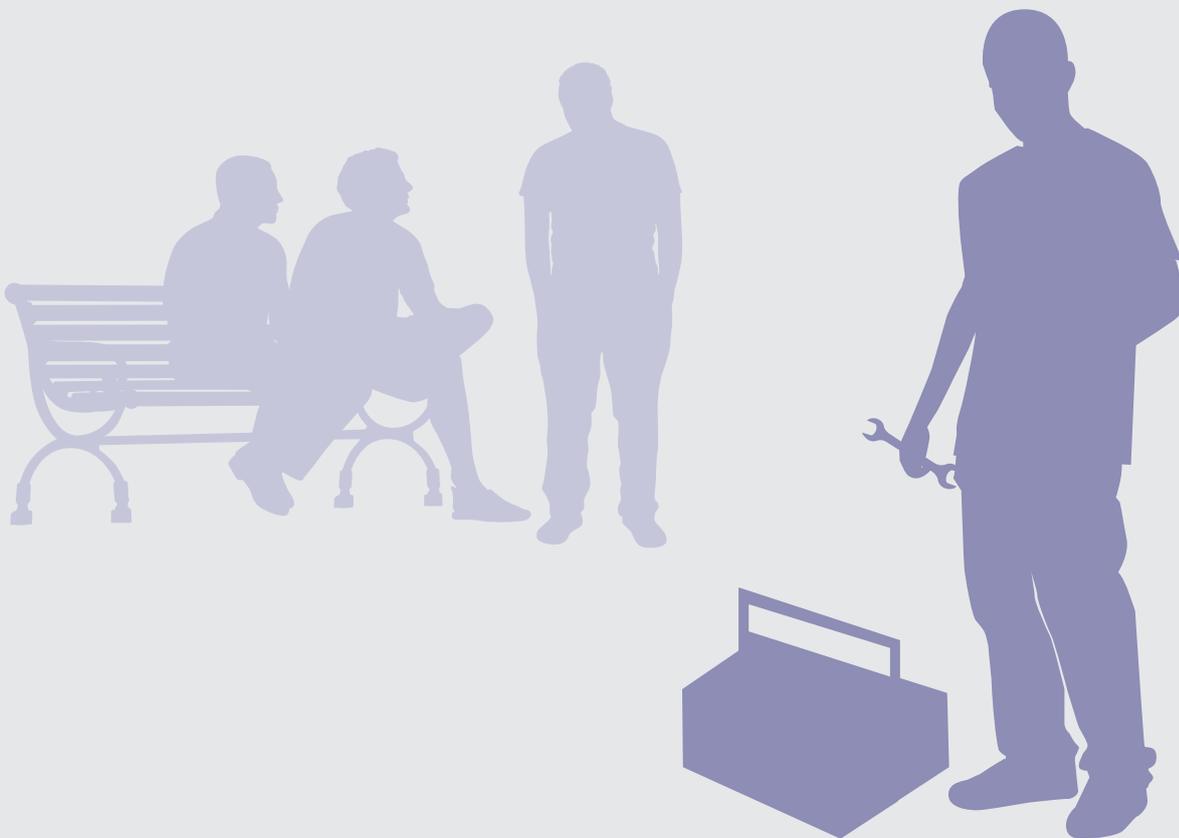




Local action on health inequalities:
**Reducing the number of
young people not in
employment, education
or training (NEET)**



About Public Health England

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About the UCL Institute of Health Equity

The Institute is led by Professor Sir Michael Marmot and seeks to increase health equity through action on the social determinants of health, specifically in four areas: influencing global, national and local policies; advising on and learning from practice; building the evidence base; and capacity building. The Institute builds on previous work to tackle inequalities in health led by Professor Sir Michael Marmot and his team, including the 'Commission on Social Determinants of Health', 'Fair Society Healthy Lives' (The Marmot Review) and the 'Review of Social Determinants of Health and the Health Divide for the WHO European Region'. www.instituteofhealthequity.org

About this evidence review

This evidence review was commissioned by PHE and researched, analysed and written by the Institute of Health Equity (IHE). There are related evidence reviews available in this series. There is a companion summary briefing note available on this and other related topics from the same series. This review is intended primarily for directors of public health, public health teams and local authorities. This review and the accompanying briefing are part of a series commissioned by PHE to describe and demonstrate effective, practical local action on a range of social determinants of health.

This evidence review was written for IHE by Matilda Allen.

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Contents

Introduction	5
1. What does 'NEET' mean?	7
2. Being NEET and health inequalities	8
2.1: What impact does being NEET have on health?	8
2.2: Being NEET and social inequalities	10
Area deprivation	10
Socio-economic position	11
Parental factors	11
School factors	11
Other factors	12
Summary on social inequalities	13
3. Scale of the problem	14
3.1: How many young people NEET are there, and what have the changes been over time?	14
3.2: Local variation	15
3.3: International comparisons	16
4. What works to reduce the proportion of young people NEET?	18
4.1: The role of local authorities	19
Reducing the number of people NEET is likely to save money	19
Responsibilities and accountabilities	20
Raising the participation age	20
4.2: Act early	22
4.3: Tackle barriers and obstacles	24
4.4: Work across organisational and geographical boundaries	28
4.5: Work with local employers	29
4.6: Track people and monitor progress	31
4.7: Base interventions on features of other successful programmes	34
Appropriate course content	34
Accreditation	34
Not like school	34
Work with young people	34
Financial incentives or support	34
Flexibility and personalisation	36
Group size and one-to-one support	36

Managing transitions	36
Staff training and workload	37
5. Areas for further research	38
Conclusion	39
References	40

Key messages

1. Spending time not in employment, education or training (NEET) has been shown to have a detrimental effect on physical and mental health. This effect is greater when time spent NEET is at a younger age or lasts for longer.
2. The link between time spent NEET and poor health is partly due to an increased likelihood of unemployment, low wages, or low quality work later on in life. Being NEET can also have an impact on unhealthy behaviours and involvement in crime.
3. These negative health effects do not occur equally across the population, as the chance of being NEET is affected by area deprivation, socio-economic position, parental factors (such as employment, education, or attitudes), growing up in care, prior academic achievement and school experiences. Being NEET therefore occurs disproportionately among those already experiencing other sources of disadvantage.
4. Because the chances of becoming NEET follow a social gradient, reducing the proportion of people NEET could help to reduce health inequalities.
5. Local authorities have specific responsibilities and accountabilities in relation to those who are NEET, particularly those aged 16-18. The raising of the participation age gives local authorities new roles, opportunities and challenges in supporting young people who are NEET.
6. Evidence of what works to reduce the proportion of young people NEET suggests that a successful strategy requires early intervention, tackling the barriers that young people face when attempting to move into education or employment. It also requires working across organisational and geographical boundaries and the involvement of local employers.
7. Tracking people, monitoring progress and programme evaluation can also help to drive improvements. Best practice from other successful programmes should be borne in mind when commissioning new services. For example, it is important that courses are accredited, not like school and developed in partnership with young people.

Introduction

In 2013, over 14% of 16-24 year-olds in England are not in employment, education or training (NEET). This equates to almost 900,000 individuals.¹ This is a cause for great concern for those working in public health and trying to address health inequalities. Indeed, the rising numbers of young people who are NEET has been described as a “public health time bomb”.²

This paper first describes the relationship between being NEET and health; inequalities in prevalence of being NEET; and the scale of the problem. It shows that being NEET, particularly for prolonged periods, is associated with negative effects on health and a range of other outcomes. Furthermore, the chances of becoming NEET are not equally or randomly distributed throughout society – those who are relatively disadvantaged, from poor backgrounds, or who have had negative experiences at school are more likely to spend some time being NEET.

Secondly, this paper proposes actions that can be taken at a local level in order to reduce the proportion of young people who are NEET. Many local areas are already taking effective action on reducing NEET levels; a small number of these actions are presented in section 4 below, as interventions.

There is good evidence on what works in order to enable and support young people to enter employment, education and training. The purpose of this document is to show that taking action to reduce NEET levels is both possible and necessary – both to ensure young people have opportunities, and also as an important way to improve public health and reduce inequalities.

This paper is part of a collection of evidence reviews commissioned by Public Health England (PHE) and written by the UCL Institute of Health Equity. A corresponding briefing on this topic area is also available, as are additional evidence reviews: the reviews on resilience among children and young people, and on employment, are particularly complementary to this review on being NEET.

Throughout the paper, we have highlighted certain evidence and resources in boxes such as this one. These are labelled in the following ways:

Intervention – an example of a strategy, programme or initiative, taken by a local area, organisation or national government, that it is felt may contribute to reducing health inequalities by acting on the social determinants of health. It has either been evaluated and shown to be effective, or is considered to be an example of promising action.

Key message(s) – summaries of the key findings or action proposed in this paper.

Key literature – summaries of academic studies or other reports which provide key information relevant to the chapter, often taking into account a range of different programmes or projects.

Key literature: summary of value for money evidence

1. Each 16-18 year-old who spends some time NEET will cost an average of £56,000 over the course of their life up to retirement age in public finance costs (e.g. cost to services and lost tax revenue), or, alternatively calculated, £104,000 in opportunity costs (e.g. loss of income to the economy and individuals).³
2. To demonstrate the aggregate lifetime public finance costs of 16-18 year-olds not in employment, education or training, for the cohort NEET at the end of 2008 the cost has been estimated to range from £12bn to £32bn.³
3. To demonstrate the weekly costs of 20-24 year-olds who are NEET, it was estimated to cost £22m per week in Jobseeker's Allowance, and £26-£133m per week in lost productivity in a 2010 report.⁴
4. As an example of likely cost-effectiveness, £4,000-worth of support to a teenage mother to enable her to move into work can be repaid twenty times over through increased tax contributions across her lifetime, and reduce public service costs by approximately £200,000.⁵

In addition to this aggregate cost-effectiveness evidence, individual programmes and interventions have also been evaluated and costed:

1. A programme for children at risk of becoming NEET in a school in Salford was evaluated by the Audit Commission, which found that the scheme would become cost-neutral if it helped just eight out of the 31 young people involved into education, training or employment. If all of them were prevented from becoming NEET, Salford would save at least £250,000.⁵
2. In Surrey, NEET levels more than halved from 2009 to 2014. The reduction in NEET levels from 2011-12 to 2012-13 alone resulted in savings of £7m to the public purse.⁶
3. Ready for Work is a programme run by Business in the Community (BITC), which supports businesses to work with disadvantaged unemployed people of all ages. The social return on investment of the programme is £3.12 for every £1 invested, and it generates a social impact of at least £3.2m for each year's investment.⁷
4. In East London, Tower Hamlets' NEET programme has resulted in a reduction in NEET levels from 10.9% in 2006 to 6.7% in 2008. The Audit Commission estimated a potential saving of £2.1m considering this cost and the reduction in NEET levels.⁵
5. A set of interventions in Swansea and Wrexham have been evaluated by Arad Research, which found that the reductions in NEET levels were likely to have resulted in public finance savings of £1.1m in Wrexham and £8.6m in Swansea, compared to a scenario where they followed the 'Wales average' of NEET levels.⁸
6. Activity Agreement Pilots, a national programme to reduce long-term NEET levels, cost £2,122 per participant, and 49% of people who took part were in education or employment three months after the programme. However, evaluation found that 72% of these 'successful' participants would have moved into education or training without the programme.⁹

More information on the overall cost of NEET levels and the evidence from interventions can be found in section 4.

