

Conclusions

14a Data

- 14.1 The proportion of the 16-18 cohort in Norfolk who are NEET is below the national average and is not hugely different from the rest of Norfolk.
- 14.2 The single most significant reason for being NEET is pregnancy/parenthood. This figure is added annually to a core of NEET but it is pregnancy which is the most significant cause of the annual rise in NEET. As a result, the majority of NEET are female.
- 14.3 There is variation in the numbers of NEET and statutory school. This variation also coincides with variations in numbers of NEET and parish/ward and is linked to socio-economic conditions, confirming the national perspective linking NEET and socio-economic status.
- 14.4 Whilst Connexions share summary data with schools, data protection has prevented sharing of individual names. Schools would welcome the opportunity to see names in order to amend IAG processes, if necessary, and to assist Connexions in tracking Unknown NEET.
- 14.5 In the period November 2007 to March 2009, the proportion of NEET Available fell from Year 12 to Year 13 and then to Year 14. By contrast, the proportion of NEET Unavailable (due to pregnancy) is higher in Year 13 than in Year 12.
- 14.6 In March 2009, the proportion of NEET in Years 12 and 13 was the same.
- 14.7 The number of "Other" young people who Connexions have lost touch with, gradually increases across Year 12 to 14.
- 14.8 The work carried out by Connexions in November 2008 to ensure as many young people as possible were effectively engaged in learning or employment produced a significant fall in NEET. However, this fall was not sustained to March 2009, possibly reflecting current economic conditions. Several of the Connexions Personal Advisors who were interviewed reported that the past few months had seen a reduction in the number of apprenticeships on offer, and fewer vacancies in terms of both skilled employment and "jobs without training". It is therefore possible that NEET figures may well rise in the near future. It is important that this is not construed as a failing on the part of the schools and agencies who have worked so hard to bring down NEET figures.
- 14.9 Schools, colleges and Connexions often have to work with exceptionally difficult young people, and sometimes have to make very difficult

decisions, where the behaviour of some students may be impacting very seriously on “the right to learn” of other students.

- 14.10 Data from some of West Norfolk’s statistical neighbours suggested that rurality was an issue (see Section 13). Testimony from LEA respondents, Connexions PAs and NEET youngsters who were interviewed also suggested that living in outlying villages with limited transport services was a problem for some students.
- 14.11 A recent study by the Centre for Market and Public Organisation (Observer 14 December 2008) found that white pupils were far more likely to leave school at the earliest possible opportunity compared to all other ethnic groups. Several of the Connexions’ PAs interviewed also felt that attitude towards education of the indigenous population in areas of West Norfolk were less positive than those from Eastern European arrivals. Cultural attitudes to education are part of the NEET issue.
- 14.12 Testimony from LEA, school and Connexions respondents suggested that many schools now see NEET reduction as an urgent priority, but that there is a need to share good practice in order to secure sustained and widespread improvement across all schools and colleges.
- 14.13 International comparisons (OECD 2008) suggest that other countries have ideas which may be worth exploring in relation to NEET issues. In Denmark over 60% of cared for children go on to Higher Education. Experiments in early intervention and social pedagogy are being piloted in several Norfolk schools, and it will be useful to monitor their effect.

14b Managing NEET

- 14.14 Some schools have a very clear policy for managing NEET including early identification and fast tracking to Connexions but such robustness is not universal across the area.
- 14.15 There is very clear and strong evidence demonstrating the positive impact of curriculum flexibility both through provision at COWA and Notschool. However, rising costs are placing a strain on all school budgets to pay for this provision.
- 14.16 Most schools have a very clear commitment to inclusion. Through this, they recognise that mainstream school provision and support does not meet the needs of all young people. Additional support comes through mentoring, additional advisers/counsellors, work with youth services, curriculum flexibility, in house support units. The development of inclusion

in school will help to reduce NEET further. The chances of becoming NEET increase significantly when a student is moved to being "Educated Otherwise".

