

Managing NEET

Summary

- ***Some schools have a specific strategy/policy for addressing NEET, others incorporate it into a wider approach to support.***
- ***Some schools target potential NEET before Key Stage 4 and follow this up with specific interventions.***
- ***Curriculum flexibility involving College of West Anglia has a very positive impact on student attitudes to learning, achievement and retention.***
- ***There are small numbers on the Not School programme and its future is in doubt.***
- ***Additional support for potential NEET comes through 1:1 counselling in some schools achieved through the use of mentors from within the school community as well as members of the business community.***
- ***Alternative provision is provided in some schools through in house support units.***
- ***Persistent absence increases the chances of becoming NEET. In West Norfolk 24% of Year 11 leavers in 2008 had been persistent absentees at some point in their school life.***
- ***Partnership with Children's Services in delivering wrap around care is seen to be at an early stage.***
- ***Permanent exclusion from school significantly increases the risk of becoming NEET. Schools are developing in school provision to reduce permanent exclusion but there is a variety in pace and provision.***
- ***There is little evidence of effective management of the transition process from May of Year 11 other than the support of Connexions PAs.***
- ***Staff recognise a wide variety of reasons why young people become NEET.***
- ***70% of NEET in West Norfolk have not reached Level 2 by November of Year 12.***
- ***Schools recognise the need to tackle lack of ambition and parental support.***

4.1 All involved in education know that engagement in learning and training are essential if young people are to be successful in life. However, a significant number of young people who pass through our schools and colleges do not recognise this and, for a variety of reasons, disengage from education. Evidence shows that NEET is a major predictor of later unemployment, low income, depression and poor mental health. This is why reducing NEET numbers is a critical ambition in 14-19 education and Every Child Matters reforms. Nationally, the strategy for reducing NEET contains three elements:

- careful tracking: to identify early those young people who are NEET, or who are at risk of becoming NEET.
- personalised guidance and support: to make sure young people know how to access education, training or employment, and to enable them to overcome barriers to participation.
- provision of a full range of courses to meet demand: to engage young people through sufficient provision at every level and in every style of learning (DCSF, 2008a: 8).

4.2 Given the significance of early identification highlighted by the DCSF strategy (DCSF, 2008a) and confirmed by other NEET Research (Blunt, 2008, DCSF, 2008b, DCSF, 2008c, Gartshore, 2009, LSC Cambridge, 2008, Tunnard *et al.*, 2008), all schools in the West Norfolk area were asked if they had a strategy or policy in place to target early identification. In a small number of schools, no specific policy or strategy was in place. However, this does not mean a great deal of action was not being taken to support young people; it was not seen as part of a NEET strategy but as part of the school's commitment to supporting all young people. Interviewees in three of these schools recognized the need for the school to develop such a policy and were actively working with the leadership team in policy development. In one school, the need for a policy as such was rejected as the school felt it knew its students and that needs were being met through the normal processes of support and guidance. In the other schools, there was a very clear recognition of the need for a NEET policy and proactive work with young people who were potentially NEET.

4.3 In the schools where there was clear and targeted activity to identify and personalize support for potential NEET, colleagues interviewed spoke with real feeling that there are young people for whom the normal processes of

support and guidance are insufficient and that the school needs to personalize support and, where necessary, commit additional resources. In all of these schools, senior staff were very actively engaged in overseeing and supporting the development of a strategy to reduce NEET. All saw it as a responsibility of the school to provide the best support for all young people, recognizing that this provision needed to be intensive for some young people. One interviewee also commented that reducing disengagement also had a positive impact on the school's Contextual Value Added data! The firm support of leadership in addressing NEET is an essential component of a NEET strategy.

4.4 Several schools felt they had to intervene early, usually in Year 9. However, colleagues in these schools also spoke of their recognition of NEET before then. In such schools, recognition involves a fast track process to the Connexions PA. In one school, this is achieved by a programme where every Year 9 is interviewed by a member of the pastoral team about aspirations and learning pathways. Interventions also involved a dogged persistence by the school's own careers/IAG coordinator to ensure that interviews had taken place and, where further interviews were needed, giving support to Connexions to ensure attendance at the interviews. One senior member of staff spoke of how his involvement with one young person had led to six interviews with Connexions. In two of the schools there is a recognition of the pressures and time constraints faced by Connexions, and the school provides enhanced support. One school employs a trained professional counsellor for one and a half days per week to work with young people at greatest risk of disengagement. In another school, there is a full time non teaching Connexions coordinator who ensures pupil engagement with Connexions. One of the senior staff interviewed showed how the school's own processes of monitoring pupil progress were linked into IAG. When performance against target grades is being discussed students are also asked about future aspirations. Those who state they are unsure are referred to a senior member of staff who ensures they are fast tracked to Connexions.