1. What does 'NEET' mean?

Young people who are not in employment, education or training (NEET) have been the focus of much national and local attention since the term was first coined in 1996. National targets and data have tended to focus on those aged 16–18, although the term can also be used for the larger group aged 16-24. This paper addresses both these groups, particularly as a change in the law means that from 2015 all young people will have to engage in some sort of education or training up to the age of 18.¹⁰ This implies that the majority of those who are NEET will be over the age of 18. Therefore in this paper, 'NEET' refers to not being in employment, education or training between the ages of 16 and 24. The term 'NEET' is not used to describe the identity of individuals or groups, but rather their situation or official status.

Those who are NEET are not a homogeneous group. Research shows that many young people are NEET at some point,⁵ for example, while waiting for a course to start or in between jobs, particularly in the case of the 18-24 age group. Data analysis conducted for the government in 2009 found that there were three main 'types' of 16-18 year-olds who were NEET. The first were positive about learning and very likely to go back to education or training in the short-term. The second group were found to have significant barriers (personal and structural – including a lack of local job opportunities, for example), and were likely to remain NEET. The remainder were classified as “undecided NEET”. This group did not face significant barriers, but were dissatisfied by or disengaged with the options available to them.¹¹ Similarly, those who are NEET have been divided into groups classified as “essentially confused”, “temporarily side-tracked” (including those who have other priorities such as caring roles), and “deeply alienated”.¹² Each of these groups faces different experiences of being NEET, and thus requires different types of intervention. We will primarily be focussing on those with significant barriers or who are deeply alienated.

2. Being NEET and health inequalities

2.1: What impact does being NEET have on health?

Unemployment is linked to ill health, premature death,¹³⁻¹⁵ deterioration in mental health^{16, 17} and an increased risk of suicide.^{18, 19} The ways in which unemployment affects physical and mental health include through reductions in income, increased social exclusion, isolation and lack of social support, and increases in unhealthy behaviours such as drinking and smoking.²⁰ More information on the health effects of unemployment can be found in the evidence review on employment.

There are particular risks associated with being unemployed at a young age.²¹ Long-term unemployment at a young age has a direct effect on health and also makes the chances of being employed in a good career later on in life significantly less likely.^{22, 23} For this reason, those who are NEET for longer than six months should be of particular concern. By the age of 21, people in this group are more likely to be unemployed, low paid, have no training, a criminal record, and suffer from poor health and depression.²⁴ Bell and Blanchflower have found that spending time unemployed under the age of 23 lowers life satisfaction, health status, job satisfaction and wages more than twenty years later – an effect they call ‘scarring’.²⁵

There are a number of reasons that unemployment early on in life is particularly damaging:

1. The immediate health effects are particularly pronounced for young people. For example, the increased likelihood of depression as a result of unemployment is amplified for unemployed young people.²⁶ One study found that young men who were NEET were three times more likely to suffer from depression than their peers.⁵
2. There is evidence that compared with other groups, a significant period of unemployment for those of a young age is likely to persist,⁵ so that early unemployment has a significant negative effect on employment opportunities later in life.^{23, 27} Almost half of those who are NEET at age 17-18 are still NEET one year later, and those who are NEET at age 18-19 are 28% more likely than others to be unemployed five years later and 20% more likely to be so ten years later (23). This increased likelihood of long-term unemployment is of particular concern for public health.
3. There is evidence that when those who were NEET do move into work, they are more likely to be in low-paid jobs,⁵ and jobs that do not offer any training.²³ In some cases, these people will receive no further training. One study estimated the effect of early unemployment on wages to be between an 8% and 15% reduction by the age of 42.²⁸ This is of concern for health as those on low wages are more likely to have relatively poor health outcomes²⁰ (see the accompanying evidence review on minimum income for more information).
4. Being NEET can also have an effect on unhealthy behaviours. For example, there is an association between youth unemployment and increased alcohol consumption: evidence suggests that reducing the number of those who are NEET would reduce harm from alcohol.²⁹ In one survey, 11% of 16-25 year-olds who had been unemployed said that they had “turned to drugs or alcohol” as a result of their unemployment.³⁰

5. There have been documented links between youth unemployment and civil unrest,³¹ and crime.³² Young men who are NEET are five times more likely to have a criminal record than their peers.⁵ Although causality in this area is hard to establish, it is likely that at least for some young people, a lack of employment or education increases their chances of committing crimes, partly for instrumental reasons – as a necessity.
6. Being in education tends to be particularly protective of health. Four more years of schooling (in total, up to age 25) on average relates to a 16% reduction in mortality rates, and reduces risk of heart disease and diabetes.³³ There is a clear gradient: those who have lower levels of education or fewer qualifications tend to have lower life expectancy and worse health outcomes than those who are more qualified or stayed in education longer.^{20, 34}

Figures 1 and 2 show life expectancy and healthy life expectancy (the number of years someone can expect to live in full health) for Local authority areas, related to the percentage of local people who are NEET. While they do not prove causation, there is an association: those areas with higher levels of young people NEET tend to have lower life expectancy and lower healthy life expectancy. It is likely that this mostly relates to levels of deprivation, which can increase NEET levels and reduce life expectancy.

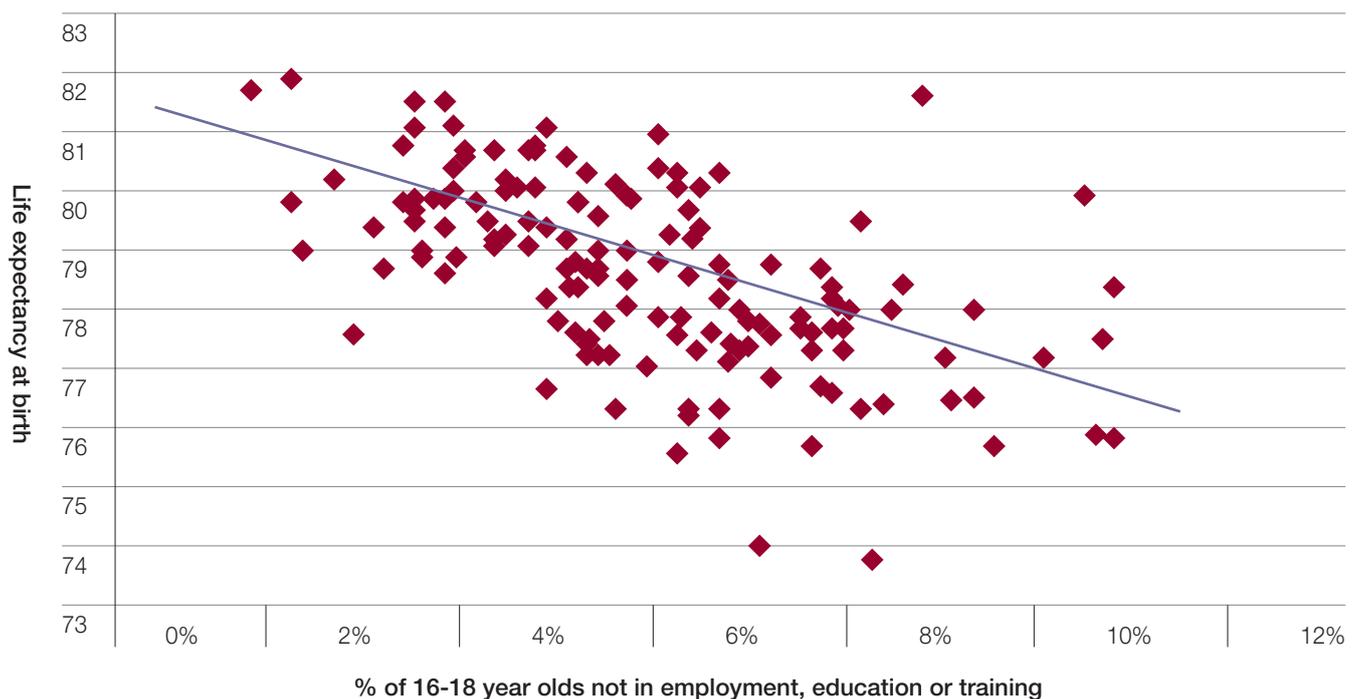


Figure 1. Percentage of 16-18 year-olds NEET and life expectancy at birth, England, local authorities, 2009-12

Sources: NEET data taken from (35); life expectancy data taken from (36)

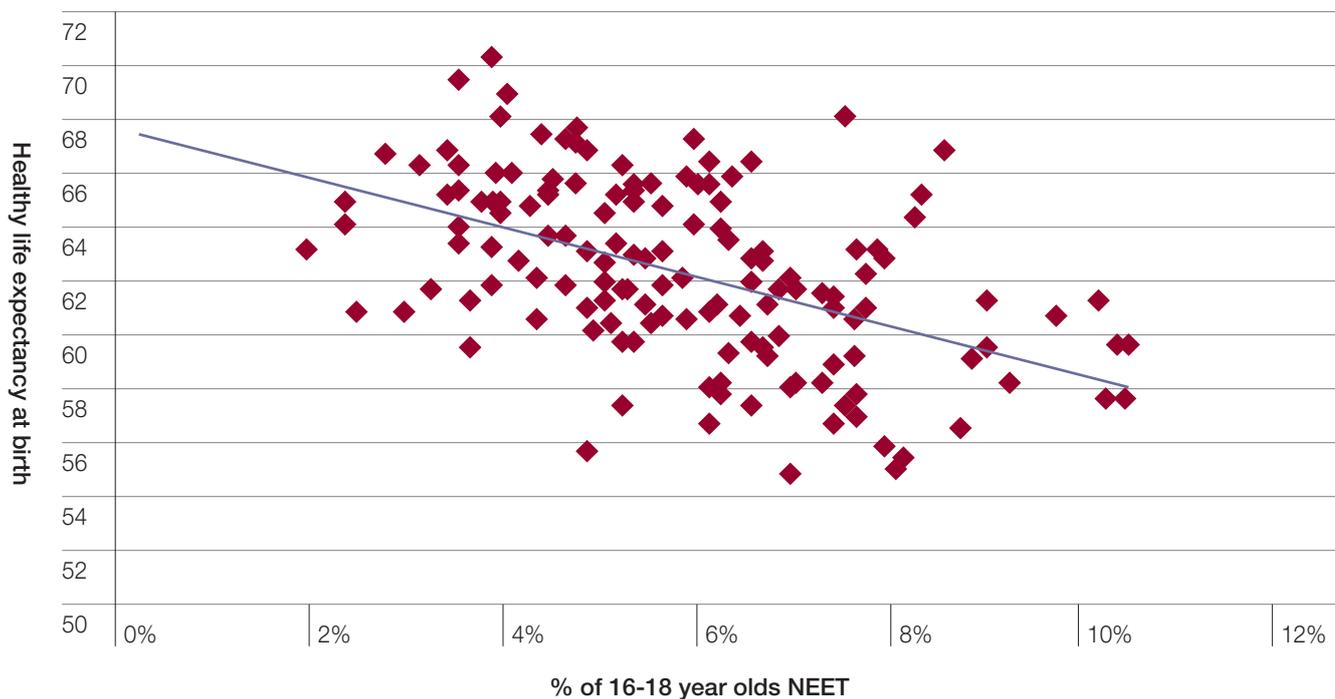


Figure 2. Percentage of 16-18 year -olds NEET and healthy life expectancy at birth, England, local authorities, 2009-12

Sources: NEET data taken from (35); healthy life expectancy data taken from (36)

2.2: Being NEET and social inequalities

The likelihood of becoming NEET is not equally distributed equally throughout society – those who are already facing disadvantage are more likely to become NEET. This creates an extra burden on those whose health is negatively affected by the conditions in which they live, thereby potentially increasing health inequalities.

