

**Good Practice in Flexibilities,
to help the NEET Group**

A report to the Learning and Skills Council

March 2009

This report has been researched for the LSC by Iain Mackinnon, Patrick Thomson, Michael Lawrie, James Kearney and John O'Sullivan of The Mackinnon Partnership, and Tim Barnes of Thinking for a Living.

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the
mackinnon
partnership

2A Walpole Court, Ealing Green, London, W5 5ED
020 8799 3120
iain@themackinnonpartnership.co.uk
www.themackinnonpartnership.co.uk

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1. Introduction

- 1.1 In January 2009 the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) commissioned The Mackinnon Partnership to identify, present and disseminate case studies of flexible provision for young people who fall into the NEET category: young people “not in education, employment or training”. This is our report.

Purpose of the report

- 1.2 The Government is committed to reducing the number of young people who are NEET, and its commitment is enshrined in the Public Service Agreement (PSA) target that the proportion of young people who are NEET should fall by two percentage points between 2004 and 2010. The Government’s NEET strategy, published by the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) in November 2007, emphasised the value of flexible, responsive, provision in reducing numbers of young people who are NEET – carefully noting that flexible, responsive, provision is valuable to *all* young people, and not just those at risk of becoming NEET.
- 1.3 Pressure to focus on tackling the NEET problem will increase with the transfer of responsibility for 16-19 years olds from the LSC to local authorities and with the raising of the participation age, first to 17 in 2013, then 18 in 2015. Responsibility for taking effective action will rest clearly with local authorities.
- 1.4 Doing better by those young people who are NEET, or at risk of becoming so, is already a high political priority for local government, with more than half the local authorities in the South East choosing the ‘NEET reduction’ indicator as a priority through the Local Area Agreement process.
- 1.5 In practical terms, political commitment is made real through the September Guarantee, through which the Government guarantees that by the end of each September everyone leaving compulsory education will be offered a suitable opportunity for further learning. What is much harder to ensure is the offer of a place later in the academic year for those young people who do not take up an offer in September, or who do so and later change their mind, ie who “drop out” of their original choice. The traditional September start still dominates timetabling of long courses (ie those designed to last a year or more) in most colleges and work-based learning providers. That is inconvenient for the most motivated, and can be a real problem for those who are less motivated, who commonly struggle to find something purposeful to do while they are waiting.

- 1.6 That is why the LSC is keen to encourage more providers to offer start dates other than September, most obviously in January, and through 'roll-on, roll-off' entry, which provides much greater flexibility. LSC therefore commissioned this report so that it could understand better what *is* possible in offering greater flexibility in start dates, and what constrains providers (colleges and others) from doing more.
- 1.7 LSC asked for the research to be focused by providing case studies of existing flexibility, with the clear intention of using the case studies to help change providers' behaviour.

Our Approach

- 1.8 Our starting-point was DCSF's definition of flexibility in provision for those who fall into the NEET group:

Flexible, responsive provision in this context means young people being able to access full-time, mainstream provision at different entry points during the year. Provision should lead to accredited qualifications that have clear progression routes from entry level to level 3 and above. Courses should be publicised in school and college prospectuses and on-line in the 14-19 area prospectus.

- 1.9 For 'NEET' itself, our starting-point was that being 'NEET' is not an inherent characteristic of any young person: 'NEET' is a residual statistical category created to cover everyone who did not fit into any of the more positive categories. What that means in practical terms for this study is that we have cast our net wide, considering provision designed for young people who might otherwise end up NEET, 'mainstream' (primarily vocational) provision, and provision designed with NEET young people clearly in mind (typically through the Entry to Employment programme, E2E). We have found fewest examples of flexibility in the middle group: mainstream vocational provision.
- 1.10 We have tried to keep our focus on the practical barriers which hinder greater flexibility, asking why more providers do not do what a few manage to do, and why the honestly pretty modest step of starting courses in January is still celebrated as good practice, and not accepted as the norm. And we have asked why those who work hard to encourage disaffected or disengaged young people to come back into formal, structured, learning still have to bend their encouragement round pretty inflexible provision for the most part, when the ideal is to build on hard-won commitment when it is still fresh. In the case studies we have sought to show how others have overcome these barriers.