- 14.17 The level of student absence in West Norfolk is high. Failure to attend school not only reduces level of qualification, it also disengages a young person from educational routines and processes increasing the difficulty of re-engagement post 16. Concerted work with the Attendance Team, including a robust approach to prosecution, in order to reduce absence is a key process in reducing NEET.
- 14.18 Most young people are "placed" at the end of Year 11 but every September Connexions must track a significant number young people who are "missing". Whilst Connexions try to sustain contact with young people over the period between the end of statutory schooling and the start of Year 12, there is only limited evidence of other actions to sustain contact with potential NEET over this important period. Programmes involving the county youth team, E2E, identified "link" mentors to support young people at this time, are some of the strategies that can be applied to reduce the number of young people who do not make this transition. Failure to make the transition has many causes - lack of parental support, nervousness over the new place of learning, inability to manage the bureaucracy of transition as well as lethargy.
- 14.19 70% of young people who are NEET are below Level 2 in Year 12. Weaknesses in literacy and numeracy restrict access to learning in main school so work done in Years 7 and 8 to improve literacy and numeracy will potentially reduce risk of NEET.
- 14.20 Several centres, especially at post 16 level, reported that they do not inform Connexions that a young person has left that institution. Connexions has a statutory responsibility to remain in contact with all young people aged 16 to 18. They should be informed immediately.
- 14.21 The majority of NEET come from backgrounds where education and training are not valued. Successful activities with parents, in partnership with primary schools, which seek to break this culture, will again contribute to the reduction in risk of becoming NEET.
- 14.22 The reduction of NEET requires multi agency engagement that is proactive and focuses on individuals. There is some evidence of multi agency working but it is not consistent across the area and there is no strong evidence that area wide strategies have been developed to define how multi agency partnership involving schools and all others responsible for

“Every Child Matters” and the “wrap around care” of Extended Schools are to operate.

- 14.23 In many instances, successful outcomes and initiatives relating to NEET reduction and prevention were in significant part due to the involvement of personnel who had exceptionally high-order skills in interacting and establishing good working relations with students. It is important not to see progress in this area simply in terms of course design and content.
- 14.24 Although there have recently been major improvements in terms of curriculum flexibility in terms of providing an appropriate curriculum for all pupils, there are still many pupils for whom school is not a positive experience. Many pupils still have profoundly anti-school attitudes by the time they get to Key Stage 4. Getting all pupils to want to learn and to value education is still a major challenge.

14c Information, Advice and Guidance

- 14.25 Early identification will not recognise all NEET. Several providers spoke of young people who are passively disengaging throughout compulsory schooling. High quality IAG is a right for all young people. This research identified a variety of different approaches within schools and examples of practice which in at least one institution has been identified as “Outstanding” by OFSTED.
- 14.26 Where the IAG is linked to a recognition that processes need to be differentiated to meet individual needs, then there is very good IAG. In some schools, the early identification and tracking is linked to robust general processes of IAG. There are excellent examples of “extra-curricular” activities within IAG. The Lynnsport careers convention was widely praised in all schools. In schools where elements of IAG were a formal part of the scheme of work of a department, this was recognized and valued. In some schools there was concern about the consistency of IAG where there was tutor involvement.
- 14.27 There was variability in the management of applications. In some schools, all applications are read and “quality assured” by the careers coordinator, looking not only at quality of English, but more importantly at ensuring aspiration matched predicted grades. The need for this quality assurance to be more widespread is confirmed by COWA where a substantial number of hours are needed to be spent contacting applicants over applications where aspiration does not match entry qualification. For some courses at

COWA, places are limited. Potential NEET are usually not strong at completing applications to time. This means they run the risk of not getting first choice of course. Students on a substitute course are inevitably less enthusiastic about learning and if they were potentially NEET in the first place, the risk increases. In addition, some post 16 providers expressed concern about the lack of information they had on applicants that would help them in processing the application and supporting the student once they had transferred.