4.5 In all West Norfolk schools there is a recognition of the value of curriculum flexibility and making use of the vocational provision at the College of West Anglia in reducing disengagement from learning. This is supported by very close links with the College involving a teacher or PA from the

school visiting College teaching staff on a regular basis, discussing individuals and taking supporting action where needed back in the school. In one school, a member of the County Youth Team and a teaching assistant work with the young people on a flexible learning programme for a further day each week. Both had developed very effective relations with the young people who were very positive about the support they had received. Interviews with students across several schools emphasized the value of involvement with COWA in Years 10 and 11 through the support of the College in helping them complete their application to COWA. Without exception, schools commented that without the provision of courses at COWA, the exclusion rate would be higher. As one senior colleague said "our experience is that students feel more positive about their future as a result of attending COWA. It gives them hope and they can see the progression." In more than one school, reference was made to the importance of programmes which allowed students to experience COWA, get to know the layout of the college, college routines and staff in advance of moving there on a full time basis in Year 12. All the students who were interviewed in schools who were on the programme were very supportive. Data provided from the College illustrates the positive impact of the programme.

Table 18 14-16 Norfolk Schools at COWA Completion Year 2007-2008

	Foundation	Level 1	Level 2
Number of Starts	17	122	17
% Retention	100	76	89
% Pass rate	100	98	63

4.6 The programme is also effective in leading to effective transition to learning/employment post 16. 111 or 71% of the young people who completed the programme progressed into FE/training with a further 6 (4%) progressing to work. The small number who started on this programme and whose future is unknown must be a priority sub group as being potentially NEET. Initially, this programme was funded by the LSC. The funding has been reduced, and sending students on the course is stretching school budgets. Numbers have fallen from a high of 200 in the

completion year 2005-2006 to 156 in 2007-2008, although there has been a rise to 187 in the current year. There is no doubt that this programme has had a significant impact on retaining many students in education.

- 4.7 18 students are currently on the Notschool programme. This programme has, as its target group, students who are capable of working independently from home. They are provided with a laptop, printer, camera and broadband access from home. They are linked to a mentor, a qualified teacher, and their learning is on line. Mentors keep folders of a range of certificates that a young person could gain. A young person could gain accreditation without realizing s/he was working towards such an award. It is claimed that 75% move on into further education. Of the three young people in West Norfolk who completed last year, progression has been to an apprenticeship, an NVQ Level 1 in Hair and Beauty and E2E. In West Norfolk, the scheme is overseen by a manager in COWA. Of the eleven Year 11 leavers this year, all but one have applied for a college course. Three applicants have been successful, the remainder are awaiting an interview. However, the cost is £5000 per student and the future of the programme is in doubt as the cost to schools is likely increase and there is no additional support from Children's Services.
- 4.8 Several schools emphasise the importance of the involvement of the resources of the learning support department in working with young people who are potentially NEET. In one school, the SEN coordinator takes all the referrals of those young people who are at highest risk of becoming NEET as well as those who are lacking in confidence. Individual mentoring is provided as well as the opportunity to join a life skills course. In the same school, those who present a significant challenge because of poor behaviour are assigned a member of senior or middle management as a personal mentor. No mentor has to manage more than one student. In another school, teaching assistants are used flexibly "to take the sting out of situations". This involves withdrawing a student from certain lessons to work with the TA on strategies to improve behaviour when returned to lessons.
- 4.9 In some schools additional resourcing is put in for mentoring and counselling. The students who were interviewed during this research who happened to be part of a mentoring scheme were all very supportive of

mentoring. In addition, some schools are developing in house learning units. In one school, students with long absences are placed in a learning unit where they catch up with work missed until they are ready to resume normal lessons. In the same school this unit is also used for students who have failed to deliver coursework on time. In another school the unit is designed so students work in isolation in booths with work brought to them. However, the person in charge has a wider support brief and uses the time for in depth discussion with students. At least two schools use youth workers to support students. In another school a lunch time club, run by a non teaching member of staff, is helpful in enhancing personalized support. The provision of a more structured in house learning support unit is seen by one school as the final piece of the structure they need to move to a point where they have virtually no permanent exclusions. Lack of funding and appropriate physical space are restricting this school's efforts.