Area deprivation

More deprived areas tend to have higher levels of young people who are NEET.³⁷ However, there is variation, partly because local NEET levels also depend on policy choices and programme implementation and because there is a wide variation in socio-economic status within most Local authority areas. Evidence demonstrates that in many cases, local authorities can influence and reduce the number of people who are NEET locally in spite of local deprivation and broader economic and national policy decisions. Interventions are presented in section 4 of this paper.

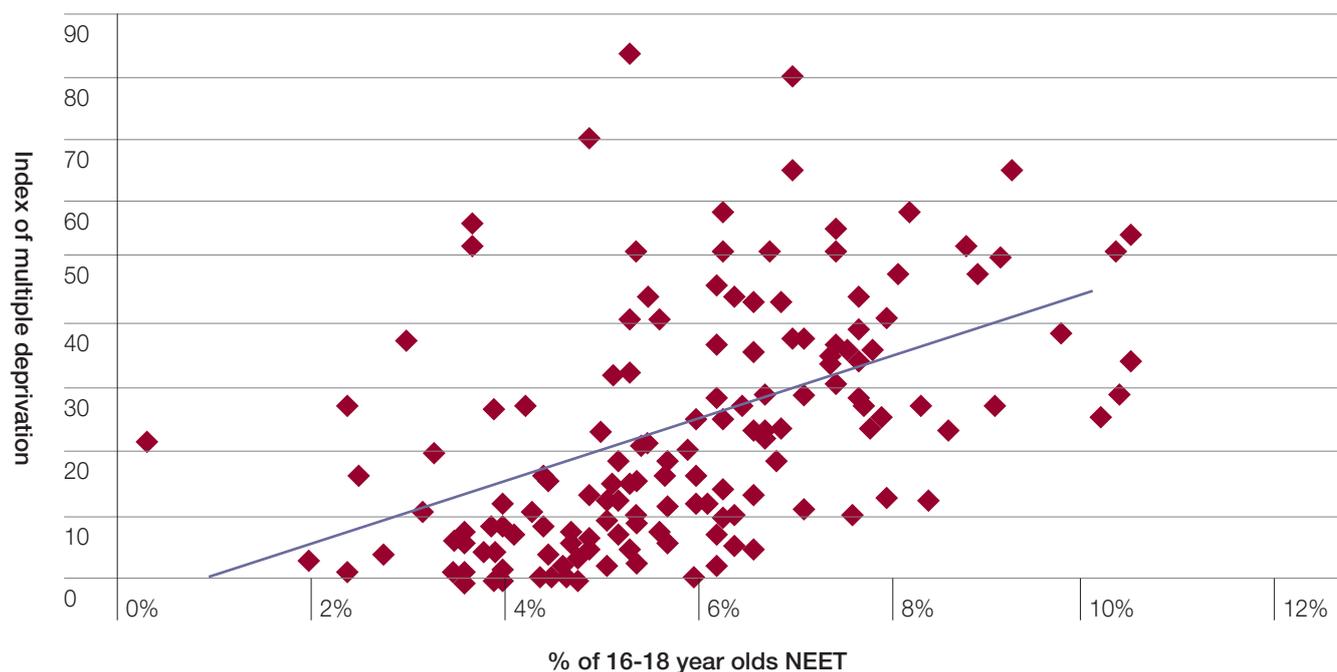


Figure 3. Percentage of 16-18 year-olds NEET and local deprivation, England, local authorities, 2009-12

Socio-economic position

There is also a link between socio-economic position of parents and the risk of young people becoming NEET:^{39, 40} more socio-economically advantaged pupils are more likely to stay in full-time education post-16 and post-18, and are also more likely to be in employment than to become NEET.²³ The relationship between socio-economic status and becoming NEET is particularly pronounced at younger ages: in one study, 46% of inactive and 50% of unemployed 16-year olds were from the bottom 24% of the population when ranked according to family background. These percentages declined at ages 17 and 18 as more young people from higher socio-economic groups left education, training or employment.⁴¹

Parental factors

The experiences (including deprivation and levels of education) and attitudes of parents also seem to have an effect on the likelihood of children becoming NEET. There is evidence that becoming NEET is more likely for those whose parents have low levels of education,³⁹ or who have been long-term unemployed.⁴⁰ One study estimated that 38% of 16-24 year olds who are NEET live in households where no one is working (compared to 8% of all 16-24 year-olds).⁴² Low levels of parental support for education have also been cited as a contributing factor.³⁹ However, other evidence suggests that among 16-year olds who are NEET, a lack of parental confidence in providing guidance, in part due to low understanding of the options available to their child, was a more salient factor than parental expectations or worklessness.⁴³

School factors

There is good evidence that school experiences and achievements affect the chances of becoming NEET. It has been shown that those who are NEET at the age of 18-19 had the lowest results in exams at age 11 and GCSE,²³ and that those who are NEET tend to have had lower academic attainment³⁹ and low levels of literacy and numeracy.⁴⁰ Some evidence suggests that GCSE results are a stronger predictor of becoming NEET than socio-economic status.⁴¹ Between 2008 and

2010, the increase in youth unemployment among those with lower secondary education (up to GCSEs) was more than double that of those who had tertiary education.⁴⁴ A particular risk factor seems to be those who had poor school attendance or who were excluded,^{39, 40} which is in turn related to family factors and socio-economic position. Some of these factors are within the control of schools, whereas others are manifestations of wider circumstances. Action must therefore be taken across different organisations (see section 4).

In addition, the structure, practice and priorities of schools as institutions can impact on young people and their chances of moving into further education, work or training. Some of the ways in which schools can build social and emotional wellbeing and resilience, as well as ensure good academic results, are described in the ‘resilience in schools’ evidence review which accompanies this paper.

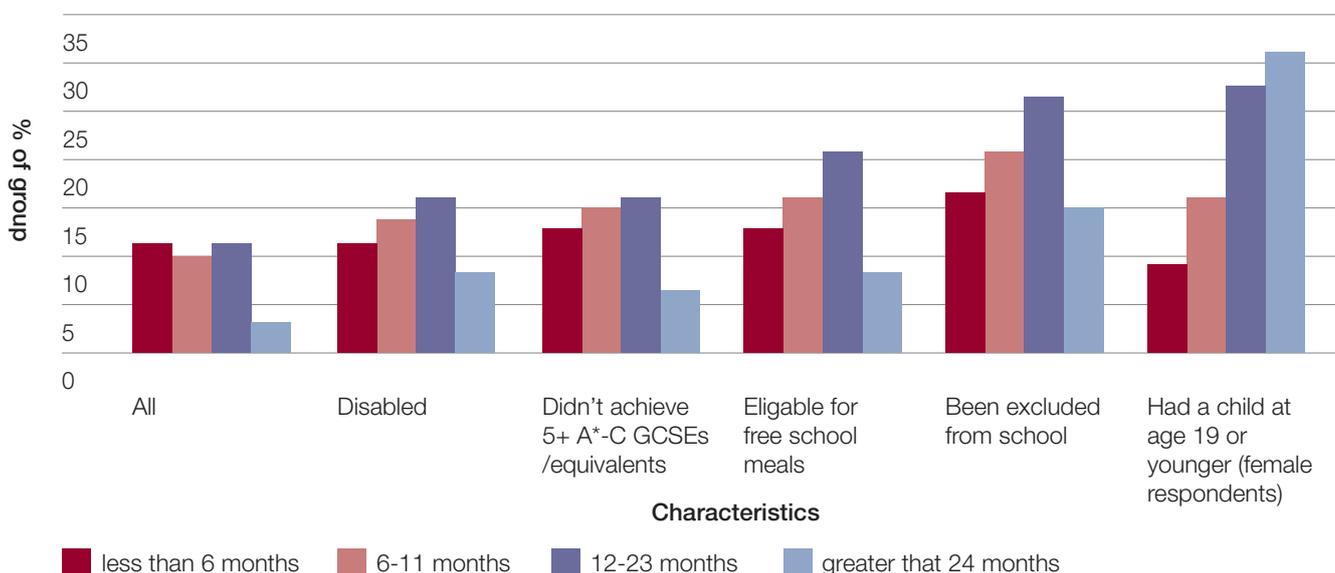


Figure 4. Longest spell spent NEET between the ages of 16 and 19, by characteristics, 2011

Source: (45)

Other factors

Young people with special educational needs, learning difficulties or a disability have an increased risk of becoming NEET,^{39, 40} as do those who were looked after children⁴⁰ – 34% of care leavers are NEET.⁴⁶

Other triggers of becoming NEET include being a teenage parent, a young carer or having left a custodial establishment, having health problems (particularly mental health) or being at risk of offending, and being classed ‘gifted and talented’ but were bored by school. In some areas, some young people from minority ethnic backgrounds are also more likely to become NEET.⁴⁰

The Audit Commission analysed data from approximately 24,000 young people in 2010 and calculated the following increased risk figures (not controlling for each other or other factors):

Factor	Increase in chance of being NEET for six months or more
Being NEET at least once before	7.9 times more likely
Pregnancy or parenthood	2.8 times more likely
Supervision by youth offending team	2.6 times more likely
Fewer than three months post-16 education	2.3 times more likely
Disclosed substance abuse	2.1 times more likely
Responsibilities as a carer	2.0 times more likely

Source: (5)

Summary on social inequalities

The common feature of the majority of these triggers or risk factors is that they are not equally experienced by all sections of the population. All the factors discussed here occur along a social gradient. Therefore, those in more disadvantaged socio-economic positions, face multiple risk factors for becoming NEET, and are far more likely to experience the negative impact on health as documented in the section above. This means that rising numbers of young people NEET is likely to lead to increasing health inequalities. These determinants that shape entry into employment, education and work also show that solutions to reduce NEET must be focussed on the conditions in which young people live, their experiences and opportunities, and the barriers that they face to participation.

3. Scale of the problem

Levels of young people NEET in England are significant (particularly in the 18–24 age group), and higher than in many other countries.⁴⁷ Increases in unemployment particularly affect young people,^{48, 49} and there is evidence that the rise in unemployment since the start of the recession in 2007 has been particularly concentrated on the young.²⁵ Cuts to funding, particularly in the areas of education and training (see the review on adult education in this series for more information), are likely to increase the proportion of those who are NEET as it becomes harder to access appropriate education and training opportunities, and cuts to public sector employment, benefits, and housing can have a disproportionate effect on lower ages.^{50, 51} While the most recent employment figures show a reduction in youth unemployment, figures are still significantly higher than before 2008. According to figures released in February 2014, the unemployment rate for 16–24 year-olds not in full-time education was 18.2%.⁵²

However, there is also noticeable variation between local authorities in England. This may be partly due to differing levels of deprivation or within-area inequalities, as well as local decisions and programmes. It is still informative, however, to be aware of these differences in order to target areas of particular concern, and to learn from areas that are doing well.

3.1: How many young people NEET are there, and what have the changes been over time?

England-wide figures from October to December 2013 indicated that 14.2% of those aged 16–24 were not in employment, education or training during this period. This is higher at older ages – 7.6% of 16–18 year-olds are NEET compared with 17.2% of those aged 19–24 years.^{1, 53} These figures show current prevalence – not incidence in the past, the levels for which are higher (see figure 4, for example).