- 1.11 Throughout we have been clear that everyone who works with young people who are NEET, or at risk of becoming NEET, is deeply committed to doing the best for these young people: there is no lack of good-will, or of earnest effort. That good-will and earnest effort has been clear from the cooperation we have received from many quarters, for which we are very grateful, and from the interest expressed to us by those who have asked to see the final report.

Our process

- 1.12 Our process involved four steps:

- a literature review, researching what is already in print about flexibility in provision insofar as it supports young people who are NEET, presented as a Working Paper and included in this report as an appendix;
- a data review, drawing together existing data for the South East on young people who are NEET, also presented as a Working Paper and included in this report as an appendix;
- interviews with people in a position either to help us understand the nature of provision for young people who are NEET, and factors influencing the extent and nature of flexible provision, or to point us towards good practice, or both. These people were primarily in the LSC, or the Connexions service, or were providers;
- interviews (and commonly repeat interviews as we sought further detail) with providers: colleges, work-based learning providers and charities running specialist provision.

Organisation of this report

- 1.13 We start this report with 14 case studies, each of which is designed to be free-standing and to be used separately from this report. We follow these with a discussion of the main factors influencing the extent and nature of flexibility provided and issues raised, then draw conclusions and offer recommendations.
- 1.14 We have put in appendices the two working papers which we produced during the study – the data review and the literature review and the data review.

A word about language

- 1.15 Though it is easy to slip into the shorthand of describing young people themselves as 'NEETs', throughout the body of this report we use NEET as an adjective, not a noun: we use 'NEET' to describe young people at a moment in time, and not as though being NEET is an inherent characteristic. We do this both as a matter of simple respect, and for reasons of accuracy: young people cease to be NEET as soon as they start a course, even if it is one designed for 'NEETs'. We are also conscious that the inevitably negative label of NEET can get in the way of seeing the positives in a young person: people become NEET for a variety of reasons and being temporarily NEET says nothing about any individual's inherent qualities.

2. Case Studies

- 2.1 We start with 14 case studies illustrating different aspects of flexibility, from across the South East and a range of providers in the public, not-for-profit and private sectors. In selecting them we have sought examples of provision which helps young people who might otherwise be NEET to get and keep a training place which suits them, or to move into, and stay in, a job which suits them. We discuss issues of definition in the Discussion section which follows the case studies.
- 2.2 We begin with the more straightforwardly vocational options, then present case studies associated with the Entry 2 Employment (E2E) programme, and conclude with three which focus on young people with particular needs: young parents, care leavers, and those with mental health issues. In each case we have provided contact details for someone who has agreed to supply more detail if requested to do so.
- 2.3 We do not present this list of case studies as in any way complete: we know of other good examples, and no doubt there are more which we have not identified through this project.

<i>Case Studies</i>		
1	January starts – developing into wider flexibility	MidKent College
2	January starts	Highbury College
3	Continuous entry to construction skills training	Fareham College
4	Infill into vocational courses	Abingdon and Witney College
5	Individually-tailored, work-focused, programme	NACRO
6	Linked provision to meet different NEET needs	Southampton City College
7	A chain of provision before and after E2E	Milton Keynes College
8	Managing on-demand entry to E2E	Include
9	Roll-on, roll-off, individually-tailored, E2E	Sussex Downs College
10	Work-focused E2E	TNG
11	Enabling learning through personal support	Oxford & Cherwell Valley College
12	Tailored, linked, provision for care leavers	Catch 22
13	Meeting the particular needs of young parents	GFS Platform
14	Supporting learners with mental health issues	Highbury College

1 January starts – developing into wider flexibility

MidKent College

In 2008, for the first time, MidKent College recruited young people who were then NEET for courses starting in January. Spurred on by the success of that initiative, the college repeated it for 2009 and extended it to offer fully flexible starts in the first half of the Autumn term.

