

Literature Review

13.1 The range of available literature pertaining to NEET provides numerous references and statistical data on the circumstances of young people who are disadvantaged or otherwise experiencing difficulties in making the transition between adolescence and adulthood. A review of this material seems to offer two essential perspectives to understanding and addressing NEET effectively: that “life does not begin at sixteen” – in other words, problems that surface in mid-teens typically have roots in childhood that invariably have not been fully addressed – and that services and support for excluded young people must be integrated “across more than one domain of disadvantage”.¹

This Literature Review explores:

- some characteristics and issues of the NEET group, including statistics;
- factors which cause or contribute to young people actually or potentially becoming NEET;
- challenges to policy-making; and
- examples of good practice.

The material covered geographical areas beyond Norfolk. In addition to investigating evidence from the county’s statistical neighbours, England-wide examples have been considered as well as research evidence from Europe, North America and Australia.

13a Some characteristics and issues of NEET

13.2 The age of young people described as NEET is usually the mid and upper teens, typically 16- to 18-year olds. However, some sources cover age groups between 14 and 19, while a few encompass ages 16 to 24. The bulk of the literature reviewed here refers to 16- to 18-year olds and 14- to 19-year olds.

¹Employability Framework for Scotland: Report of the NEET Workstream, June 2005 www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2005/08/30111605/16069 (accessed 16 May 2009); S. Pemberton (2008), Social Inclusion and the ‘Get Heard’ process: Implications for the Horizontal and Vertical Integration of Governance and Policy in the UK, *Public Policy and Administration* (23/2), 135.

The diversity of NEET young people must be emphasised. As Yardley (2009) points out in her study of stigma and teenage motherhood, teenage mothers are one example of diversity within the NEET group. Furthermore, it is “problematic” to address “young people as homogeneous groups”.²

In addition to the sub-groups which give NEET great diversity, the group tends to be characterised by episodic NEET experience. Many teenagers enter (or re-enter) NEET status for short periods – which needs to be considered for informing the targeting and delivery of effective, relevant NEET support.³

General and detailed statistics on NEET are widely available and in a variety of forms. BBC reporter Mark Easton, for example, blogged in February 2009 about the “plight of the 60,000 [looked-after] youngsters” in Britain. He referred to government statistics on NEET, adding that “35% of children leaving care are ‘Neets’ at the age of 19. But that compares with a national average of just over 6%.”⁴ He compared the different outcomes for care-leavers in Britain with those in Denmark: in Denmark, six out of ten enter higher education; by contrast, only six out of 100 do so in the UK.

Included here are three sets of general data, the first showing the UK relative to the OECD average and to three other OECD countries. The differences again show a sharp distinction between the UK and some other European countries:

OECD (reported in 2008 for year of reference 2006):⁵

Percentage of youth (age 15-19) not in education and unemployed

OECD average	3.0
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²E. Yardley (2008), Teenage mothers’ experiences of stigma, *Journal of Youth Studies* (11/6), 673. She cites MacDonald and March (2005) in her comment on the lack of NEET homogeneity.

³Employability Framework for Scotland: Report of the NEET Workstream, June 2005.

⁴Social Pedagogy in RCC, 3 February 2009, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/blogs/thereporters/markeaston/> (accessed 27 May 2009).

⁵*Education at a Glance 2008: OECD Indicators*. OECD <http://browse.oecdbookshop.org/oecd/pdfs/browseit/9608041E.PDF> (accessed 23 May 2009).

Canada	2.9
Denmark	1.9
Ireland	2.6
United Kingdom	5.3

The UK's 5.3% is the highest within the OECD and is substantially higher not only than the OECD average but also than countries as diverse as Canada, Denmark and Ireland.⁶

- 13.3 The second set of general data, which was produced by Connexions Norfolk, shows NEET figures from Norfolk in comparison with the English national average, the Eastern regional average and the county's statistical neighbours as of November 2007:⁷

Percentage of youth (age 16-18) NEET

National average	6.7
Suffolk	7.4
Derbyshire	6.3
Norfolk	6.1
Cornwall	6.0
Eastern Region	5.9
Devon	5.8
Herefordshire	5.7
Dorset	5.6
Cumbria	5.2
Shropshire	4.7
Somerset	4.3
Lincolnshire	4.0

⁶Although beyond the scope of this Review, the NEET figure in the UK for the 20-24 age group is 6.8%, which is lower than the OECD average of 7.3% for this age group. This might suggest that factors including UK social and educational opportunities combine to produce better outcomes for this age group compared with the teenage group.