Rising NEET levels at older ages reflect the fact that the majority of people stay in education post-16 (97.1% of all 16-year olds in England were in education or training in 2010), but many drop out at 17 and 18.³⁹ Post-18, NEET levels rise even further, due to an increase in age-18 school-leavers who do not go on to further education, but cannot find or are unable to participate in work. From October to December 2012 to the same period in 2013, there were slight reductions (less than 1%) in the number of those NEET at every age.¹ However, in the longer term, there has been a significant increase: for example, there has been a 25% increase in 16–24 year-olds NEET over the past 10 years,²⁹ with a particularly noticeable rise in the post-18 group following the start of the recession in 2008. A government target to reduce the proportion of 16 to 18 year-olds NEET to 7.6% by 2010⁴⁰ was missed – levels stood at 9.1% at the end of 2010 and rose to 9.9% by the end of 2011.⁵⁴

Figures 6a and 6b show the changes in both 16–18 and post-18 age groups over time. Every English region has seen an increase in the proportion of 16–24 year-olds NEET between 2002 and

2012, the largest increases being in the South West of England and the West Midlands, although the South West had a comparatively low starting point.⁵⁵

In the longer term (20 years-plus), the number of under-18s NEET have fallen, but there have been large increases in the post-18 group. This is at least in part due to increasing participation in education between the ages of 16 and 18. This can be seen in figure 5. Other research shows that the number of 16-18 year-olds in full-time education doubled from 32% in 1985 to 64% in 2008.⁵⁶

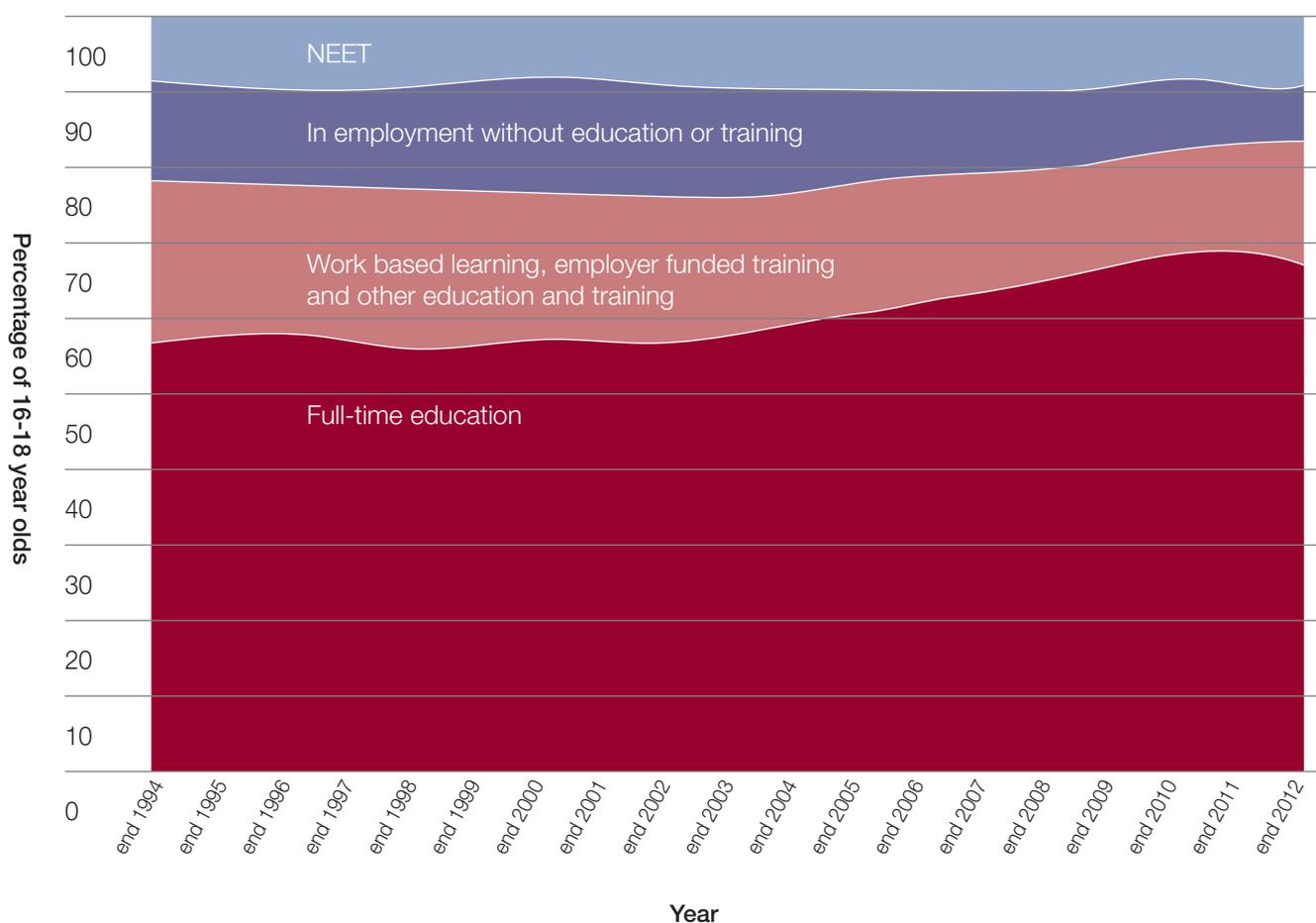


Figure 5. Participation rate of 16-18 year-olds in education and training, England, 1994-2012

Source: Data taken from (57)

3.2: Local variation

There is significant variation in the percentage of 16-18 year-olds NEET at a local level across England. Some regions (particularly the North East), have particularly high proportions of young people NEET.⁵³ Some of this variation correlates with deprivation, as shown in figure 3 above. Data on the 19-24 age group is not systematically collected at a local level, although there are plans for this to change by 2015 when all those under 18 should be in some sort of education or training. However, some data is available. A 2011 report showed that cities with very high age 16-24 NEET levels tended to be small and in the north, whereas cities with low rates of young people NEET tended to be prosperous and in the south.⁵⁰ They also found that, in general, the recession

had exacerbated the problem in cities which already had high NEET levels, thereby widening the gap between cities.⁵⁰

3.3: International comparisons

According to figures from the OECD, the UK as a whole does not do particularly well on the proportion of those NEET when compared with other countries, but levels in some European countries, Spain and Portugal for example, are significantly higher. Figures 6a and 6b show changes in percentages of men who have been NEET for the UK, Spain (which currently has one of the highest levels), and the Netherlands (which has one of the lowest). These figures demonstrate that there is clearly room for improvement. (For more information on the Netherlands, see its Youth Unemployment Action Plan.⁵⁸ The age groupings are slightly different to those used in UK statistics, but the trends are broadly comparable.



Figure 6a. Percentage of men aged 15-19 NEET, 1997–2012, selected OECD countries
 Source: Data taken from (47)

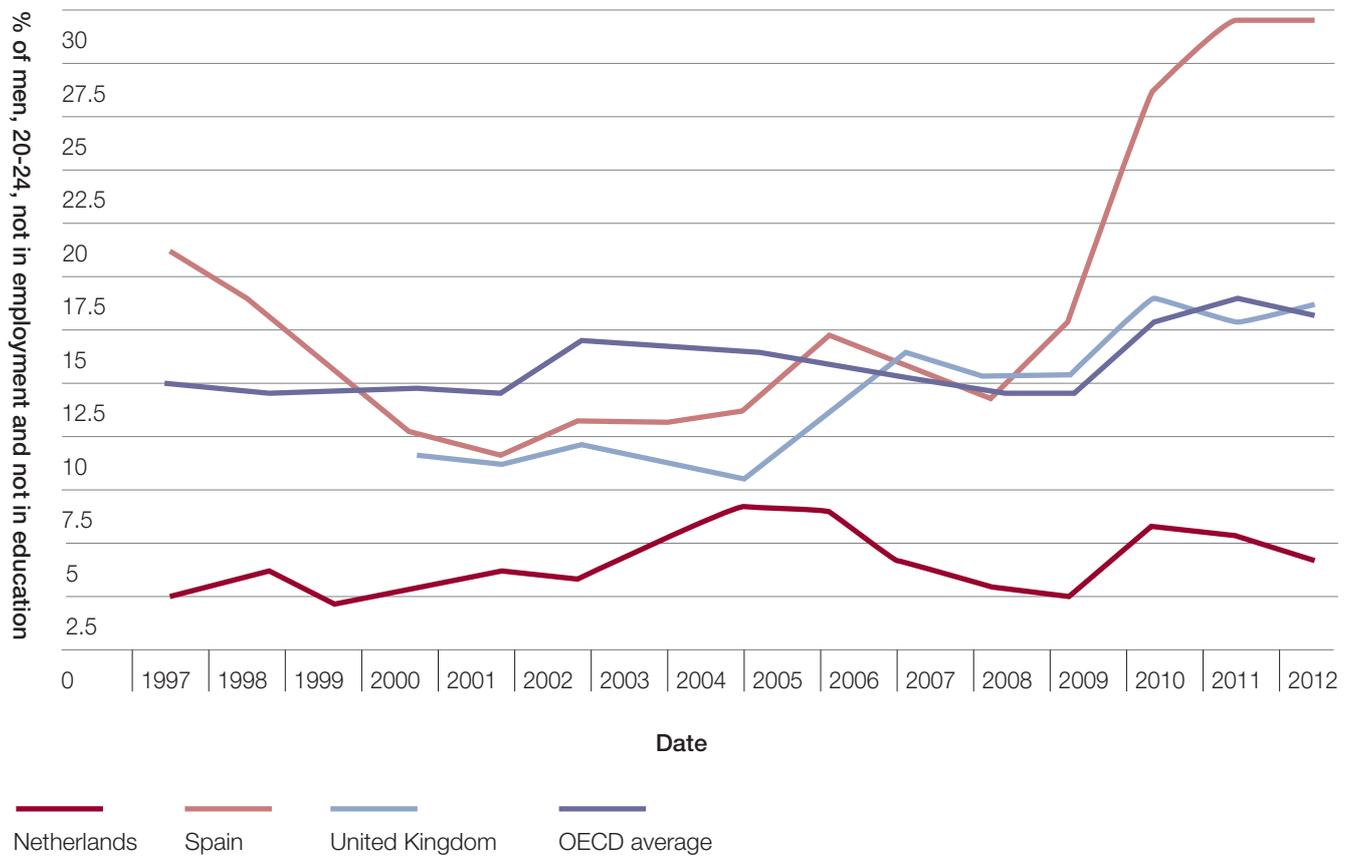


Figure 6b. Percentage of men aged 20-24 NEET, 1997–2012, selected OECD countries
 Source: Data taken from (47)

4. What works to reduce the proportion of young people NEET?

Key messages: what works to reduce the proportion of young people NEET

Act early: strategies implemented before the age of 16 that are designed to prevent young people from becoming NEET are likely to be the most effective way of reducing local NEET levels.

Tackle barriers and obstacles: when trying to help young people to move back into education, training or work, it is important to consider the wide range of barriers that they may face, and to help them overcome these.

Work across organisational and geographical boundaries: successful strategies have involved collaboration and cooperation of different agencies and sectors, as well as some cross-area coordination and information sharing.

Work with local employers: getting people into work is unlikely to be successful unless local employers are involved and have a role from early on in the process.

Track people and monitor progress: to reduce the number of people NEET, information is important: about who is NEET, but also about why they are, their history, and the agencies they are engaged with. Effective monitoring and evaluation of programmes is also essential.

Base interventions on features of other successful programmes: there are some common features of programmes delivered or commissioned by local authorities that have worked well. This includes the content of courses, ensuring that they are accredited, not like school, and are developed and implemented in partnership with young people. There is also evidence to support using financial incentives, flexible and personalised programmes, small group sizes, one-to-one support, and helping young people to manage transitions.