4.10 Nationally, a characteristic of many NEET is attendance well below the average. All schools reported working closely with their attendance officer and all schools recognized the importance of attendance. Absence not only results in failure to achieve formal qualifications, it also disengages a young person from learning routines. Students who have a poor record of attendance at school also struggle to attend College on a regular basis.

4.11 Absence is a significant issue for West Norfolk schools. Most West Norfolk schools do not meet the threshold of no more than 7% of students as persistent absentees. If this threshold is lowered even further to 6%, then the number of schools failing to meet this target will increase. Data from the County attendance team shows the scale of the problem. In the Year 11 leavers of summer 2008, 575 students in the West had been categorized as "persistent absentees" during their school life i.e with 20% absence in a period of four weeks. The Year 12 cohort known to Connexions is 2422, so 24% had been persistent absentees during the school career, although this is a small overestimate because of the voluntary nature of engagement with Connexions. Of the 2136 leavers in 2007 known to Connexions, 577 (27%) had been persistently absent at some point in their school year. With such a strong link between absence and NEET, improving attendance by a variety of strategies is an essential element in reducing NEET numbers. A summary of best practice is

included as **Appendix 2**. The Fast Track approach to formal procedures leading to a prosecution in twelve weeks was piloted in West Norfolk with a success rate in improving attendance of 80-90%. Above all, the message must be that there will be a consequence for absence without sound and valid reasons.

- 4.12 Some young people need support and resourcing beyond the ability of an individual school. The type of support varies considerably from young person to young person. It was recognised by the Social Exclusion Unit that the challenge to ensure all young people progress through adolescence fully equipped to play an active role in society and gain the skills they need to enter the labour market would require a collective response. It would require *"...agencies working together to provide services in partnership, demonstrated by a strategic vision, shared responsibility and solutions agreed by senior officers across local authorities and primary care trusts – and with local areas having clear lines of accountability, through their Children’s Trust and Local Strategic Partnership to ensure that the contribution of all partners is monitored effectively."* (Tunnard *et al.*, 2008: 18). Effective partnership with Children’s Services with links to families right back to ante-natal and post-natal support, through children’s centres, parental support advisers, and work in primary schools, provides a longitudinal perspective which the secondary school alone does not have. In Norfolk schools, there was concern over the Common Assessment Form. It was described as being “too bureaucratic” by more than one interviewee. Some schools spoke of the value of multi agency meetings to discuss those young people with complex needs, in one case, with the frequency linked to the exclusion record of young people. There is evidence of the very positive impact of regular meetings amongst professionals discussing individuals, but these meetings need to be as frequent as fortnightly (Blunt, 2008, Gartshore, 2009). Some were very negative in their assessment of the support they received from Children’s Services, and a feeling that the onus is too much on the school to lead in working with other professions and agencies. One interviewee stated “Norfolk is slow to develop round table discussions which focus on individuals. As a result, processes are too reactive.” There is variation in the degree to which the resources of the youth service are used by schools. In two examples in the research it is used effectively to work with targeted groups. The general feeling was that partnership with

Children's Services in ensuring high quality, coordinated "wrap around care", as outlined in both Every Child Matters and Extended Schools, is still at an early stage.

- 4.13 Permanent exclusion from school significantly increases a young person's chances of becoming NEET. Many of the young people with whom the Youth Offending Team are working are also out of mainstream learning. Of the 27 young people being supported by YOT and who reached the end of statutory education in 2008, eleven are NEET, seven are in training, five are on an E2E programme and four are employed. The Behaviour Partnership, with its commitment to the reduction of permanent exclusion is developing in West Norfolk but some schools commented negatively on its working. These comments related to a perceived lack of transparency in the system; that some schools exclude more readily than others and some schools receive very few students excluded from other schools. The Rosebery Centre is managing 140 young people (April 2009). It has to take a flexible approach to reflect individual needs. There is a core curriculum of English, mathematics, science, and ICT. Provision is bought in off-site with organizations specializing in areas such as music, performing arts, motor vehicle maintenance and sport. Most of the young people now have a curriculum mix of nearly 25 hours. The Centre ensures there is a worker in COWA for two days a week to liaise with the College.
- 4.14 The Head of the PRU was very much in favour of a post 16 role for the PRU for those young people for whom continued links with the PRU would help prevent their becoming NEET post 16. The involvement of a PRU in post 16 education would be limited but could provide a degree of support through providing access to on line learning, distance learning and mentoring. This is a view which was expressed by another head in West Norfolk. Given that a school has a central role at the heart of its community and also provides some adult learning, it is a natural development of extended schools that, where appropriate, some on going support post 16 would give continued contact with staff and resources for some vulnerable young people.
- 4.15 The cost of providing education at the PRU is conservatively estimated at £15000 per year per student. One school referred to its wish to develop in house provision which would reduce almost to zero its permanent exclusions. Schools are committed to increased inclusion through the

