lunch..."

and tea and coffee and everything, and that covers all their exam fees, so we get all the exam fees done for them, we've covered all of that.... The course is to try and get them to move on, to progress like mixed and go on to Prince's Trust hopefully, I can get them in to that, which is really good for them... Angela wants to get on Prince's Trust.. we have Connexions here, Emily, who works with them as well to get their CVs done and to actually bring in the latest vacancies through Connections, and will contact them".

The Connexions' Advisor stressed that the success of the course was partly due to the skills of the teacher, and in particular, her skills of interaction with the pupils. Many of the students were disappointed that there was going to be a two week break for the Easter Vacation. The teacher explained that especially for those who lived in local hostels, the course gave them something to do and meant that they did not have to hang about in the hostel all day. Attendance at the course also gave them a sense of self-esteem: "At least they have a little place to come to, and they call it college, not, you know, but they call it college, they say to people, I'm going to college, and it's lovely for them, you know, they say, oh I said I've got to go to college tomorrow so, and I think, great, you know..."

The teacher who led the course felt that developing teachers who were talented in terms of getting pupils to engage with learning was crucial with NEET at-risk students: "That's the main thing... and the way in which they learn is different, and I think we need to get young teachers and older teachers to actually realise it isn't... you've got to get them engaged in it, you've got to get them to like what they're actually doing".

The course may not have been "perfect provision", but it was a good example of a comparatively modest investment that, given an inspirational tutor, could make a big difference to young peoples' attitudes. There were 14 members of the group and attendance was very good.

12m The Use of Nurture Groups at Key Stage 3

12.16 Until recently, the use of nurture groups has largely been confined to primary schools, but the increasing acknowledgement that many pupils are not perfectly developed in social and emotional terms in a way that will enable them to access the curriculum and fit into school life, has meant that several secondary schools in the country have experimented with variants on Nurture Groups or an integrated curriculum on primary school lines, which entails pupils working with the same teacher in several subjects. The creation of such teaching groups generally has resourcing implications as it is generally a small group in order to give attention to individual needs, and it often requires an experienced and accomplished member of staff to cope with the challenge of working with a group of pupils who all find learning difficult, or who do not want to learn. One senior member of staff pointed out that if such pupils were split across the year group, they tended to be simply "submerged" and that their development needs were not really addressed. In nearly all cases, the pupils in the nurture groups were the sort of students who were considered vulnerable to becoming NEET further down the line if there was not intensive intervention at an early stage.

A particularly interesting feature in one school was an attempt to build into the assessment and feedback processes elements that explicitly acknowledged progress in personal and social gains and in respect and consideration for others. It was made explicit to pupils that this was considered to be an important part of their educational progress, and feedback to pupils was based on how well they were developing in terms of making an effort to do well in lessons, and how well they were developing in terms of their ability to interact in an appropriate way with other pupils and with adults in the school. It is now 35 years since the Hargreaves Report (1984) which strongly advocated that assessment should acknowledge improvements in motivation and commitment, and the development of personal and social skills if learners who were cognitively less able were not to be de-motivated. More recently, contextual value added scores for schools have been predicated primarily on cognitive rather than social gains. Although "hard" mentoring models, such as assertive mentoring, have made a massive difference to the number of pupils who begin to realise that they are capable of academic success, there may be some "collateral damage" caused to pupils who are quite limited in terms of their cognitive ability. Danish approaches place

considerable emphasis on the development of personal creativity and the capacity for strong, easy relationships with others (Bunting, 2006:1); Tunnard *et al.* (2008) stress the need for young people to develop “soft skills” such as confidence, motivation, self-control and interpersonal skills, and the OECD lists “key competences” to be developed through education as “thinking, making meaning, managing self, relation to others and participating and contributing” (quoted in Hattie, 2005). One question which schools might ask themselves is the extent to which assessment and feedback practices get across to pupils the importance of these aspects of progression. Holt (1984: 34) pointed out the dangers of paying insufficient heed to the affective domain of education and the importance of learners’ attitudes to education:

“Most people understand education as being made to go to a place called school, and there being made to learn something that they don’t much want to learn, under the threat that bad things will be done to them if they don’t. Needless to say, most people don’t much like this game and stop playing as soon as they can”.