Preventing people from becoming NEET is likely to require acting on inequalities in social, economic and environmental factors at a societal level, and local authorities have a contribution to make to this wider goal.

There are also effective strategies that the local authority, including (but not limited to) public health teams, can take to reduce the number of people NEET at a local level. Particularly effective strategies are likely to be focussed before the age of 16 – thereby preventing people from becoming NEET in the first place. For this reason, this section starts by reviewing actions taking place before people become NEET ('acting early'). Following this, the evidence on 'what works' is structured in terms of some general principles for action.

Throughout this section, interventions are presented in boxes. As can be seen in these examples, at times measuring 'soft' outcomes is necessary (such as increases in confidence, accessing support, and building relationships), particularly for those from vulnerable or at-risk groups for whom immediate re-entry into education, training or work may be unrealistic.³⁹ This is particularly the case if evaluations are only short-term. In addition, benefits, particularly in economic terms, are more evident in the medium and long-term.⁵

Ofsted has written a number of reports that provide case studies on organisations working with employers in order to broaden their attitudes to working with people with learning difficulties or disabilities,⁵⁹ plus a collection of more general inspirational examples from local areas.⁴⁰ The European Social Fund in England website (maintained by the Department for Work and Pensions) has a collection of case studies of local projects supported by the fund.⁶⁰

4.1: The role of local authorities

Many local authorities currently face a challenging fiscal climate, including cuts to youth services and 16-19 education provision of approximately 20%.⁶¹ While national policy decisions have a significant impact on the opportunities open to young people, and the chances that they become NEET, much can be done at a local level. In addition, many of these actions can be integrated into current approaches with little extra cost; a general theme running through the evidence is to increase coordination and coherence across existing local authority functions and activities. There are also specific budgets available for action on reducing the proportion of young people NEET: for example, the EU youth guarantee provides €6bn across all 28 member states to ensure that all young people get an offer of education, training or employment after four months of unemployment.⁶²

Reducing the number of people NEET is likely to have many beneficial outcomes both nationally and locally. As well as potentially improving health outcomes and reducing inequalities, improvements are likely to be seen in other local authority areas such as reducing anti-social behaviour and youth offending, increasing attainment in education, improving health-related behaviours, and impacting positively on physical and mental health. This makes reducing the number of people who are NEET a shared agenda, with the potential for 'win-wins'. Two further reasons for local authorities to act are presented here:

Reducing the number of people NEET is likely to save money

Time spent NEET has negative effects on the economy, through lost output and tax contributions, and increased welfare and healthcare payments.⁵⁰ There have been a range of economic calculations of the cost of spending time NEET, such as:

- each 16-18 year-old who is NEET will have an estimated cost to society of £56,000 over their lifetime.³ This is based on the costs of benefits, lost tax and national insurance contributions, and some small costs in the health and criminal justice systems. When including 'resource costs' – losses to the economy and to individuals and their families resulting from being NEET and later from under- and unemployment – this figure rises to £104,000
- the aggregate lifetime public finance costs of the cohort of 16-18 year-olds NEET at the end of 2008 have been estimated to range from £12bn to £32bn.³ The larger figure, as with the 'individual' costs listed above, includes resource costs

- in a 2010 report, the weekly cost of 20-24 year-olds NEET was estimated to cost £22m in Jobseeker's Allowance, and £26m-£133m in lost productivity. (The lower figure is the estimate if the productivity of unemployed young people were equal in value to JSA. The upper value presumes that productivity would be equal in value to the average weekly pay of employed young people.)⁴
- as an example of likely return on investment, £4,000-worth of support to a teenage mother which enables her to move into work can be repaid twenty times over through increased tax contributions across her lifetime, and reduce public service costs by approximately £200,000⁵

Responsibilities and accountabilities

The following summary of the duties attributable to the local authority in this area is extracted from the 2013 Statutory Guidance.⁶³ It states that local authorities have a duty to:

- secure sufficient suitable education and training provision for all young people aged 16-19, and for those aged 20-24 who have a learning difficulty assessment
- make support available to young people aged 13-19, and to those aged 20-24 with a learning difficulty assessment, that will encourage, enable or assist them to participate in education or training

The guidance also states that “re-engagement programmes should be used to support young people who are not in education, employment or training (NEET) back into learning.”

Since the National Careers Service has replaced locally-based Connexions services, local authorities no longer have responsibility for delivering careers guidance,⁶⁴ although they will be expected to work with the National Careers Service, and some areas have chosen to maintain their local Connexions service in addition¹. Schools are now responsible for delivering careers guidance, and local authorities can work with them to ensure that this is effective.

The 2004 Children Act also placed a duty on local authorities, health services, the police and others to cooperate to improve the wellbeing of local children and young people in relation to, among other things, their physical and mental health and emotional wellbeing, education, training, the contribution made by them to society, and their social and economic wellbeing.⁶⁵ Reducing the proportion of those NEET within local authorities can also help to improve results on the Public Health Outcomes Framework, which includes a measure of 16-18 year-olds NEET.⁶⁶

Raising the participation age

In the 2008 Education and Skills Act,¹⁰ the government set out its intention to raise the participation age (RPA). Since 2013, all those up to the age of 17 have been required to take part in some kind of ‘appropriate’ education and training. From 2015, this extends to age 18. There is some evidence that RPA lacks resources and enforcement mechanisms, and that not all local authorities are sufficiently prepared.³⁹ In order to meet the from-2015 requirement and other challenges, local authorities will need to have input into three different types of provision:

1. Mainstream educational provision for those aged 16-18

To fulfil their obligations, local authorities must ensure all young people between the ages of 16 and 18 have access to some education or training. It is the responsibility of the local authority to define what constitutes ‘appropriate’ education and training, and how RPA will be implemented.

2. Specialised, targeted programmes for those aged 16–18 for those who are disengaged

¹ Arrangements differ in some of the devolved nations: for example, Wales never had a Connexions service.

Evaluations of previous targeted provision such as the activity agreements (see below) suggests that even once the participation age has been raised, there will still be a need for targeted, individualised programmes for those who are most in need or are particularly disengaged from education or training.³⁹

3. Education and training provision for those who are NEET aged 19-24

The majority of those who are NEET are over the age of 18, and this is also the group in which numbers have been rising recently. It should therefore still be a priority for local authorities to provide appropriate services and programmes for this group.

In order for the increased participation age to be of benefit to young people, it is necessary to put into place a range of supportive processes and mechanisms. An intervention carried out in Ontario (see box) demonstrates one way of achieving this.

Intervention: schools in Ontario, Canada ⁽³⁹⁾

In 2005 Ontario raised the legal school leaving age to 18, accompanying this with a range of incentives and strategies. These included:

- a more diverse and vocational curriculum
- innovative and flexible educational opportunities to meet students' differing needs
- the Ontario youth apprenticeship programme, to aid the transition from school to work
- allocating tax credits to employers to support the apprenticeship programme
- court sanctions for 16 and 17-year olds who failed to comply (e.g. suspending driving licence)
- sanctions for parents whose children were truanting
- sanctions for employers who employed 16 and 17-year olds during school hours

Outcomes:

- 13% increase in diploma graduation rates between 2004 and 2010 (although other factors may have also influenced this)
- evaluation showed that the programme focussed on learner needs, promoted inter-agency working, encouraged flexibility in provision, expanded choice, and increased tracking and monitoring students
- majority of respondents felt the programme was improving the success and learning of students.

4.2: Act early

Many of the risk factors for becoming NEET (see section 2) can be tackled through an approach that acts early. For example, one study found that areas that have been successful in reducing the number of people NEET have all adopted a prevention approach, including taking action in primary school, and working in partnership to recognise and tackle NEET ‘triggers’ such as poor school attendance.⁴⁰

Local authorities can work towards equity for all children, including through early years interventions and support for families, which will help to improve the conditions in which children and young people live. This is the topic of dedicated reports,^{20, 34, 67} including one on early years services within local areas,⁶⁸ and will not be the main topic for this paper.

The local authority can also support institutions and organisations to act early to prevent people from becoming NEET by supporting children who are identified as at-risk.^{5, 69} The intervention ‘CHOICE’ shows how one local area is acting with primary school age children to prevent them from becoming NEET in future (see box).

Intervention: CHOICE, Wakefield⁷⁰

‘Children have options, imagination, challenge and experience’ – CHOICE – is a primary intervention programme to identify and support those at risk of becoming NEET (because of attendance and behaviours), working with primary schools and a community high school in Wakefield. The programme identifies children in Years 4, 5 and 6 who are at risk of becoming NEET, and then targets them with a programme of preventative activities.

Wakefield Council has also developed a NEET tracker which contains key data relating to each child, including their NEET risk level. The impact of the programme on each child’s NEET risk level is recorded, and tracker data forwarded to the high school in preparation for entry into Year 7 at age 11. Data from Wakefield’s Troubled Families Programme is also used to identify potential children suitable for the CHOICE programme.

The programme is delivered in partnership with Wakefield Council’s Troubled Families programme, Wakefield and District Housing (WDH), Wakefield college, West Yorkshire Police and West Yorkshire Fire Services, Wakefield Youth Offending Team, healthcare professionals, a community centre, parents and carers, and more.

A 30-week programme has been developed for the five primary schools involved. Children who have taken part in the programme then become ‘college cadets’ and continue to work with the local college. The Think Family Team (Wakefield’s Troubled Families Programme) ensure support is provided to the family and a holistic family common assessment framework (CAF) is put in place, ensuring parents receive appropriate interventions.

The NEET risk tracker is now being rolled out to all primary schools.

As well as hopefully reducing the number of young people NEET in the long-term, more immediate effects on results can be seen. For the 2013-14 cohort, all participating children’s attainment rose by at least two sub-levels, and their attendance and behaviour improved. In the Rookeries J&I School, one of the participating primary schools:⁷¹

- in maths 30% achieved expected progress and 60% achieved exceptional progress
- in English 50% achieved expected progress and 40% achieved exceptional progress
- attendance in Year 8 (second year of secondary school) is at 97%, compared with 89% in Year 6

The total approximate cost was £28,900, for one 30-week programme delivery and for planning.

The programme is now being extended to 12 primary schools from September 2014, Wakefield's Troubled Families Programme and Wakefield District Housing in partnership with the Pontefract Education Trust will fund the programme.

For slightly older children, the programme ThinkForward has had positive results by working with young people at risk of being NEET from the age of 14 for five years (see box).

Intervention: ThinkForward⁷²

ThinkForward is a programme created in 2010 by Impetus – The Private Equity Foundation (Impetus-PEF) and delivered by Tomorrow's People, a national employment charity. The programme aims to act early to ensure young people make a successful move from education into employment. The programme places coaches in schools, where they work with those who are most at risk from the age of 14, providing one-to-one coaching. Support is provided long-term for up to five years, and includes linking young people to existing services in the community and facilitating contact with local employers.

The programme is based on a pilot delivered in Tower Hamlets, East London, which placed coaches in five schools for two years, helping 320 young people and achieving an 88% reduction in those NEET at age 18.

Currently, ThinkForward operates in 14 schools in East London, working with 1,100 young people: 88% of these young people have improved their behaviour or attendance at school; 95% of participants continue into further education, employment or training at age 16.⁷³

The intervention is funded in part by a three-year Social Impact Bond, which is commissioned by the Department for Work and Pensions' Innovation Fund, backed by the Private Equity Foundation and Big Social Capital.