behaviour partnership. Significant resources would be released to schools if numbers in the PRU are reduced. This requires schools to be able to develop learning provision in a suitable physical location as well as ensuring they have appropriately trained and committed staff in place to work with those young people who present the greatest challenge. Across the country, many schools are developing innovative and effective responses to the challenge of increased inclusion. Given that the likelihood of a young person becoming NEET increases with absence and exclusion from school, there is a strong case for the further development of in school provision not only as part of a wider inclusion strategy but also as part of a strategy to reduce NEET numbers.

- 4.16 All schools take a great deal of care over transition processes from Year 6 to Year 7 but for some young people, planned and supportive action is needed throughout the process of transition at the end of Year 11. Most young people will have made some application before the examination phase in Year 11 but by September of Year 12, Connexions have a great deal of work to ensure that the requirements of the September Guarantee have been met. This work involves young people who have not achieved their anticipated grades but also those who have applied and failed to take up a place. For some young people this transition is not easy either because of concerns about the new environment, or because of lack of personal motivation and drive to sustain engagement in learning after compulsory education. Borderline students are encouraged to make a reserve application should they be unsuccessful in their first choice. Connexions support young people over the period from May of Year 11 to September of Year 12. For some young people other support could be considered. Connexions staff have limited capacity. Other, more appropriate staff such as teaching assistants, youth workers or school counsellors may have already formed close links with young people and could maintain contact over the transition period. Such an approach is a characteristic of the approach of the Youth Offending Team (YOT). Recognising that the young people it works with, most of whom are not within mainstream education, it delivers a personalised programme of support. A member of the team helps a young person on a one to one basis choose a course. Many feel lost in what they see as a maze of courses. It supports them in writing applications, coaches them in interview techniques, and travels with them to interviews. Where a young

person has a statutory order extending over the summer at the end of Year 11, YOT keeps in touch, ensures they have started at the College and checks on attendance. For some young people, Entry to Employment (E2E) is an option. E2E is a flexible programme which is not tied to September starts. Young people can start an E2E programme in the transition summer. The Youth Service is also a valuable source of personnel available over this period. In one school, the youth service is employed to provide group activities in the summer holidays through a one day off-site programme. The school recognizes the value of this and is planning to have a weekly event through the summer for targeted students. There could also be consideration of a larger summer transition activity such as the U Programme which is run in Cambridgeshire. This is a multi agency programme targeted at young people who are potentially NEET. It begins during Year 11 but the centrepiece is a residential period for three days in the summer at the end of Year 11. Youth workers retain contact and use the opportunities provided by the residential programme to ensure young people are still on track to start their Year 12 route. In 2008 175 young people were referred into the programme, 66 took part in the residential element and of these 76, 62 were in employment, education or training at the end of October 2008. Such a programme might well be a useful collaborative activity for OWN and Children's Services to develop.

- 4.17 Strong support for improved transition processes comes from the College. Most young people who are potentially NEET are not skilled at form filling, understanding bureaucracy or the availability of funding to support them post 16. The College quotes the example of a student who made a chance remark to a tutor that she would have to withdraw from a course because her family could no longer afford transport and equipment costs. The family circumstances were such that the student in question was entitled to several grants and additional financial support and she was retained on her course. Schools are in the best position to know which students are likely to be in this position. Stronger red flag identification of such students would greatly help the College in identifying those in need of support. Equally, early identification of students with poor organizational skills would help in transfer. Such students should be prioritized in terms of ensuring application forms are completed early in the transfer cycle (see section on IAG) and prioritized with an adult, whether it be Connexions or a school employee to ensure the young person has sorted travel

arrangements, knows the start times and which days to attend College, and so on. This contact is important not just for ensuring the processes of transfer in place, it is also valuable at a personal level giving support and encouragement for students who are unsure, dilatory or nervous about transition.

4.18 Many interviewees spoke with passion about wishing to reduce NEET numbers, and recognized that to do so would require actions and support in statutory education to ensure that there was an effective transition to Year 12. Such an approach will not provide all the answers, but if the numbers who begin Year 12 as NEET are reduced, then that could free capacity within the Connexions, and other services, to work with those who start a new programme in Year 12 but subsequently struggle.