⁷http://www.norwich.gov.uk/internet_docs/docs/Partnerships/CoNP/Forums/151008/Workshop_1A_presentation_NEET.pdf (accessed 25May09). The table has been restructured for this Review in order to show percentages in decreasing order.

The third set of figures is the most recent and indicates the percentage of 16-18 year olds who were NEET as of the end of 2008:⁸

Percentage of youth (age 16-18) NEET

Eastern region	6.2
Suffolk	7.9
Derbyshire	6.7
Devon	6.4
Cornwall	6.1
Herefordshire	5.8
Norfolk	5.2
Lincolnshire	4.4

Figures available from a recent needs assessment in Suffolk show that the highest levels of NEET “map closely to areas with high levels of multiple deprivation and low income, and highlight the multidimensional nature of deprivation and poor life chances”. The needs assessment also lists the Suffolk localities with the highest percentages of those NEET in the 16-18 age group:⁹

Lowestoft	11.02%
Ipswich N&E	10.83
Ipswich S&W	9.24
Haverhill	8.37

Multiple deprivation is a major factor contributing to young people who become NEET. According to the DCSF strategy for NEET in North-east Lincolnshire, the significant differences in educational achievement across this region is linked to “those with the highest levels of deprivation... and the greatest incidence of young people at risk of, or being classified as NEET” (DCSF 2009).

⁸NEET figures for Local Authority areas, <http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/14-19/index.cfm?go=site.home&sid=42&pid=343&lid=337&ctype=Text&ptype=Single> (accessed 25 May 2009).

Compared with November 2007, Norfolk is the only county where the NEET percentage decreased. The figures reproduced here are a small excerpt from this source. The data cover all Local Authority areas in England and include estimates of the number of NEET (age group 16-18), as well as percentages.

⁹*Joint Strategic Needs Assessment for Suffolk, 2007*, 94, 95. www.nfer.ac.uk/emie/inc/fd.asp?doc=CYPP_SUFF.pdf (accessed on 25 May 2009).

13b Factors causing or contributing to young people actually or potentially becoming NEET

13.4 Social class background is a major factor in those who become or at risk of becoming NEET. As Thompson (2009, 34) points out:

Participation of 16–17 year olds in education and training declines markedly with social class position, with a commensurate increase in those in government-supported training, those in employment without training, or those not in employment, education or training.

Thompson's sample dealt with data from England and Wales. The European context also discusses the significance of social background (Ianelli and Smyth 2008) and the findings of Simpson and Cieslik (2007) supports previous research "which links social background and the structure of opportunities to different transition routes [to adulthood]". In their study of NEET in Canadian and UK contexts, Côté and Bynner refer to the challenge posed by disadvantaged social backgrounds making the transition to adulthood, remarking that young people compensate for such disadvantage "by exercising their own agency in ways that have risks and benefits" (2008, 262). They add that young people may "require additional time in making the transition to adulthood, often on a trial-and-error basis"¹⁰ This underscores the previous point that those who are NEET do not constitute a homogeneous category. The individual circumstances and needs presented by young people must be addressed in supporting this age group.

Particular mention will be made of pregnancy, transport and rural locations as factors causing or contributing to those who become NEET, beginning with pregnancy. Statistically, the United States has the highest adolescent birth rate among similarly industrialised countries: for every 1000 females 15 to 19 years of age in 1992, there were 4 births in Japan, 8 in the Netherlands, 33 in the UK, 41 in Canada and 61 in the US (Klein 2005, 283).¹⁰ There is a high correlation between poverty and teenage pregnancy in the UK and elsewhere, though teen pregnancy in the UK is

¹⁰The OECD figures discussed earlier indicate 2.1% figure for 15-19 NEETs for the United States, which distinguishes it substantially from the 5.3% reported for the UK.