Local authorities, including public health teams and health and wellbeing boards, have a clear function in helping schools to identify which children may be at risk. This is also included in statutory guidance for local authorities.⁶³ Local authorities can also provide schools with extra resources in order to take preventative actions to engage and support these children.⁷⁴ The pupil premium may provide a source of funding for targeted prevention.

Local authorities also have a responsibility to support schools in implementing strategies that may prevent disengagement, low achievement or high drop-out rates, and enhance employment opportunities. While strategies will vary depending on the school, the students, and the local context, there are some principles that are universal. For example, students need general skills,⁷⁵ and some students will need to be supported to achieve in areas they are strong in rather than just

the traditional subjects.⁵ Where possible, students can be encouraged to develop skills that are in high demand such as STEM (science, technology, engineering and maths) skills – 59% of firms employing staff with STEM skills have difficulty recruiting.⁷⁶

The evidence review from this series on promoting resilience in schools provides further details of actions local authorities can take to encourage and support schools to build mental wellbeing among their student population. Alongside these actions, applied teaching and learning and good relationships between teachers and students are important,¹¹ as is working with families and local communities, and preventing bullying. It is also particularly important to develop strategies to prevent or minimise permanent exclusions.⁴⁰ Exclusion rates vary significantly between local authorities, and are three times more likely for those qualifying for free school meals.⁷⁷

Actions to prevent disengagement should be available to all, as this is not an issue for only the most disadvantaged or poor students – it is estimated that 20-33% of young people aged 14-16 are disengaged from education, meaning that they are more likely to truant, achieve lower academic results, and be hostile towards school. Of these, over a quarter become NEET after GCSEs.⁷⁸ Solutions to disengagement occur at both school and wider societal levels.⁷⁸

Acting early is more likely to be effective where local authorities and schools work with families, particularly parents. Further information on the importance of parenting programmes is provided in the early years evidence review.

4.3: Tackle barriers and obstacles

Even effective action taken early is unlikely to prevent all young people spending some time NEET. Local authorities have a responsibility to provide particular programmes for those who become NEET, particularly for those aged 16-18.

Those who are NEET long-term, when young (16 or 17), or who have limited or no qualifications or experience, are likely to face significant barriers to moving into employment, education or training. Acting early and working with employers can help to overcome some barriers. However, it is also necessary for the local authority to improve the living conditions of young people who are NEET. An Ofsted investigation into geographical areas that had been successful in reducing the number of young people NEET found that in those areas, providers recognised and helped to tackle obstacles to participation such as housing needs or substance misuse, and then worked with other agencies, sometimes in one-stop shops, where young people were able to receive help from mentors and specialist services in order to tackle obstacles.⁴⁰

In order to support young people, local authorities can provide advice and help in accessing provision for housing, debt, physical and mental health problems and relationship concerns.²⁰ Housing and income are areas of particular concern, and should be considered in relation to proposals to potentially restrict access to housing benefit and Jobseeker's Allowance for under-25 year-olds in future. For those who have inadequate housing, are homeless, or are living in severe deprivation or poverty, it is often much harder to find the physical and economic resources required to access the labour market or to re-engage with education.

As with the 'act early' domain, actions in this area are likely to be particularly effective when they involve working not only with individuals, but also with their families and considering what could

have an effect on the wider community.⁷⁹ CatZero is a programme that aims to tackle a wide range of issues that prevent young people from engaging with education or work (see box).

Intervention: CatZero⁸⁰

CatZero, based in Hull, provides a 12-week programme designed to move young people into 'earning or learning' and improve their health and wellbeing. It has been running for three years, with a yearly target to recruit 150 people and move 100 of them off the NEET register.

The programme included visits and placements with local employers, mentors from the public and private sector (who continue to support the young people for a year after the programme ends), in health awareness, skills training, and accreditation.

The programme states that it is concerned with the holistic needs of young people and their families, and the underlying challenges that lead to people becoming NEET.

The programme is now changing focus to work with 18-24-year olds who are long-term unemployed, with a more extensive programme partly funded by Jobcentre Plus.

Over three years of implementation, 416 young people participated in the programme, with a 70% success rate – 288 of them went into further education, employment or training. The programme costs £3,000 per young person.

A further barrier to preventing people becoming NEET is the cost of post-compulsory education. According to a large-scale survey, 34% of those who did not enrol in post-secondary education were prevented from doing so because they could not afford the programme. Of those who left without completing post-secondary education, 24% reported that this was due to cost.⁸¹

The cancellation of the Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA) may have increased financial barriers to staying in education. EMA was a payment available to many 16-19 year-olds who remained in education. Receiving the payment, and the amount, depended on household income and required that the student meet attendance, progress and behaviour requirements. In 2006-07, 30% of 16-18 year-olds enrolled in education received at least one EMA payment.⁸² The programme was positively evaluated, and was shown to have increased the participation rate⁸³ and attainment⁸⁴ of participants. Evaluations also showed that those who had achieved low and middle grades at GCSE benefitted most.⁸³ The decision to discontinue EMA was made by central government, but local areas can continue to provide help by providing guidance, information, and in some cases, financial support to students struggling with financing further education. For example, in London, Tower Hamlets has set up the Mayor's Education Award, to replace the EMA support.⁸⁵ Haringey Council has taken a range of actions to reduce its NEET population, including making people aware of alternatives to EMA (see box).

Intervention: Strategy for Young People, Haringey⁸⁶

London Borough of Haringey's Strategy for Young People is based on the aspiration that they "want every child and young person to be happy, healthy, safe and confident about the future". It includes a framework for all service providers working with young people (mostly age 13-19 and up to 25 with a learning need or disability), which includes:

- working in partnership with the third sector and developing a commissioning framework
- increasing volunteering, both with and of young people
- increasing knowledge of bursaries/support to replace EMA
- 'new Approach to Worklessness' programme
- strategy for raising the participation age
- systems for police to engage positively with young people
- balance of targeted one-to-one support and universal group work to support those at risk
- targeted interventions according to need
- promoting positive participation of young people in decision making

There has been no evaluation of the strategy as such. However, by 2010-11, the percentage of young people NEET in Haringey had almost halved to 6.6% from 12.5% in 2006-07, showing a much greater improvement than other local authorities. Furthermore, 2012 figures showed that the 16-18 year-old NEET figure in Haringey was 3.7%. This was lower than the London average of 5.1%,³⁵ despite the fact that Haringey is the fourth most deprived borough in London.⁸⁷

The local authority can also embed awareness and focus on reducing the number of people NEET in its wider activity. For example, as an employer, the local authority can establish apprenticeships or job opportunities for young people NEET, and add requirements on other bodies to do so in tendering and contractual processes.⁵ Local authorities spend approximately £42bn a year on external contracts.⁸⁸ This commissioning function can be used to create local markets for NEET services,⁷⁴ including by using the Social Value Act to ensure that employment opportunities focus on those who are NEET,²⁹ and through the use of section 106 agreements, social clauses or community benefit clauses, and local labour clauses in major developments and infrastructure projects. The intervention in the next box details Surrey County Council's programme to engage young people in education, employment or training, in part through their own role as employers and commissioners.

Intervention: Surrey County Council's 14-19 plan

Surrey County Council has put in place a plan for creating opportunities for all young people, called the Surrey 14-19 plan.⁸⁹ This aims to widen participation, improve achievement and ensure that all young people have equal opportunities to progress to learning or employment regardless of ability, socio-economic background, ethnicity, gender, disability or learning difficulty.

Surrey is taking a life-course approach, working simultaneously on health and wellbeing of young people as well as attainment and participation. The council's employability plan also states its intention to use commissioning opportunities to reduce NEET levels, and ensure that as a purchaser and employer, the council increases apprenticeship opportunities. The council is ensuring that all contracts for the provision of services are let with a condition that the contractor employs an agreed number of apprentices aged 16 to 24 years.

The plan also includes a set of actions designed to overcome barriers to participation, including The council's plan to work closely with young people, increase financial assistance, work preventatively to reduce the likelihood of people becoming NEET, and develop effective tracking of participation.

Action takes place across a county-wide partnership between schools, colleges, employers, learning providers, the voluntary sector and higher education.

Achievements include (6):

- a 59% reduction in young people who are NEET from 2009 to 2014. Surrey now has the joint lowest number in England, whereas in 2013 they were joint twenty-fifth (out of 152 local authorities)
- a 90% reduction in the number of first-time entrants of young people to the criminal justice system from 2009 to 2013, resulting in Surrey having the lowest rate in England
- a saving of £7m from the reduction in numbers of young people NEET from 2011-12 to 2012-13 alone
- a 90% figure of successful progression to education, training or employment among those who were at risk of being NEET and who received support from the Year 11/12 Transition Commission

Both creating, and encouraging businesses to create, apprenticeships is an important way for local authorities to increase opportunities and reduce barriers. In Surrey, contracts often include the condition that apprenticeships must be offered (see box). Similarly, in the North East, Gateshead Council has taken a leadership and commissioning role to increase apprenticeship provision. As a result, the number of residents participating in apprenticeships increased by 28% from 2008-09 to 2009-10 (compared with an 18% increase regionally). The programme's aim was to increase the number of apprenticeships by 1,360 by March 2013.⁹⁰

Finally, it is important that strategies are aligned across any local authority, ensuring economic development and regeneration policy is designed to be of benefit to local employment, and particularly for those who are NEET,⁵ and that other services (such as transport) do not create extra barriers to young people participating in education, training, or work.⁶³

4.4: Work across organisational and geographical boundaries

Statutory guidance states that local authorities should provide strategic leadership on people who are NEET in their areas, including through working with partners and neighbouring areas.⁶³ In addition, the evidence shows that working with partners can help to reduce the number of those NEET.

As well as working with schools (section 4.2) and employers (section 4.5), many different sectors and organisations will likely need to be involved in order to reduce the number of young people NEET. Successful interventions have worked with careers services, sexual health clinics, children's centres (to reach young parents), and youth courts.^{5, 79} These partnerships and coordination of services can also help to ensure that young people are able to transition easily and smoothly between school, other education providers, and the workplace.⁵⁰

There is a transition of responsibility at age 18 from local authorities, who have the majority of responsibility for 16 to 18-year olds NEET, to Jobcentre Plus, which is responsible for those over 18. However, local authorities still have an important role with the older cohort and can work with local Jobcentres⁴⁰ to ensure that information is shared, provision is streamlined, and strategies are coherent and aligned. Statutory guidance states that, "local authorities should continue to maintain close links with Jobcentre Plus to ensure that young people who are NEET and receiving benefits get support that is appropriate to their needs. This responsibility is best met by the development of local partnership agreements, which set out the ways in which local authorities and Jobcentre Plus will work together."⁶³

Ofsted found that local authorities that had reduced the proportion of people NEET had worked well with many partners, including the voluntary and community sector, and had all shown a readiness to align and pool resources and funding, thereby ensuring that successful strategies were continued and in some cases extended. Effective partnerships also ensured the long-term sustainability of their programmes by establishing rigorous commissioning and monitoring procedures, and evaluating providers against clear targets.⁴⁰

Working across organisational boundaries can also help to streamline information: for example, the UK now has more than 20,000 available qualifications, triple the number in 2008. These are offered by almost 150 different organisations and vary in terms of content, progression, skills and fees.⁸¹ Young people often need help to understand and navigate this array of options. Local authorities can make good use of the National Careers Service (NCS), an online repository of information on jobs and related topics.⁸¹ Young people appear to be less aware than adults of this service – under-18s are less than half as likely to use it.⁸¹ There has also been criticism of the new careers guidance in schools: Ofsted has reported that three quarters of schools visited were not providing good enough impartial careers advice and were not sufficiently promoting the National Careers Service.⁹¹

Working across geographical boundaries – creating effective links across local authority areas – also has a number of benefits. Firstly, it can facilitate the transfer of information about young people who move, or those who live in one local authority area but access employment or education opportunities in another. Secondly, it can enable those working in one area to direct those who are NEET to services (especially specialist services) that are not available locally, but may be available in neighbouring areas.⁹ Finally, it can enable local authorities to work together to adopt a coherent and cooperative approach to regional issues such as transport or employment, linking provision and commissioning with an awareness of neighbouring or regional issues.