14.28 All centres were generally supportive about Connexions PAs. All recognized the workload carried by the PAs. Strong support came from those centres dealing with some of the most difficult to place young people. NEET youngsters interviewed spoke very warmly of Connexions staff. The only concerns about Connexions were linked to issues of internal communication within the school, the knowledge/experience of Connexions in dealing with Higher Education courses, and the fact that not all youngsters seemed to be aware of the continued help that Connexions were able to provide post 16.

14.29 Connexions' PAs felt that 'taster visits' and face to face conversations with course tutors running post 16 courses were very helpful in reducing the number of poor course choices and "brochure decisions", and that extending such opportunities would help to reduce dropout rates.

14d Post 16 Learning

14.30 All centres have entry thresholds but there is variation and varying degrees of flexibility in the way these thresholds are applied. Several centres are reviewing their thresholds, especially for maths and science. In some centres, there are several students on Level 3 courses without at least a C in maths and in English. Some students are following Level 3 courses which require a high level of literacy skill in reading and writing without a C in English at GCSE. Centres should look at the value added achieved in such circumstances. A similar comment can be made about subjects which require a high level of numeracy.

14.31 Several centres commented that whilst most students make the transition from GCSE to A level quite comfortably, for many students, it is not easy. Whilst all centres sought to give personal and academic support, only one centre identified the provision of full time personal tutors as well as additional subject based lessons in core skills such as note taking, essay

writing, data handling as key strands in their retention rate as well as the high value added achieved by that centre.

- 14.32 Centres provided details of reasons why students who had left either after one year of an A level programme or part way through. In most cases, the centre knew why a young person had left but this was not always the case. Equally, in only two centres was there a policy to conduct exit interviews. Even in those centres, the difficulties of getting a young person who is leaving a course to explain the reasons for leaving are significant. Reference has already been made to the need to inform Connexions immediately a young person leaves a course.
- 14.33 Connexions were given the names of young people who had left the courses. Only a small proportion of those young people had actually become NEET, although the figure is probably higher as Connexions did not know all who had left. The fact that so few NEET are students who start post 16 courses and then leave the course suggests that the origins of NEET lie in those who were already disengaged from education before post 16 learning. It emphasizes the longer term approaches that need to be taken to addressing NEET.
- 14.34 Experienced teachers, Connexions' PAs and students made the point that vocational courses would be limited in their effectiveness if they still relied on "traditional" pedagogy rather than practical and applied learning. There were some pupils for whom "learning by doing" made a massive difference to their commitment and attainment.
- 14.35 Advanced Bridging Courses which provided for a mixture of level 3 and level 2 courses at one sixth form college had proved to be very successful in moving many students on successfully and had elicited considerable interest from QCA as an example of good practice (see Section 12 for further detail).
- 14.36 In spite of recent BECTa and county initiatives, the digital divide remains an issue for many NEET youngsters, and particularly for those from a Traveller background. The proliferation of ICT initiatives and portals in recent years has made it difficult for institutions to keep at the cutting edge of all developments which might help improve NEET related outcomes and there is a need for good inter-institutional communication and collaboration in this area (see Section 11).

14e Students' Views

Year 11

- 14.37 Whilst most students were able to remember IAG activities presented in Years 10 and 11, peers, friends, siblings and parents are strong influences affecting final choice. Students were very positive about Lynnsport but with the exception of one school, views on the role of form tutors in IAG ranged from lukewarm to scathing. In one school, the IMPACT Theatre Group's work was warmly praised. Students were also positive about structured and planned IAG activities which took place in subject areas. Students acknowledged the value of the action in one school where writing CVs is part of the English scheme of work.
- 14.38 Students generally spoke positively about Connexions' PAs. In several schools students had the perception that Connexions exists primarily to support in choice of learning/employment at the age 16 transfer. Very few students were aware of the role Connexions has post 16. With the exception of the schools in Kings Lynn, students were not aware that Connexions has an office in Kings Lynn. There was equally little awareness of the wider support available from Connexions.
- 14.39 Students from only two schools could remember any reading of their final application to check it for grammatical accuracy or, more importantly, to ensure that the course applied for matched the likely GCSE grades. There was support in almost every school from young people attending COWA in Year 11 for the day spent with a tutor in COWA completing the application form.
- 14.40 Students were asked what aspects of IAG they would like to see improved. The two strongest responses were
- More visits to post 16 providers during the course of the working day.
 - Better teaching of IAG.
 - More help and support in completing applications and writing CV.