MidKent College began its January start programme in 2008 offering discrete programmes which finished after two terms. They are wide-ranging, in terms of both level (from entry level to level 2) and subject, with 14 subject areas covered, including:

- Introductory Certificate in Health and Social Care
- Level 1 Diploma in Construction (trowel operations)
- First Certificate in Art and Design
- First Certificate in Engineering
- Level 2 course in Frontline Training (Customer Service, Airline and Tourism mix)
- NVQ 1 Hairdressing

The college recruited 75 young people to these courses in 2009 (50% more than planned), with the great majority forming discrete classes. Eight of the 75 went into existing classes through infill, in NCFE Foundation Studies in Sport, Coaching and Exercise, NVQ 1 Beauty Therapy and First Certificate in Performing Arts.

Recruiting

The college worked closely with Connexions to recruit young people onto the course. Connexions used its list of people known to be NEET, sending them a special January prospectus, with an invitation to special events in Connexions centres in Medway and Maidstone. (The former was better attended, and subsequent take-up was greater in Medway). The events were staffed by all the experts required to enable young people to sign up for appropriate courses there and then: course leaders, IAG staff and EMA advisors. This enabled those attending to say what they are interested in, discuss the course with a subject teacher, get advice and guidance on their choice and on future options, have an interview and be offered a place at the college all on the same day: there were no off-putting delays between stages.

The events featured local E2E provision, and resulted in recruits to the programme. One event also featured the success of two previous January start learners who have progressed and achieved particularly well, acknowledged through a presentation by players from Gillingham Football Club. Most of those recruited for January 2009 starts were recruited through these special events, though the college also advertised in local media.

Support for students

Though MidKent College has a strong personal tutor structure in place for all students, it realised that many of those starting in January required additional support, so it provided a separate personal tutor who works exclusively with January starters. This tutor helps these students to stay on track, by supporting them with both academic and other issues.

The tutors have found that, contrary to some people's expectation that most young people who are NEET are at a low academic level, there is a wide range of abilities this year, with many students well able to progress to further study in the college.

Extending flexibility

Inspired by its success with January start dates, MidKent College has extended its flexibilities to include infill starts in the first half term after September. Staff realised that a number of young people felt that they would have to wait a long time for another opportunity if they missed recruitment deadlines, so advertised (both directly, and through Connexions) to say that the door was still open, targeting those who had expected to get work and failed to do so and those who had made poor course choices and wanted to change. The college runs extra catch-up sessions for these students.

This flexibility applies to any course with space to take additional students, and applicants must satisfy standard eligibility criteria. The most popular options have been engineering, sports and A-levels.

The college has followed the same practice for its Customer Service for Tourism, Hospitality and Retail course, formally starting in January. Fewer people than expected took up the course initially in January, but interest began to grow throughout the next month. The college therefore allowed new applicants to join into March. They will not be able to complete the full award, but will have time to take several modules.

Funding

Courses starting in January would normally be funded in the same way as September starts, but this year MidKent College reached its funding allocation before January. To pay for the courses, it successfully applied to the LSC for extra funds through the NEET Fighting Fund.

A successful experience

With its teething troubles behind it, the college has found this year's January starts programme much easier to manage than last year's. Staff are positive about it, and most students seem likely to achieve and progress. A January start course was observed during the recent Ofsted inspection and graded 'outstanding'.

The initiative has meant some staff working extra hours (because areas popular in September are just as popular in January) and new staff being recruited. January starts are not physically possible for some subjects, however, because of workshop space constraints.

The college describes its approach to flexibility as now part of the way the college thinks and plans. Staff see it as valuable and needed, and it is likely to continue.

For further details please contact Lindsey Morgan on 01634 830633 or lindsey.morgan@midkent.ac.uk

2 January starts on vocational courses

Highbury College

Through its Move On programme, Portsmouth's Highbury College enabled 150 young people to start their vocational studies in January 2009. With these high numbers, most are able to join dedicated groups, and where numbers do not justify a new group, students infill into existing courses with extra support. Infill was the norm in 2008.

