

## Recommendations

15.1 There are six points which seemed to be of overarching importance and we have listed these first. These points are followed by more specific recommendations related to particular facets of NEET issues:

- 1 One of the most important messages emerging from the enquiry was the strong feeling shared by many of the professionals most closely involved with NEET issues that earlier intervention was needed to prevent students developing the characteristics, attitudes and dispositions which would make them more vulnerable to becoming NEET as they went through school. Many of the Connexions' PAs made the point that many students were well on the way to becoming NEET before the statutory school leaving age, and that even Year 9 was too late to be acting on this. It is worth noting that the recent Cambridgeshire NEET enquiry found evidence of successful primary school initiatives which were designed to get pupils to think positively about education and schooling (Gartshore, 2009).
- 2 Although there is a strong correlation between low levels of attainment in literacy and numeracy and the likelihood that students will enter the NEET churn, many respondents felt that there were other fundamental issues which needed to be addressed in order to reduce NEET numbers, such as social and interpersonal skills, self-esteem, and attitude to learning and the process of education in general. The Scandinavian model of "social pedagogy" provides some examples of possible ways forward in these areas and many high schools in Norfolk are exploring some of these approaches. Given the importance of raising standards of attainment generally, and reducing the amount of underachievement due to low expectations of pupils, there are difficult tensions for schools and teachers in terms of maximising attainment and yet trying to ensure that all pupils have positive experiences of schooling. A key question for schools to consider is how to ensure that pupils who do not find learning easy and who struggle to reach the higher National Curriculum levels of attainment and GCSE qualifications can nonetheless find the

experience of education as positive and fulfilling as pupils who are academically more able. Every year, most PGCE and SCITT/GTP students in Norfolk shadow a group of pupils through a school day, and become aware that for less able pupils, the school day is often not an unremittingly positive experience.

3 In many of the instances of good practice and successful initiatives in reducing student dropout and NEET figures, one of the key elements was the tutor's skills of interaction with students and their ability to create a positive climate for learning. Although appropriate course content and 'technical' pedagogical approach were important factors, often what really made the course work well was the interpersonal skills of the teacher. One of the key variables in the educational system (and one which particularly influences students who are not committed scholars) is the learners' working relationship with the teacher. Most schools and colleges have some teachers who are exceptionally talented in this area but it has often proved difficult to share or disseminate this excellence across all teachers in the institution. In terms of workforce development, whether in ITE or CPD, it would be helpful if more time and attention could be invested in this facet of training, as high levels of expertise in this area appear to have a particularly beneficial effect on pupils who are at risk of becoming NEET. More could be done to develop teachers' understanding of the factors which make pupils want to learn. There is a body of research evidence in this area, including research done with Norfolk students (see, for example, <http://www.uea.ac.uk/~m242/nasc/welcome.htm>). In the words of Hallam (1996), "They must want to learn; if you lose that you lose just about everything". The success of the Key Stage 4 Engagement Programme (see Section 12) is a good example of what a big difference improving pupil engagement can make to NEET figures.

4 The quality of transition arrangements appears to be an important variable in terms of factors which influence dropout rates and NEET outcomes. As much time and care needs to go into post 16

transition as to KS2/3 transition. At the moment, Connexions personnel appear to be the main support for "at-risk" students. Schools might consider how key school personnel such as form tutors, learning mentors, learning support assistants and regular contact through the use of learning platforms, email and social networking might help in the transition period. Some consideration might also be given to the provision of bridging courses comparable to the TIRO project or U project in Cambridge. Curriculum flexibility involving the College of West Anglia, and opportunities for potential students to do "taster visits" and have face to face talks with tutors had a very positive impact on student attitudes to learning, achievement and retention. Colleges and transition institutions should consider how to maximise the quality of IAG, induction and familiarisation so as to reduce the number of students who make poor course choices or who do not feel confident and positive about transition to post 16 institutions.

- 5 Some schools had been exceptionally proactive in devising strategies and interventions which might help to reduce the number of pupils becoming NEET. There was strong support from the Senior Management Team, a sense that NEET outcomes were an important priority in terms of the school's work, and support in terms of investment and resourcing to allow innovative approaches to be explored. Schools need to agree and adhere to a protocol for managing NEET concerns and issues within their own institutions. There was evidence of innovative and effective practice in many schools and it would be helpful if thought could be given to how to maximise the extent to which schools and colleges share information and work collaboratively to improve NEET outcomes, so that ideas and initiatives which seem to have potential can be disseminated across all schools and colleges. There was some evidence to suggest that simply making NEET issues a key priority for the school was an important first step. There is also a need for a clearer definition of partnership working. There was no strong evidence that schools and Children's Services had common agreement about thresholds of intervention and support which are beyond the resources of a school to deliver. In some cases, there was a strongly negative view about the support from the Local

Authority. An initiative led by the local authority on sharing good practice would be a helpful start in developing more effective partnership working.

- 6 Teenage pregnancy emerges as one of the biggest contributors to NEET unavailable figures, and this should be an urgent priority in terms of NEET reduction. One recommendation related to this is that schools in West Norfolk should consider how they might work more closely with the Norfolk SRE Partnership, as well as reviewing their own IAG in this area, and exploring approaches which have been successful in reducing teenage pregnancy outside Norfolk.

15.2 Some schools addressed NEET as a discrete issue with key personnel/core teams and specific policies and strategies for addressing NEET, rather than regarding it as an issue which the school's pastoral system encompassed. There was some evidence to suggest that there were some advantages in the former approach.