the highest in Western Europe. Some of the popular media speak stridently against teenage pregnancy, equating it with social downturn and moral shortcomings. In addition, the provision of benefits is often cited as the reason for teenagers becoming parents. The situation is not likely to be always as simplistic as this. Taking the reverse standpoint, for example, Klein points out (regarding the US's highest teenage birth rate) that America has far less generous benefit provisions than in Europe, therefore "it is unlikely that the current welfare system motivates or explains American teenagers' decisions to have children". The reasons seem to be more complex. Furthermore, teenage pregnancy does not necessarily result in the dire outcome which popular media suggest. Some have pointed out that "having a child can motivate a girl to return to education" (Tickle 2006) and spur teenage mothers "to do better" (Spear 2002). Examples of innovative approaches to teenage pregnancy vis-à-vis NEET status are mentioned in the section below on good practice.

13.5 **Transport and rural locations**

The head of an 11-19 comprehensive school in Cornwall which is a 25-mile round trip away from the nearest college has described problems of transport, with attendant impact on NEET, in the following way:

"The friction of distance means significant numbers of young people don't engage in education or training post-16. ... What that means is that significant numbers don't bother. The social impact of geography is to create social problems... as young people are dropping out of the system at 16".

As a result, this school head is pushing for a new Sixth Form college at an accessible distance in order to address the NEET problem (*Western Morning News* 2009).

The impact of poor public transport combined with rural or hard-to-reach areas is felt in ways both direct and indirect on NEET. In their evaluation of Activity Agreements (AAs), a government initiative targeting 16- and 17-year olds in work but not training, Maguire and Thompson (2009) cited one of the reasons given by teenagers for not taking up AAs: "an unwillingness or inability to leave the immediate area, in particular in rural areas." Similarly, Connexions Norfolk (2008) cited transport as a barrier to employment, while a Resolve2 project based in Wiltshire has been funded by the European Social Fund (ESF) in order to reduce NEETs in

Wiltshire and Swindon, "particularly those living in rural or inner town areas of deprivation or who have profiles of multiple deprivation". Mention will also be made of a Canadian Council on Learning report (*Lessons in Learning* 2005), which highlighted the problem of school drop-out rates among high-risk groups: these rates are higher in some parts of rural and small-town Canada than in urban areas (excepting impoverished inner-city areas). While this report did not categorise these drop-outs as NEET-equivalent, the impact of rural locations on education echoes aspects of what NEET data have indicated within England.

- 13.6 In addition to the problems posed by multiple deprivation, rural localities and transport, **other challenges** must be considered regarding the NEET groups. Much research deals with issues faced by young people as they make the transition from adolescence to adulthood. For example, McCrystal *et al.* (2007) have pointed out the "increasing detachment from the norms of mainstream society" during these transitional years. Much as Côté and Bynner (2008) noted that some young people may require more time to accomplish the transition, some of which may involve trial and error, the literature speaks about the extra difficulties posed by the liminal stages of the teenage years.

Some researchers have addressed issues of discourse, referring to messages of economic worth outweighing personal identity (Fergusson 2004), of the focus on economic concern of education and employment outweighing personal and individual dimensions of vulnerable young people (Yardley 2008) and the "commodification of young people under the guise of preparing them" for the economy (McGregor 2009). McGregor is referring to the Australian context but views of a similar vein have been made within the UK by many others, including Yardley (2008) and Simmons (2008), the latter who states that "the needs of those [who are NEET] ... are subordinated to the needs of an English economy that is increasingly based upon low-skill, low-pay work relations". In view of the current economic recession, Corney (2009) has emphasised that specific measures are required to meet the needs of 16- and 17-year olds. Finally, the work of Wilson *et al.* (2008) should be mentioned: they are concerned that recent attention may be diverted away from others who, while not categorised as NEET, are still experiencing fragile and vulnerable situations.

13c Examples of good practice

- 13.7 The examples of good practice are not presented as a panacea or as a one-size-fits-all, rather as examples or models of what can be adopted and adapted – typically within a larger, comprehensive programme or group of services – to support those who are NEET.

Mentoring has been suggested as particularly helpful to excluded young people for coming to terms with difficult family relationships (Colley 2006), while Basit (2009) recommended that mentoring programmes be devised for NEET.