4.19 Staff were asked their views about why young people become NEET. Views of staff covered:

- the local economy, either too many easily accessible but unskilled jobs or just a general lack of employment opportunities.
- parents who also lacked ambition so school receives no parental support.
- too many young people in the area with a lack of ambition and with poor attitudes to learning.
- the transition from GCSE sees a significant jump in the academic rigour of courses linked to a change in learning style which requires greater independence and self-motivation.
- students make what they feel is the right choice and for the best of reasons but it turns out subsequently to have been an inappropriate choice.
- an institution is chosen because it is close-by and convenient although it may not offer the best provision to meet the needs of some students.
- the west of the county is seen as a poor relation in comparison to the rest of the County.

The majority of responses revolved around lack of ambition, lack of job opportunities, size of transition to A level. Interestingly, no one mentioned the single most significant reason, pregnancy and parenting.

4.20 The responses from schools are interesting in the light of data held by Connexions on the learning qualifications achieved by students who are NEET and available in March 2009.

Table 19 Learning Qualifications of NEET Available March 2009

Qualification	Number	%
Entry Level	10	3
GCSE A-C or Equivalent	68	23
Level 2 NVQ	6	2
No qualifications	76	25
GCSE D-G or equiv	121	40
Level 1 NVQ	5	2
A/AS levels or equivalent	12	4
	298	

The table clearly shows that the variety of NEET by attainment, 25% have no qualifications, 42% have achieved a Level 1 qualification, and 25% a level 2 qualification. No data has been collected on how many have achieved a qualification in mathematics or English. However, 70% of NEET in West Norfolk have not reached Level 2, and it is clearly the failure of this group to progress effectively beyond statutory school that is the greatest contributor to NEET in West Norfolk. That is why there is a need for emphasis on processes to reduce NEET in schools. One priority is the improvement of levels of literacy and numeracy through curriculum flexibility. Nationally many schools are taking the opportunity of increased curriculum flexibility at Key Stage 3 to enhance literacy and numeracy. How this happens is a decision for individual schools to take according to need. However, given the below average ability, literacy and numeracy skills of the majority of NEET, there is a strong argument that reduction of NEET from secondary schools begins by enhancing literacy and numeracy

skills from Year 7, and for secondary schools to work with primary colleagues to improve further numeracy and literacy before Year 7.

- 4.21 Several interviewees raised lack of ambition and lack of parental support as a reason for NEET. It is exactly for these reasons that any strategy for the reduction of NEET cannot be achieved simply by actions between ages 16 and 19. This is increasingly being recognized nationally and is described in great depth in Tunnard *et al's* book (2008) "One in Ten". In one West Norfolk school, there is a Sixth Form induction evening for parents and the College has a parents guide to post 16 as part of its prospectus. The need to win over parents and to raise ambition of young people cannot be achieved alone by the secondary and post 16 sector. Involvement of Children's Services with its resources, especially parental support advisers, and work with colleagues in primary level on raising young people's ambitions are as integral a part of NEET reduction as are the tactical actions for 16 and 17 olds (Blunt, 2008, Gartshore, 2008, Tunnard *et al.*, 2008).
- 4.22 Throughout this section, there has been a recurring theme of the importance of the partnership between Connexions and schools, especially in relation to the sharing of data. Schools were very keen to know what had happened to ex-students and equally willing to amend IAG in the light of feedback on individuals. Connexions currently ask students if they are willing for information to be shared with other agencies by ticking a box. Many young people fail to tick this box so Connexions are faced with the difficulty of further follow up work if they want to share. If the default position is changed to one which assumes the data can be shared with the statutory school unless the young person declines, then Connexions Norfolk can move to a position where, in the overwhelming majority of cases, the names of young people who have become NEET can be discussed.
- 4.23 Providers also have a responsibility to ensure they do all they can to support Connexions in maintaining an accurate database. Post 16, in many centres there was no embedded awareness of the need to inform Connexions immediately a young person leaves the centre, although one centre reports monthly. Connexions needs to know immediately a young person disengages. Persistence and doggedness are key themes in the

management of NEET and all centres should inform Connexions immediately so action can be taken. This should not be an onerous process but is of great importance to Connexions. Evidence collected during the research confirms that even in the largest centre, COWA, the total number leaving the centre in any one year did not exceed 50.