15.3 Given that permanent exclusion for school significantly increases the risk of pupils becoming NEET, schools should continue to explore imaginative and resourceful strategies for minimising "complete" and out of school exclusions. We are aware that schools do not take decisions to exclude pupils lightly, and often have to make difficult decisions over exclusion. Massive progress appears to have been made in this area over the past few years, but several respondents felt that this was another area which was a variable in terms of NEET outcomes. Two senior LEA respondents felt that the "Managed Moves" system generally works well in the county, but some respondents felt that some schools made greater efforts than others in terms of inclusion. It was widely felt that some schools have NEET reduction as a higher priority than others. This raises important questions about the distribution of "difficult" pupils and support mechanisms for the schools which have a higher proportion of potential NEET. OWN should take the lead in developing a strategy for those potential NEET who have exhausted normal school processes; this would include approaches to tackling the problem of persistent absentees.

- 15.4 It is essential to the work of Connexions, and to the tracking and management of NEET, that all schools and colleges notify Connexions when students drop out or move away (or “drop off the radar”).
- 15.5 It is equally essential in the tracking and management of NEET that students who have become NEET are reported back to statutory school by name rather than by statistics. This approach will improve tracking and allow schools to review their IAG systems if necessary. One suggestion for facilitating this would be if “opting out” could be the default position when talking with NEET youngsters rather than “opting in” in terms of data sharing with schools. Another suggestion was that schools and Connexions might explore moving to a common information sharing system.
- 15.6 Although many respondents felt that potential NEETs were quite easy to identify at an early stage, in other studies (Gartshore 2009) schools were surprised at some of the pupils who had entered the NEET pool. There would appear to be a number of pupils who are “quietly disaffected” from education (see for instance, Oakley, 2002) and who drift out of education in spite of not having presented significant problems in terms of attendance and behaviour. Schools should explore what might be done a) to identify such pupils and b) to consider how their engagement with education might be improved.
- 15.7 Many respondents, especially students, expressed reservations about the effectiveness of using form tutors as the main vehicle for IAG. Differences in the quality of delivery of IAG by form tutors emerged as one of the “key variables” in the system. There was some evidence to suggest that in schools where IAG is delivered by a small and carefully managed core team, this is effective in reducing NEET outcomes. If schools are committed to retaining the form tutor model for IAG delivery, some thought might be given to how to improve the overall quality of delivery of IAG by form tutors.
- 15.8 More could be done to make students aware that Connexions offer guidance and support post 16. There was strong praise for the work of Connexions but there is the question of what proportion of young people who are not “sorted out” avail themselves of Connexions support and advice post 16.

- 15.9 Some schools appeared to have closer and more effective working relationships with Connexions than others. Schools should consider whether they have the best channels of communication and systems for collaborative working with Connexions (and other children's services agencies).
- 15.10 There is some evidence to suggest that close inter-agency working between key school staff and children's services agencies can be effective in providing the "wrap around care" which might help to prevent at-risk students from disengaging from education. Although some schools have substantially reduced their NEET figures though the use of regular, purposeful and "followed-up" meetings with support services, not all schools have fully developed systems for optimising the support provided by Children's Services.
- 15.11 Some schools have developed very strong guidance and support for ensuring that applications to post 16 courses are appropriate in terms of aspiration and qualifications, and that the applications meet the requisite deadlines. Schools should review their practice in this area to see whether it reflects best practice.
- 15.12 Some schools and colleges have very structured systems for helping students struggling to meet the demands of transition to level 3 courses. This is another area where institutions should review their practice.
- 15.13 The Lynnsport event evinced widespread praise and is regarded as a very useful contribution to IAG and induction in the area. It should be retained and developed as an important element of the transition and IAG process.
- 15.14 Many schools are exploring the potential of social pedagogy approaches to improving students' social skills, self-esteem, interaction with others and attitude to learning rather than focusing primarily on academic mentoring and development approaches (see, for example, Bunting 2006). There is tentative evidence to suggest that this can be helpful in reducing the chances of less able pupils becoming disaffected and disengaged from education. In some schools, this includes a strong emphasis on acknowledging gains in personal and social skills, and in motivation and

commitment, in assessment and feedback to pupils (see Section 12). The potential of such approaches might be explored more widely.

- 15.15 Some forms of E2E provision elicited very positive feedback from NEET youngsters and Connexions' PAs. Further research might be undertaken to see what exactly these high quality providers do that makes the courses so well thought of.
- 15.16 The development of VLEs, Web 2.0 applications and e-portfolios means that ICT is likely to play an increasingly important part in several areas which are likely to influence NEET outcomes (see Section 12, see also, Lightfoot L. 2010, Having a more positive impact in *Leader, January 2010: 24-7*). Schools and colleges need to review their strengths in these areas and to work collaboratively to ensure dissemination of best practice in areas such as e-communication with learners and parents/carers, use of Web 2.0, e-portfolio development etc.
- 15.17 There was evidence to suggest that some ITE students had a limited understanding of NEET issues. Although the professional development programme places considerable emphasis on 14-19 issues, there is no designated lecture or seminar which focuses exclusively on NEET issues. We recommend that both the UEA ITE Partnership and the Suffolk and Norfolk ITT Course consider the incorporation of a discrete input on NEET as part of their initial training course, so that all NQTs are familiar with NEET issues when they enter the profession.