4.5: Work with local employers

Many employers are hesitant to employ young people who have limited experience, particularly in a context of high unemployment. However, by working with employers, local authorities can help to overcome this hesitancy.⁵ Research shows that the vast majority of those who are NEET would like to move into employment.^{11, 64} However, this does not imply that they should, or always can, take any job at any cost. It is necessary not only to consider what experiences young people have in education, but also what opportunities and contractual obligations they are exposed to in the labour market.⁹² There are also those who do not want to re-engage because they have found alternative ways of living and earning money – through crime, for example.

Communication between employers, the local authority and schools is particularly important. Local employers should be encouraged by public health teams to work with local schools and the local authority to design education and training that meets their needs, and thereby increases the chances of employment on completion. For example, employers have cited a lack of communication and IT literacy skills as barriers to increasing internships.⁵ Having employers increase their contact with young people even before age 16, giving information on employment and offering work placements or work experience, would be beneficial.⁷⁴ Research has shown that fewer than half of UK students complete a work placement, compared with 87% of those in France.⁸¹ For those over 16, involvement in part-time work, training at workplaces or apprenticeships can all help to increase employability and reduce the risk of becoming NEET.^{9, 40} Those combining full-time education and part-time work at age 16-17 have a lower probability of becoming NEET in the following five years, compared with those who are in full-time education without any sort of work.²³ Apprenticeships and placements should involve undertaking genuine workplace activities and developing general skills.⁷⁵ For example, the WorkingRite programme involves three- or six-month placements in workplaces for school leavers (see box).

Intervention: WorkingRite⁹³

WorkingRite is a charity that works in East Sussex, Herefordshire and Worcestershire. Its programmes are funded in part by local authorities, alongside the Education Funding Agency, colleges and Impetus.

In order to help reduce NEET levels, WorkingRite works with local small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) in order to arrange placements for school leavers who are struggling to find work due to a lack of skills, confidence, qualifications or stability. These placements last for three or six months and include one day a week's tutoring in Maths and English, and mentoring from an older mentor in the workplace. The rest of the time is spent in practical work environments. Employers pay participants a small weekly allowance of at least £50.

In the most recent cohort of about 400 trainees, 56% of those who started a placement finished it; of those who did, 88% moved on to full-time jobs, apprenticeships or further education. Participants have also reported positive emotional outcomes, including increased confidence levels and raised aspirations.

Training, placements and apprenticeships are also necessary for those who are already NEET. Local authorities can work with employers to improve pathways from unemployment back into work, including by offering special resources such as subsidised wages or tax rebates for employers who offer opportunities to those who are NEET.³⁴ Local programmes that connect young unemployed people with local employers have also been shown to be successful. One example is Youthsmart (see box).

Intervention: Youthsmart⁹⁴

The Youthsmart Employer Survey (YES) in southern England provides a programme to help young people move from being NEET to SWEET (sustainably working and employed, or back in education and training), and to respond to employer frustration at having vacancies they cannot fill.⁹⁵ The programme involves telephone interviews between young unemployed people and employers. This is designed to up-skill those who are NEET while combating low self-esteem and a lack of self-confidence. It also provides genuine work experience, induction, training and certification in a positive and fun work-place environment. The programme can also include meeting with employers, interviews, coaching and placements.

All of the participants are paid for their work and receive continued support for a period of nine months after a survey is delivered, working on a 'route map' which may involve a return to education or training, and a 'market map' of local employers interested in 'people like me'. The 'fresh eyes' week one induction period gives people the opportunity to build their employability toolkit before going to market. Tailored to the individual, typically this includes an employability profile, accreditation, references, a CV and Linked-in profile if relevant.

Originally piloted in 2012 with 48 employers, 18 young people and the support of Jobcentre Plus in Hampshire, by 2014 the organisers had a database of 191 people (16 to 24-year olds) and 120 employers, including multinational and national employers such as Virgin, O2, the Cooperative Group, Levis, John Lewis, The Body Shop, Battersea Cats and Dogs Home, the National Trust and successful SMEs like Priestmangoode and the Interiors Group. Since 2011, Youthsmart has worked directly with 60 young people, helping them move off the NEET register. In 2014 the programme is targeted to help 480 young people looking and planning for work.

The programme costs £900 per young person and the organisers are talking to cluster-funding groups, to upscale their targets.

Finally, local authorities can be aware of and direct young people to programmes run by businesses, such as Ready for Work, which consists of a network of over 150 businesses, supported by Business in the Community.

Intervention: Ready for Work⁷

Business in the Community (BITC) supports a network of over 150 businesses, which have worked with over 7,500 of the most disadvantaged people. The businesses provide training, work placements and volunteers to act as job coaches and buddies.

BITC registers and selects participants, gives pre-placement training, arranges two-week work placements, and post-placement support through job coaching sessions.

Ready for Work does not only tackle those who are NEET, but due to its focus on those who have been in the criminal justice system, leaving care, or been homeless, many of their clients are also NEET.

Results include:

- over 2,900 people have gained work
- currently over 40% of programme participants gain work following their placement
- 75% of those that move into a job sustain work for over three months

Of Ready for Work volunteers (employees in participating businesses):

- 88% reported increased relationship building skills
- 74% reported increased job satisfaction
- 88% reported increased awareness of diversity

The social return on investment of Ready for Work is £3.12 for every £1 invested, and the programme generates a social impact of at least £3.2m for each year's investment. This is made up from reduced re-offending, reduced benefits claims and increased tax payments, among other savings.

4.6: Track people and monitor progress

There are two important types of information required by local authorities. Firstly, to reduce the proportion of people NEET, it is important to know who is NEET, for how long, what agencies they are engaged with, what training or other provision they have accessed, and any barriers they have to going back to education or getting a job.^{69, 79} The maintenance of client management systems is therefore also required in order to provide this information. Secondly, local authorities also need to know who is at risk of becoming NEET, in order to 'act early' (section 4.2). Not only is this data-gathering sensible, but it is also statutory: guidance issued by government requires local authorities to "collect information to identify young people who are not participating, or who are at risk of not doing so, to target their resources on those who need them most."⁽⁶³⁾

Data can then be used to plan, commission or evaluate services.^{5, 69} Local authorities can also use data to target resources to areas of greatest need.⁶⁹ Data should be gathered collaboratively, with the involvement of many services and sectors, and then shared in order to ensure a coherent and collaborative approach.

Secondly, programmes that are delivered or commissioned by the local authority in order to reduce NEET levels should be carefully monitored and evaluated. This is essential for establishing what works, why, how long effects take to appear, and how cost-effective programmes are. Where approaches taken have not worked, this information can also be used to improve future efforts, both locally and nationally, when shared with other areas.

In Wales, tracking young people was extended to the KIT (Keeping in Touch) strategy,⁸ which enabled local authorities and other providers to ensure that someone was available to respond when young people were ready and receptive to new direction. In Swansea and Wrexham, this has contributed to consistent reductions in the proportion of young people NEET. This intervention has also benefited from good evaluation and monitoring (see box).

Intervention: Swansea and Wrexham⁸

Swansea Council has developed an approach of early identification of those at risk of becoming NEET before they leave school and has worked in partnership with Careers Wales West and used a traffic-light system to engage and monitor Year 11 pupils. Such an approach looks at need and risk factors and helps inform the type of intervention required for each young person, who is then provided with transitional support between leaving school and entering higher education, training or work. Wrexham has also reduced NEET levels.

An evaluation conducted by Arad Research in 2011 found a set of 'common characteristics for success' in Wrexham and Swansea:

- reducing NEET levels was a priority at a strategic level, targets were set, and resources shifted to enable more support staff to work intensively with at-risk young people, starting from Year 11
- identifying at-risk young people early was key, based on data-gathering and analysis of risk, and a practitioner-led approach whereby Careers Wales advisers and school staff work together to identify those at risk of being NEET
- clear responsibility for different cohorts has been assigned to different organisations, who then share information
- projects have influenced core service provision rather than temporary new provision
- the programmes also include increasing support over the summer months, flexible start dates, work placements (including within the local authority), personal support and guidance, and teaching employability skills

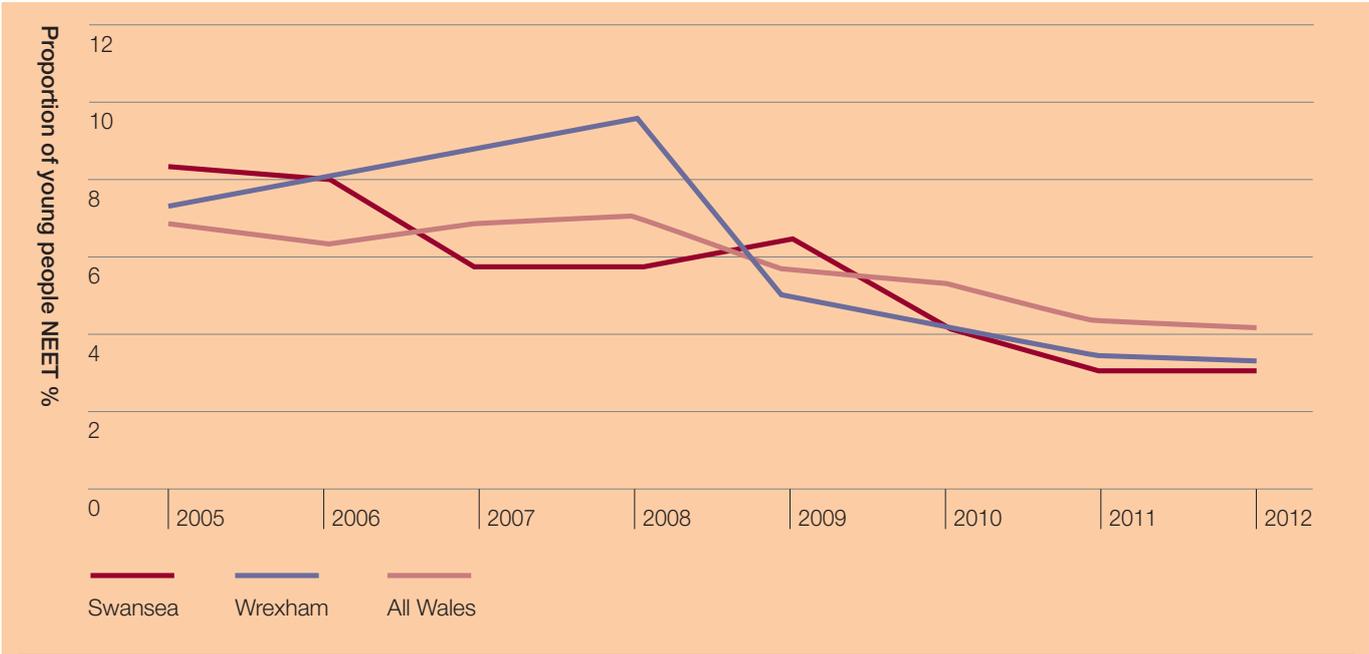


Figure 7. NEET levels in Wales, Swansea and Wrexham, 2005-2012

There have also been corresponding reductions in the number of youth offenders and offences. While there is no proof of causation, the correlation is suggestive, at least.