Three of the schools who were experimenting with nurture groups reported that they felt they had the potential to reduce the number of pupils vulnerable to becoming NEET, but as with other initiatives, it was acknowledged that the success of such groups depended to a large extent on the teachers’ skills of interaction with pupils.

12n “Themed Thursdays”

12.17 Connexions in the southern Norfolk region offer “Themed Thursdays”, aimed at lowering NEET figures, that they hold once a month. Choosing themes that will encourage young people to spend time at the centre and hopefully bring them back to speak to a PA about school training or work. Recent themes have included parents’ and carers’ evening, drugs and alcohol, Chlamydia screening and “Have a safe summer”. They are supported by the Thetford Sexual Health Steering Group. The Third Thursday of the month a PA and a youth worker are always in attendance and prepared to help and advise. They are supported by PAYP, Youth Services, Include Shockwave and the Youth council. Events range from

films on drug addiction shown and discussed by right direction to a Thursday with live bands and BBQ. "Connexions works with many other agencies including BEST, PRU and Zone for Learning, to engage these young people and keep them in education and give them direction. They hold a job shop in the centre when they help young people fill in applications and contact employers. Many of the PA's go so far as to pick up young people from their homes to take them to these events. However as an AIG agency they may only give advice when asked for it, they cannot volunteer it. The IAG development team work with Connexions to support local schools and instruct chosen staff members in how to counsel young people in their schools. The community of practice which operates through and from the Connexions office is awesome".

12o The importance of skills of interaction and developing good relationships with students

12.18 We came across many examples where success in improving NEET outcomes had depended on the relevant professionals possessing very strong skills of interaction with young people, and being able to develop good relationships with them. The following is a small but, we feel, good example of this. Attendance rates are generally acknowledged to be fairly difficult and intractable statistics to change and are not generally susceptible to simple, quick solutions, but one form teacher (an NQT), was able to improve the attendance rate for his class from 86 to 93% over the course of the year. Part of this was attributed to his practice of providing a muffin for all pupils who had 100% attendance for the week on Fridays. The assistant head who mentioned this pointed out that it was not the muffins *per se* which explained the improvement in the attendance rates:

"He works really hard with them as a form tutor, he talks to them a lot outside the lessons, he spends time with them over lunchtime chatting to them, they know he is there for them and really wants to help them, he does a lot of work in terms of extra curricular activities and has got a lot of them playing volleyball.... It means something to them because he is the person giving them the muffin and his praise, respect, approval means a lot to them".

12p Open Road

12.19 Open Road Open Road offers pupils at risk of educational exclusion the opportunity to work with cars, motorcycles and motor sport. As well as the Bracondale workshop, which now has an attached classroom, the project now also has a mobile workshop which makes it possible for them to do outreach work with schools. They have already done work in Watton and several parts of North Norfolk.
(<http://www.openroadnorwich.co.uk>.)

12q Activities and courses to help to re-engage pupils who have been in Pupil Referral Units

12.20 Part of the Key Stage 4 Engagement Programme, there has been an attempt to provide a broader range of reintegration activities for students who have been studying in PRUs. This has included taking small groups of students to supported visits to FE college and a course which gives students the opportunity to take courses in canoeing and bushcraft. Both these strands are designed to help pupils who have been in PRUs to reengage in education, to get them to take responsibility for their actions and to develop their ability to relate to others. The respondent who was responsible for these initiatives made the point that what works for some students doesn't work for others, and therefore a range of approaches are necessary. "Half of them really took to the college and saw it as being very different to what had alienated them in school, the other half didn't like it and were apprehensive and negative... It was just so big. Again, about half of the group of eight students got a lot out of the canoeing and bushcraft courses, did really well and finished the course..... one student asked if he could go back and act as a volunteer and has begun to do that, but not all of them liked it and some fell by the wayside".

12r "Collapsed Curriculum days"

12.21 A number of schools were experimenting with abandoning the normal school timetable on one day of the week and having "special project" activities. Several heads and assistants felt that this was working well and that it offered the opportunity for teachers to work with pupils in a different way, and in a way that enabled them to develop stronger working relations with pupils. Most of these initiatives were comparatively recent

innovations and there is perhaps a need to follow up and evaluate their progress and effect, and to share ideas on formats and focuses for such days.