An approach which considers teenagers in the round is being advocated by some local authorities as well as researchers. In Northumberland, a three-year strategy called *Whatever It Takes* (2008) has been launched underpinned by a commitment to build on good practice across the county and for partners to work together:

Whilst educational attainment is a key element of breaking the cycle of deprivation, there are wider factors which are also important. For example research has shown that a child who has a good community learning environment in the early years together with high quality pre-school provision who then goes on to attend an effective primary school is more likely to show improved outcomes compared with children that have two, one or none of these experiences.

Social exclusion is, as Savelsberg and Martin-Giles (2008) report on the Australian situation, “a multidimensional phenomenon”. Acknowledging Percy-Smith’s social exclusion framework (2000), they point out that someone who experiences “more than one of the dimensions of social exclusion” is likely to become more vulnerable to further exclusion. As a result, immediate needs of food and shelter are given precedence over government targets that prioritise economic participation and employment. As the work of Yates and Payne (2006) and of Pemberton (2008) indicate, young people’s own feedback stresses their concern about a lack of

integrated support encompassing housing, financial management, mental health, substance misuse and access to training and employment.

In Cornwall, a statistical neighbour of Norfolk, some work has dealt in a more comprehensive way with children's and young people's problems than other single-focus projects. One of these was a pilot project which identified children as young as 14 who were at risk of becoming NEET and provided intensive support, consisting of a 4-week residential, Outward-bound-style activity followed by 15 weeks of vocational training. The results were positive, with 13 of the 15 students moving on to college courses or into work. Despite a high per capita cost of £15K, the pilot nevertheless encouraged Cornwall to secure further funding to repeat the project. The director of the southwest region's Learning Skills Council is now bidding for European funding to expand the pilot to offer it to as many as 120 students from Cornwall.

Springing from the success of the two pilots, the South West region's Learning Skills Council secured funds from the European Social Fund to engage hard-to-reach, vulnerable teens from 14 to 19 years, including those who are NEET or at risk of NEET. A key feature of the project, Freestyle – Best Start for Young People, is a learning plan which is individually tailored to the needs of teenagers in Cornwall.

A new programme called Reaching the Heights has been awarded funding from the European Social Fund and the Welsh Assembly to run two individual projects (First Footholds and Routes to the Summit) to prevent 11- to 19-year olds from becoming NEET. Both projects are expected to employ innovative practices, including workshops, taster sessions, mentoring, support and work-related experience, in order to raise skills and aspirations and enhance young people's opportunities of obtaining work-relevant skills. The projects also seek to share good practice among Welsh local authorities.

Engaging disaffected learners, including those of NEET status, was behind a series of seven projects run in 2007-2008 by the Mobile Learning Network, MoLeNET, which used a variety of mobile technologies to address issues of low levels of aspiration and confidence, as well as skills gaps, in young people. The projects reported improved attendance or attainment

and improved engagement and motivation from the NEET status learners. Whether these results can be sustained has not yet been addressed, but incorporating the use of mobile technology such as podcasting can be one of the positive factors to engage learners of NEET status.

Good practice in addressing teenage pregnancy has also been reported in the literature. An American ethnographic study looked at the social and learning environment of an alternative school programme for pregnant and parenting females aged 13 to 19 (Spear 2002). The study reported that many teenagers on the alternative programme experienced academic success for the first time and were motivated by impending motherhood to do better in school. It recommended that a school-based approach to meet the needs of this group of teenagers be made. In the UK, the findings from a secondary analysis of data from a randomised trial of sex education provided evidence of the value of improved communication between teenage females and their parents or guardians (Allen *et al.* 2007):

..... findings suggest that ease of communication with parents/guardian is protective against girls, pregnancy by age 16 years... [and] support a policy of dealing with multiple influences on teenage pregnancy including recent initiatives addressing communication, personal development and education.

In Cornwall, a project called Karenza “actively encourages teen mothers to bring their children with them as they try ‘bite-size’ training courses”, while their children are looked after in an adjacent room by childcare professionals (*Western Morning News* 2009). Canadian researchers reported on a one-year tracking of life-course trajectories of street-involved young women (King *et al.* 2009). Pregnancy and parenting were constructed as a turning point away from street involvement and drug use. A renewed interest in education and employment was manifested, along with reduction of risk behaviours and help-seeking behaviour to ensure a safe environment for the baby. The researchers added that the availability of day care was important in the decision to return to school.