All the vocational students bar those at the dedicated construction site study at the college's 'city learning centre', where all January starters are now streamed according to literacy and numeracy needs. The college creates three groups – those definitely at level 2, those on the borderline of levels 1 and 2, and those at level 1 or below – which it finds makes them easier to teach, and which provides a better experience for the students as they are all at the same level. Students also find it easier to make friends, as they are in different groups to their vocational classes.

Highbury College works closely with other providers and with Connexions to recruit to Move On. Before Christmas, Connexions wrote to every person whom it identified as NEET (numbers are high in Portsmouth), to let them know that Highbury College was running January start dates in vocational courses, sending reminders in early January to those who had not responded. Connexions also ran an open day at Portsmouth Football Club, which all the colleges and work-based learning providers attended, targeting NEETs and prospective NEETs (looked-after children, 14-16 year olds on the KS4 engagement programme, and students identified as being at risk of dropping out).

Following this the college ran the usual format of interviews and open days: it helped for these people to see the college in the day-time, with students present. Highbury College also put great emphasis on information, advice and guidance (IAG), to ensure that prospective students joined the right course and were supported during it so that they stay to the end.

The college has a database identifying which students need support, and what kind of support, which is particularly important for January starters, as more need support than those who start in September. Use of the database ensures that all staff who need to know what support particular students are getting do know.

The college has other procedures in place to help integrate January starters into college life, or to prevent them from dropping out. They get the same induction pack as September starters, with the Education Maintenance Allowance application form: many January starters apply, and the college provides them with help to do so. Highbury also holds back a percentage of its travel support funds for January starters (though numbers claiming are relatively small because Portsmouth has good transport links).

The course is paid for through mainstream LSC funds, allocated in advance at the beginning of the year to ensure that sufficient funds remain to support those who start in January.

The college is anxious that demand will increase considerably with the increase in the compulsory participation age, both in terms of funding remaining available and of finding suitable accommodation in the crowded city centre.

For further details please contact Sue Ward on 023 9231 3373 or sue.ward@highbury.ac.uk

3 Continuous entry to construction skills training

Fareham College

Fareham College set up a construction course three years ago to attract young people who did not want to go to college, and to serve both Fareham and Gosport, two areas with high numbers of young people who are NEET. The course outgrew its original site, and a new facility has been developed. This was built as close to Gosport as possible, as a lot of the students come from the area. There are advantages and disadvantages to having this away from the college: hard-to-reach young people on the course who are NEET are less distracted and therefore more productive, but they do not get the full college experience and the opportunity to mix with different types of people. However, young people on this course do come to college one day a week, particularly to work on key skills and to play sport. The college has found this approach to pay dividends.

Intake to this workshop-based construction course is wholly flexible: the college takes on new students throughout the year. Once they have enrolled and completed their initial Health and Safety training (clearly essential in the construction field) they get a start date within the next few days, as well as their timetable and their course end date. There is space for 40 students in the workshop, who can all be at different stages and working at their own speed.

In the first year, students work towards a Foundation Construction Award, set at level 1. In the next two years, they work for an Intermediate Construction Award, at level 2. Students can leave after the first year with a qualification, or stay for both awards, which takes three years.

The college ran an open day in January 2009, and recruited 15 new students. Most of these students had dropped out from other college courses, and the college advertised the January start with them in mind. Students starting in January were blended into the group, and the intention is that they will catch up with the others. This catching up is easier to do the earlier the student enrolls. Staff say that the course can be completed in five terms instead of six.

Other courses at Fareham College run with this type of flexibility (to varying degrees: some like students to have some experience of the sector), including hairdressing, motor vehicle, carpentry, engineering, beauty therapy and a football course. All typically lead to NVQs. The college has found this kind of flexibility unrealistic, however, for the more linear courses which lead to BTEC Nationals and A-levels (ie where each week's work builds on work done the previous week).

The college requires attendance for 17 hours a week, spread over four days. It encourages students to get a part-time job for the other day, so that they learn valuable employability skills and can help to support themselves. There is also a strong tutorial programme for these individuals, with both pastoral and academic support, through different tutors.

Funding

Funding for this course is normal, mainstream, FE funding. The construction course is already running, so no extra staff or facilities are needed. Students on the course are part of the funding guarantee group, meaning that funds the college receives are linked to the qualifications they do. The college also received money from the LSC's NEET Fighting Fund to buy new equipment including computers, to invest in facilities, and to provide a relaxation area for students.