Figure 8. Youth Offending in Swansea, Wales, 2007-08 to 2012-13

Cost analysis calculated the public finance costs associated with the actual number of NEET levels among Year 11 leavers in 2010, compared with a scenario whereby the NEET levels had followed the Wales average from 2004-2010. This found that the actual levels cost £1.1m less in Wrexham and £8.6m less in Swansea than in the Wales average scenario.

4.7: Base interventions on features of other successful programmes

The information provided here has been taken from literature on ‘what works’ and examples of local authority implemented programmes that have been evaluated to be successful.

Appropriate course content

It is important that courses offered to those who are NEET are designed so that they attract and retain those who are disengaged, while simultaneously providing skills that will help them to move on to further education or gain employment. These two goals are compatible, as young people have reported particularly appreciating learning skills for employment.⁴⁰ Literacy and numeracy are important⁴⁰ – for example, the Wolf Review of Vocational Training states that “good levels of English and Mathematics continue to be the most generally useful and valuable vocational skills on offer”, particularly as they are often a pre-condition for entry to good quality courses.⁷⁵ However, in some areas, there are shortages of literacy and numeracy skills development programmes, and there is a variation in terms of cost.⁹

Other features of successful provision included a focus on building communication skills, confidence and interpersonal relationships, and supporting young people to access and build social support;⁹⁶ and providing behaviour management courses.⁴⁰

Accreditation

Provision which leads to accreditation is likely to be particularly successful in reducing NEET levels, and has been shown to be attractive to young people, build their confidence and self-belief and increase their employability.^{9, 40} Acquiring NVQ2 has been shown to increase the likelihood of participating in further accredited learning.⁹⁷ Where accreditation is not possible or suitable, courses should still endeavour to recognise and reward achievement.⁹⁶

Not like school

For those who have had negative experiences of education, re-engagement is more likely where the provision offered is not like their school experience.⁹⁶ This can be achieved by delivering the provision in informal settings such as social centres and youth clubs,⁴⁰ and ensuring that staff relate to young people in a non-hierarchical way, treating them as equals and partners.⁹⁶

Work with young people

Successful local programmes have tended to involve young people NEET in designing and delivering provision.^{40, 79, 96} Some programmes have also maintained collaboration with young people who have completed the course, encouraging them to become advocates, mentors or facilitators for those just starting the programme.⁴⁰

Financial incentives or support

Research has consistently found that offering young people financial incentives increases engagement rates and can help people overcome barriers to participation.^{9, 39, 40, 69} It is also the case that many young people require some kind of financial support to be able to take part in a course.^{11, 69} Discretionary funds made available to staff, that they have control over (for example, to give to participants to buy clothes for interviews or tools for a course) have also been shown to be important.^{9, 40} The end of the Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA) scheme (section 4.3) increases the need for effective financial support. The Activity Agreement and Entry to Learning pilots both included financial incentives for participants (see box).

Interventions: Activity Agreement and Entry to Learning pilots

Activity Agreement pilots⁹

This was a national programme for 16 and 17 year-olds with extra needs to help them re-engage in education or training. It ran from 2006 to 2011 and targeted those who were NEET long term, Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) claimants and vulnerable groups and was piloted in 50 'high NEET' local authority areas. The pilots involved an 'activity agreement' – a personally negotiated contract between a young person and a personal adviser. Activity focussed on personal development (eg anger management, dealing with money), skill development, and work-related activities. Financial incentives were offered as a reward for young people fulfilling their agreements (£10-£30 per week). The programme was based on the Australian Youth Allowance,⁹⁸ which provided income support for young people dealing with a range of problems, including housing circumstances, family issues and drug addiction.

Outcomes:

- three months after the programme, 49% of young people were in education or employment, compared with 36% in the control group
- between 5% and 10% of participants demonstrated more positive attitudes towards education, employment and the future
- effects lasted for two years
- two years on, data also showed participants were at a higher occupational level, and more likely to have achieved a qualification than the control group (73% compared with 62%)

The European Union reported that the activity agreement pilots were one of the more effective programmes in the UK, and were successful in offering innovative and flexible approaches for learning, which was particularly important for those who lacked the confidence to re-engage in traditional learning environments straight away.³⁹

25,000 young people took part, at a cost of £2,122 per participant. However, analysis suggested that 72% of participants who moved into education or training would have done so even without the programme.

Entry to Learning pilots (9)

The Entry to Learning pilots, nationally run between 2008 and 2011, and delivered in four local authorities, aimed at working with the voluntary and community sector to create better links between re-engagement activities and formal education and training. The programme also involved a financial allowance, and included mentoring and support from an adviser, personal development, and work-related learning.

There was a less robust evaluation than for the Activity Agreement pilots. However, the available evidence based on interviews with participants showed that:

- 41% were still participating
- 61% had left the programme for a positive destination, half gone into education and two out of five to training. The rest went into employment with training
- ff those who left for a positive destination, 72% were still in a positive destination 13 weeks later.

- reporting of increases in personal and social development, including employability skills
- 1,500 people took part, at a cost of £1,757 per person.

Flexibility and personalisation

For many young people, re-engagement is far more likely where programmes are flexible^{40, 69} and can be modified according to the individual needs of those taking part.^{5, 39, 40, 69} In one area, personal advisers had worked together to set up courses to meet a need they had encountered that was not covered by any of the existing provision.⁴⁰

Group size and one-to-one support

Evidence shows that where possible, small group sizes are better than large, leading to more motivation and engagement in those taking part.⁴⁰ It is also essential that those who are NEET long-term, or those facing many barriers, have regular one-to-one contact with a staff member, acting as a mentor or adviser.^{40, 96} Evaluation of the Activity Agreements and Entry to Learning pilot programmes in the UK (see box above) found that both intensiveness of support and bespoke tailored provision helped to sustain participation. This often worked best where the adviser specialised in a vulnerable group, for example, pregnant teenagers or young carers. This enabled better links to external services such as youth offending services, leaving care teams, housing departments, teenage pregnancy support services, Sure Start centres, youth services and social services.⁹

Managing transitions

Some young people are particularly vulnerable to becoming NEET at transition points – at the end of education provision at 16, at the end of a training programme or when leaving a particular job. For this reason, local authorities should focus on maintaining support and contact with individuals who are at a high risk of becoming NEET even while they are in school or employment, providing them with relevant information and guidance.¹¹ and extending this support beyond the age of 18, working with Jobcentre Plus and local employers.⁴⁰ Local authorities should also design or commission programmes that remove barriers to people engaging and help them to make transitions into education, work or further training once they have reached the end of a course.⁵ Tester or taster programmes can also help to ease transitions between different programmes (for example, between education and an apprenticeship).⁷⁹

There is significant evidence to show that providing flexible start dates to provision, including full-time further education, can help to engage people without a prolonged wait (usually until the start of the academic year in September).^{40, 79} Evaluation of a programme in West Yorkshire that offered flexible start dates across a range of education provision showed some positive outcomes, including increases in confidence, career focus and self-esteem.⁷⁹

Schools also have a role in managing transitions; some areas have piloted approaches whereby primary schools provide secondary schools with information on pupils who may be at risk of disengagement, ensuring that information and strategies can be continued across this transition point.⁵ Schools can also help to manage the transition out of school, particularly by working with other organisations and sectors such as local employers.⁵

Staff training and workload

In order for provision to be successful, it is necessary that staff are specifically trained and allowed to develop skills and capacity.^{39, 79} A low caseload is also necessary for advisers on specialised programmes for those who are NEET and hard to reach.³⁹ Training school staff, as in the Engage in Education intervention (see box), can help to ensure that successful strategies are continued beyond the time span of a particular programme.

Intervention: Engage in Education⁹⁹

Engage in Education was a two-year pilot project funded by the Department for Education and delivered by Catch22 and partners. It ran from 2011 to 2013, and was delivered in secondary schools in Croydon, Bristol, Harlow, Newcastle and Greater Manchester, reaching approximately 1,700 individuals. The programme aimed to reduce exclusions, improve attendance and attainment, and support those at risk of becoming NEET in moving into education, employment and training.

Engage in Education offered schools support with one-to-one support, small group and family work, and a focus on communication difficulties and the social and emotional aspects of learning (SEAL). It also included training for school staff so that re-engagement strategies were replicated in day-to-day school provision.

An evaluation of the project¹⁰⁰ found that, among participants:

- 58% increased their attendance
- 61% increased their attainment
- in the programme focussed on reducing the number of people NEET (Greater Manchester), 91% of participants were in education, employment or training after the programme
- fixed-term exclusions fell from 115 to 91
- approximately 50% reported an increase in their happiness with life and their home environment
- approximately 50% reported an increase in confidence in their own future
- approximately 50% reported giving more thought to their education
- approximately 65% felt they had improved their communication skills

The University of Cambridge is currently undertaking a further evaluation of the long-term impact of the programme on exclusions in London schools, which will include a randomised control trial.¹⁰¹

5. Areas for further research

Throughout this paper, we have highlighted some promising areas for action. These are based on evidence from research and local interventions. However, it is very important that local areas continue to conduct research into what is working or not working in their local context, and contribute this to the evidence base. Further research on costs and benefits would be useful, particularly in terms of which sectors or organisations bear the costs, and who benefits. Information on long-term outcomes across a range of areas would also be beneficial.

In addition, for many interventions there is not sufficient evidence on the extent to which the programme helped those who are hardest to reach. It is possible that some interventions engage those who would have found education or training anyway, as they did not face major barriers (those described in section 1 as being positive about learning or employment). Evaluations that track control groups with similar characteristics can help us to see the additional effect of the programme, but not many interventions include evaluations of this type. Securing improved outcomes for those who are most disengaged or face the most significant barriers is likely to require more time, money and other resources.

There are also some wider questions which have not been within the scope of this paper, but which do deserve further attention. For example, in the absence of changes in the national economy, reducing NEET levels in one area has the potential to simply move the problem and increase NEET levels in another area, or increase unemployment in another group (for example, older people). However, there is also a possibility that reducing the proportion of young people NEET in many local areas would help to grow the national economy, therefore resulting in overall lower levels of people NEET, rather than simply shifting the problem. Similarly, there may be economic and other conditions at a local, regional or national level that are necessary for a reduction in the number of people NEET.

The impacts of structural conditions in the labour market (for example, the types of jobs available for young people) have not been discussed in detail here. Longer term increases in NEET levels may be a result of these structural conditions. Further research is needed in these areas, in order to ascertain the national conditions necessary for reducing the number of people NEET, and the wider effects.

Conclusion

Being not in employment, education or training (NEET) is likely to have clear short- and long-term negative impacts on the health of young people, in part due to a damaging effect on employment, wages, and quality of work later in life. Being NEET for a long period of time is particularly damaging. The chances of becoming NEET are not distributed randomly or equally – those who already face disadvantage or poverty are more likely to become NEET at some point.

Local authorities, including public health teams, have a clear and important role to play in helping reduce NEET levels within their population and there is good evidence of effective interventions to support action. Reducing the proportion of young people NEET will improve health outcomes, and is likely to reduce health inequalities and deliver a range of other desirable outcomes, such as improved employment opportunities and higher income. Reducing NEET levels also saves money and helps local authorities to fulfil their responsibilities and obligations. Action taken early, before people become NEET, is particularly effective. Cross-sector collaborations between different local authority directorates (public health, housing and children's services for instance) and also between local authorities, employers, jobcentres and schools, have also been shown to deliver good results.

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