Yardley (2008) points out that within many teenage mothers’ families of origin, young motherhood is valued and esteemed. She also argues that

teenage mothers who have decided to be NEET in order to care for their children may not necessarily represent a problematic or permanent state and that the stigma and lack of support networks for teenage mothers should be addressed. John Coleman, deputy chairman of the UK government's advisory group on teenage pregnancy, recently stated that pregnancy can be a positive option for some teenagers when good childcare, a supportive family and decent housing are in place. He added that "perhaps it's time to rethink the idea that having children ruins young girls' lives" (Morrison 2009).

Acknowledging young people as decision-makers who also play an active role in shaping their own identity is starting to be seen as positive practice. Trotter and Campbell (2008) aimed to engage and empower NEET 17- to 21-year olds in a project on mental health and well-being. By enlisting the young people as co-researchers with 'youth-friendly technology' (e.g., mobile phones), they attempted to increase their engagement and, by extension, their sense of well-being. While ethical implications were raised during the course of the project, one of the participants experienced a marked improvement in social engagement and well-being.

For Tanner *et al.* (2007), collecting young people's views and developing young person-centred support and development activities were key variables to preventing and re-engaging NEET young people in London. Directly consulting, engaging and enabling young people helped them to be ultimate decision-makers during their research. The success of such findings was supported by school staff, such as this School Inclusion Project Manager, who said:

"The model will work as long as you understand that you have to work with these students differently and treat them as individuals. A lot of their rebellion is about, 'I'm an individual, treat me with respect'" (p. 32).

Good practice has emerged over a number of years. As remarked in the *Report of the NEET Workstream, June 2005* produced for the Scottish Government, the primary NEET determinants of educational

underachievement, educational disaffection and family disadvantage through poverty are being addressed through strategies including:

- offering flexibility to match the needs of the highly diverse young people who are NEET,
- the recognition that progression may not always be linear,
- the most effective approach, which incorporates the involvement of young people in designing NEET services (2005, sections 46, 61).

13d What are other LEAs doing to address the issue of teenage pregnancy?

13.8 The following URLs are links to local authority sites which have been designed to provide resources aimed at reducing teenage pregnancy and helping young parents:

- **Supporting pregnant teenagers and teenage parents (including young fathers)**

http://www.wirral.gov.uk/LGCL/100005/200086/736/content_0002371.html

The Wirral website also linked to two other relevant sources:

- (1) Teenage Pregnancy Pathways

http://www.wirral.gov.uk/LGCL/100005/200086/736/Teenage_Pregnancy_Pathway_A5.pdf

- (2) Teenage Pregnancy in Wirral

<http://www.wirral.gov.uk/LGCL/100005/200086/736/TeenagePregnancyReportJune2007.pdf>

- **Busy Mummy: Education, Employment or Training for Teenage Parents**

www.busymummy.co.uk/assets/attachments/Busymummy_Media_Kit.ppt

Busymummy has designed a tool to encourage teenage parents to work on their own to find a way back to employment, education or training (EET). It is a home-study programme that parents can work on in their own time

and at their own pace. Through effective coaching and questioning it guides the young parent through the stages to moving from NEET to EET:

- pilot ran in South London involving 70 teenagers (either pregnant or parents).
- results: 54 (77%) moved from being NEET to EET within 6 months of starting the programme.
- Me & My Education, Employment and Training Home-Study Programme.
- Me and My Education, Employment and Training Workshop Programme.

- **Reaching out to pregnant teenagers and teenage parents**

www.dcsf.gov.uk/everychildmatters/_download/?id=3138

An education pack designed for teenage parents wanting to return to education.

- **ContinYou: Changing lives through learning**

http://www.continyou.org.uk/case_studies/gateway_cluster_supports_teenage_parents

The Gateway cluster in Birmingham has set up a network of support to help teenage parents back into education, employment or training.

- 13.9 At the outset of this Review, two essential perspectives were suggested: that problems surfacing in mid-teens typically are rooted in much earlier years and that support for NEET or those at risk of NEET must be fully integrated and joined up with the full range of services appropriate for this group. To this can be added the perspective offered by Fergusson (2004, 316): “young people’s participation in education, training or employment is not a fixed category. It is ephemeral, and it has multiple meanings”.

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