Success and Future Planning

The college foresees continuing demand for the course, and hopes that funding will therefore continue to be available. Success rates over the last three years have been good, with high completion rates and high attendance.

Beyond their course, most students have stayed in the construction field, with many moving on to work for small building firms, and others opting for further study.

For further details please contact Nigel Duncan on 01329 81520 or nigel.duncan@fareham.ac.uk

4 Infill into vocational courses

Abingdon and Witney College

Abingdon and Witney College has a policy not to turn away any young person who is a potential student who shows an interest in studying at the college. Central to its commitment is infill, through which the college will try to integrate a student into their chosen course (if it is judged suitable) regardless of the time of year.

Infill is often used in the Foundation Training Department, which operates from entry level through to Level 1, steps 5, 6 and 7 on the college's carefully graded 'Steps programme' (www.abingdon-witney.ac.uk/courses-and-applying/the-steps-programme).

Most young people joining through infill come in at step 6, the vocational choices programme, a full-time, modular, course which involves vocational tasters combined with literacy and numeracy. The course feeds into step 7, which is a level 1 vocational course.

To help infill students to settle in, the department has arranged a "buddying up" scheme with existing students. The college has found that the established students in the group like the responsibility of helping the new student, and that many of the new students arriving for the course know people who are already on the course.

The department has two main start dates, in September and January. Young people who arrive before the October half term usually join the course as they arrive. After that time they are usually asked to wait until January, as they have missed too much time, though this can be varied, depending on the interview. The college follows the same pattern after the fourth week of January for January starters. Anyone who is desperate for something to do while they wait is offered a place on the pre-apprenticeship programme (see below).

Pre-apprenticeship construction course with start dates in November and March

The college also runs a pre-apprenticeship course in construction. This is a full-time course with start dates in November and March, which aims to catch those who have missed September and January start dates. It lasts 16 weeks, and involves the students being on-site for 2½ days, learning the basics including health and safety, with the other two days doing work experience, which the college arranges for them. This work experience is not necessarily in construction, but could be in a related field such as painting and decorating, because the main aim is to teach them employability skills.

Course participants get the certificate they need to work on a building site, but no other qualification: the college is anxious not to scare off those for whom a formal qualification might appear too daunting.

This course is specifically targeted at 16 and 17 year olds whom Connexions have tracked and who are definitely NEET. They are invited to have a look round the college with their Connexions PA, and the course is explained to them.

Some of the students from last year's course stayed on for other studies at the college at Levels 1 and 2, and others started work in the construction industry.

Funding

The pre-apprenticeship scheme is funded by the LSC as work-based learning.

Infill students are funded from mainstream funding: as full-time students if they start before October half term, and as part-time students if they start in January, as they cannot complete enough hours to be considered full-time, even though they are effectively in college full-time.

Obstacles and Future Plans

The pre-apprenticeship course requires some clever timetabling as it is workshop-based, and because many students prefer to have contact with the same member of staff throughout their course.

The college has found that infill starters integrate well into groups. It has also found no significant difference between the success rates of those who start later as opposed to those who start in September, reflecting the modular nature of the course which allows the motivated to thrive.

The college plans to increase its pre-apprenticeship provision, particularly by starting courses which would appeal more to young women, as there are none on the construction course. (It is conscious that it would have to consider the capacity of its crèche, as many of the young women whom it would target are mothers).

For further details please contact Maureen Boyle on 01235 216435 or maureen.boyle@abingdon-witney.ac.uk

5 Individually-tailored, work-focused programmes

NACRO

NACRO (the National Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders) has secured £3m from the European Social Fund. The money is funding two projects called Switch On and the TIE Programme which are running from October 2008 to December 2010 and provide training and mentoring based around the needs of the individual learners aged 14-19.