Year 12

- 14.41 Students gave very good and clear reasons why they had chosen their statutory school's sixth form. The strongest reason was proximity. When A level students were interviewed in COWA, they came from all the towns in the area as well as Wisbech. They did not see distance as a factor affecting their studies.
- 14.42 Students were asked about the role IAG played in making their decision about their post 16 provider. There was a significant contrast with the Year 11 students interviewed. Very few students studying A level had attended

the Lynnsport convention, only a small number had had a Connexions interview. Whilst students in several centres felt there was an assumption they would attend their statutory school's sixth form, in only one case did they feel this was translated into pressure.

- 14.43 When asked if the reality of their chosen centre matched the information pre 16, most students felt this to be true. All students commented on the huge jump from GCSE to A level in terms of academic rigour and the need to have good organizational skills. Students were positive about actions to support them such as core skills workshops, full time tutors, sixth form tutors who were very empathetic. In most school sixth forms, the Head of Sixth was seen as a key source of support and information.
- 14.44 In subject lessons, students were very positive about teaching which was varied in style and approach; staff who supported them positively in the skills of essay writing and note taking and lessons where there was a structure available either through a lesson plan or available on a learning platform. Students were negative about lessons which were repeatedly based on note taking, used Powerpoint excessively, staff who made no allowance for the transition into the sixth and told them that they were sixth formers and they should get on with it, and learning instructions which were too general such as "Go away and read up on this."
- 14.45 Students' experiences of E2E courses were vary variable and Connexions' PAs also felt that courses were of variable quality. Education and Youth Services (www.eyesuk.org.uk) and the Prince's Trust were identified as high quality providers by several PAs.

14f Pregnancy

- 14.46 When staff were asked the reasons why young people were NEET, in only one instance was pregnancy mentioned. There was no general awareness in schools of the significance of pregnancy as a reason. This may be the reason for the limited engagement of schools in the west with the county SRE Partnership.
- 14.47 Whilst the majority of pregnancies are unplanned, there is variation linked to socio-economic reasons in the levels of termination. The effectiveness of strategies to reduce pregnancy requires collaborative working between schools and other Children's Trust Partners.
- 14.48 Take-up of "Beyond the Bump" courses was variable, Connexions' PAs suggested that a degree of flexibility was particularly important for this client group. "Critical mass" was also thought to be a factor influencing

take-up. Social networking, including “virtual networking”, was thought to be an area that could be explored and developed further with young parents.

- 14.49 Although the SRE Partnership felt that most pregnancies were unplanned, and that alcohol was a factor in some cases, several Connexions’ PAs believed that in a number of cases, the pregnancies were “a lifestyle choice”, and one which was influenced by low aspirations and the belief that ‘there is not much else out there’.
- 14.50 There were some variations in pregnancy rates in terms of students’ place of education. Although there are limits to the extent to which schools can be held responsible for the sexual behaviour of both pupils and former pupils, schools may wish to review how well SRE works within their own institution.
- 14.51 The issue of teenage pregnancy rates is not confined to West Norfolk or Norfolk as a whole. The UK has the highest teenage pregnancy rates in Europe, and like truancy rates, such phenomena are not generally susceptible to “quick fixes”. Given the part that pregnancies play in NEET Unavailable figures in West Norfolk, there is a case for giving this aspect of the NEET agenda particular attention, thought and priority.