The *Training into Employment* (TIE) programme is aimed, for the most part, at 16-19 year olds, although 14-16 year olds can take part. On referral to TIE, programme staff assess the young person's learning and personal needs and design a programme to deliver accredited courses over ten weeks, with a minimum attendance of twelve hours a week. Staff shape the curriculum round both the learner's interests and their own assessment of any areas of weakness, with the aim of getting the young person into some form of education, employment or training.

Switch On works with 14-16 year olds who may be disengaged from the education system, indicated by high truancy rates or the threat or reality of expulsion. Young people in such circumstances are very likely to be NEET later in life. The project provides mentoring services for them, encouraging them to re-engage with the education system.

Bespoke Courses

The *TIE* programme aims to "identify the barriers to employment, think of ways to address them and develop their skills for applying and keeping jobs". It begins with an in-depth, one-to-one, initial assessment which takes into account both what individuals want and their needs, as assessed by NACRO staff. Based on the information gained from this discussion, and on the results of literacy and numeracy tests, staff design a bespoke learning programme. They aim to balance the learner's personal interests (to make it more likely that the programme is completed), and the practicalities of enhancing employability.

Participants are awarded National Open College Network (NOCN) qualifications designed to "enable the greatest flexibility for the learner whilst maintaining the qualifications at an achievable level." The range of courses is wide and learners obtain NOCN Progression Awards, Certificates or Diplomas, depending on how successful they are.

Accompaniment to job interview

The *TIE* programme also aims to build strong relationships between the young person and their support worker. Where *Switch On* focuses on a young person's behaviour and personal situation, TIE is geared towards careers advice and developing employability. One of the key tools of the programme is for the support workers to remain closely linked to the young person's progress by attending job or college interviews with them. This flexibility addresses the problem of young people not turning up to interviews arranged for them, which results in many lost placements. Developing a close working relationship with the young people reduces this problem considerably.

Mentoring

A key aspect of both projects is the relationship built up between the young person and their mentor. For many of the young people involved, "this is the first time anyone has given them time and energy". In *Switch On*, the relationship is built up over the first four weeks of the project which are based around sporting, art and adventure activity. This frames the relationship so that the young person, "does not see their mentor as a teacher or authority figure. This allows trust to be built up, which is the key".

On completion of the four week programme, mentoring continues in a diluted form for a further six weeks. In this second phase, meetings are once a week, often held in school. The local schools that NACRO are working with strongly support this mentoring system and provide rooms and facilities for the meetings to take place.

Paying for it

NACRO has £3m of ESF funding to run these projects until the end of 2010 across Kent, Medway, Sussex and Surrey, and hopes that the projects will become self-funding by the end of 2010. As an example of what is possible, NACRO has been asked to work with young people on the Intensive Supervision and Surveillance Programme (ISSP). This is the most rigorous, non-custodial, Youth Justice Board programme targeting the most prolific young offenders and those who commit the most serious crimes. Provision of education and training programmes is one of the core elements of the programme.

NACRO also hopes to sell the programme to further education colleges, and to schools, a number of which have expressed an interest in buying the *TIE* programme's services for their 14-16 year old students. It is developing a database of volunteer mentors to enable the project to expand.

Does it work?

For the *TIE* programme, success is measured through the participant's progression to some form of education, employment or training. (There is no requirement at this stage for the employment to include training). Of the first cohort, 87% progressed into education, employment or training, comfortably exceeding the target of 75%.

For *Switch On*, the target is for 55% of participants to progress, where 'progress' is independently defined by the school or a support worker based on evidence of whether the young person's behaviour or outlook has improved (the definition is less tangible than with *TIE* because participants are younger). Progression rates are currently 60%. Managers of both programmes predict that progression rates will rise.

NACRO also uses 'softer' outcomes to identify the success of the programmes. It is pleased to note that many of the young people who have gone through the projects so far have said that they want to come back as mentors – and that Government Ministers, including the Minister for Europe, are keen to visit and be associated with the projects.

Challenges

Numbers on the projects are restricted by the nature of the young people, many of whom have recently left the criminal justice system and present very challenging behaviour, including violence.

For further details please contact Lesley Game on 07800 998 394 or lesley.game@nacro.org.uk

6 Linked provision to meet different NEET needs

Southampton
City College

Southampton City College recognises that not all young people are NEET for the same reason, so it has created a range of provision to address particular needs and circumstances.

Though there has been some recent progress, Southampton is recognised as a NEET hotspot. Contributing factors are a low attainment rate at age 16, a persistent absentee problem, and a high teenage pregnancy rate.

Given these problems, Southampton City College (SCC), its employment training section *city training* and other local FE colleges (led by SCC), have worked together closely to target young people who are out of education, and have managed to re-engage 500. To do this, the college set up a wide range of programmes, recognising that not all young people are NEET for the same reason. These include programmes targeted at 14-16 year olds identified as potentially becoming NEET, young women who are pregnant or parents with young children, young men with behavioural problems and young women with behavioural problems (separate groups).

Flexibility

The college identifies four reasons why it was able to recruit these additional learners: provision of flexible courses, particularly in terms of start dates; using sub-contractors to support particular parts of a course; the location of courses and provision of support it.

Two of the courses targeted at NEETs have three start dates, in September, January and April. These courses are *Skills Plus*, a technology-focused course, and a fashion-related creative merchandising course, both of which lead to the BTEC 'introduction to vocational studies' qualification. The attendance requirement for both is twenty hours a week, every day in college. Both courses are supported by youth workers from Hampshire Youth Service, who provide additional personal support for vulnerable students.

These courses (particularly the technology-based option) have been designed with the local labour market in mind. They include taster days, to help make sure that young people who enrol are making the right choice, and employability skills, as they aim to prepare people for working life. Vocational training is at entry level, with the option to progress within the college to higher levels.

The technology course now includes the option for everyone to try aluminium welding, as this has been identified as a skills shortage in Southampton, more acutely felt with super-yacht builder Palmer-Johnson moving to the area.

Students who start the course in April are funded differently from the rest, through E2E. They do the same activities as the other students, but because they are from higher risk groups (eg they have been disruptive at school, or are pregnant, or have a criminal record, or need high levels of support), they are much less certain to continue to the new academic year. They would therefore be a financial risk if funded immediately from a mainstream budget which requires qualification outcomes: E2E provides an opportunity for them to prove that they can cope with an extended course, before they start a full course in September.

Other forms of flexibility are offered by the college for level 1 and entry level qualifications, to help cater for the various needs of the individuals. Third sector partners are used to deliver certain courses, including local charity the Wheatsheaf Trust, which offers E2E courses for

individuals who do not want to enter the college premises (for example due to problems with other students). Skills centres have also been set up at local schools, which offer courses for those who feel more comfortable in a school environment. This includes groups such as 14-16 year olds (the main target group), adult learners and young people with learning difficulties and disabilities: those who may find the college too big or are used to the school environment and want to stay there.

There is also some targeted help, through the 'choices conference'. Schools identify individuals who have not made a decision about what they are going to do when they leave, and SCC lets them know what is available at the college, making them unconditional offers, so they definitely have something to fall back on. The city training department also runs a number of E2E programmes, including construction, hospitality and beauty therapy, which start every six weeks.

Finance

The college has found financing and timetabling these flexible start dates not to be a problem. Funding comes from various sources, depending on the programme, such as E2E and work-based learning funding, (though 'over-delivery' against the latter contract in the current year has presented a problem). Other funding comes from mainstream FE funds, with the Youth Option workers on the college payroll. SCC also received £45,000 from the LSC's NEET Fighting Fund, which enabled it to buy the aluminium welding equipment for the technology-based Skills Plus course, which is also being used in a motor vehicle course for 14-16 year olds in danger of becoming disengaged from education.

Successes, Obstacles and Challenges

The Skills Plus courses have not been running for very long, so no formal evaluation has been done. However, there are 26 16-18 year olds identified as NEET on the course, and twelve 'at risk' 14-16 year olds, with early indications very positive.

In terms of the challenges for the future, the main concern is finding and keeping the right staff. Teaching skills are not enough: work with these students requires staff to be very resilient, supportive and understanding of vulnerable young people.

For further details please contact Helen Mason on 02380 484848 or helen.mason@southampton-city.ac.uk

7 A chain of provision before and after E2E

Milton Keynes College

Milton Keynes College has developed a suite of courses aimed at providing maximum flexibility: **Signpost** which is a full-time course; **E2E** which is a roll-on roll-off programme, and a joint programme with the **Prince's Trust**. The college has recently started a new community programme based in the community centre of a local estate which has high levels of deprivation. **LEAP** is a 'pre-NEET' course which works with 30 year 11 students who are young carers, in care or home educated.

Signpost

Signpost is a full-time course for 15-18 year-olds, most of whom have been under-achieving. The purpose of the course is to prepare them for training and employment, and it therefore aims to improve social and emotional behaviour and to develop literacy and numeracy, as well as soft skills. The course runs from September to June and has good pastoral care and tutor support.

The course recruits 80 students: most arrive between September and Christmas, and the rest throughout the year. This is especially the case for those in year 11 who are referred by the local education authority at the age of 15 or 16 before transferring to college on a full-time basis. Students can be on the course for one or two years depending on their level of ability and their needs as a learner. The course has historically had good success rates.

The course has a one-to-one support area and the timetable is varied according to individual need. Staffing resources are good with nine full-time staff, three learning support assistants and a pool of visiting lecturers.

More than just a qualification

Learners gain qualifications in literacy, numeracy, and ICT. Wider key skills, personal development, job-seeking skills, and career planning are also offered. The college runs a sequence of taster sessions in vocational areas, such as construction, hair and beauty, and art and design.

Adapting to needs as they emerge on E2E

The E2E course has a very flexible approach which has been much needed this year as there has been a noticeable increase in difficult behaviour by students, some of whom have been aggressive and unable to function in groups. Staff have spent a lot of time providing guidance, coaching and personal tutoring.

Prince's Trust

The college is rated as a 'grade 1 delivery partner' by the Prince's Trust in the South East. This strong partnership means that young people are encouraged to progress through the different NEET courses offered at the college, so they can move from Signpost to E2E to Prince's Trust, and various permutations of this, according to individual need. This year the college has also offered a 13th week on the end of the Prince's Trust programme for students to gain qualifications in adult literacy and numeracy.

Sparkle!

As a result of the changes in behaviour observed the college has launched a new initiative called Sparkle! This is essentially a self-esteem workshop lasting 30-45 minutes with small group work and discussion groups led by staff specially selected for the role. Much time has

been spent on looking at external factors in an individual young person's life such as their home circumstances.

Re-locating in the community

Starting in January 2009, this is a joint venture involving community workers and youth workers based in a community centre on the Lakes Estate near the college, and offering E2E type activities to attract 16-18 year olds living on the estate. By moving the college 'into the community' managers hope that more young people will re-engage with learning and join the college either for E2E or for other courses.

LEAP project

The college runs the LEAP project for a group of 30 young people in Year 11 who have been identified as being at risk of becoming NEET. It is targeting three groups: young carers, children in care and young people who are home educated. This is a new project and part of the impetus has been that very little is known about two of the groups (young carers and home education): the poor educational outcomes for children in care, the third group, are well documented.

Paying for it

There is mainstream LSC funding for Signpost, E2E, and Prince's Trust programmes. The LEA funds individual Year 11 students.

Why does it work?

The college attributes its success to several factors:

- giving one person, the college's Skills Area Manager, oversight over the whole of this suite of provision;
- good support from senior managers;
- development of a dedicated team – which the college also credits with changing attitudes amongst staff who have traditionally been resistant to the NEET group;
- a strong focus on the 'learner voice' and feedback from students. All learners are encouraged to participate in regular feedback sessions. All staff have an open door policy so learners can raise any concerns or flag up ideas at any time. The college displays its responses to students' ideas on student notice boards.

Over time there have been more referrals from Level 1 curriculum areas, resulting in tailored programmes which lead students back to a Level 1 course the following year.

Challenges and next steps

Staff identify the following challenges in creating this flexible suite of provision:

- creating individual learner timetables in a college setting geared to course provision;
- lack of appropriate physical space. These students need flexible space, not classrooms;
- the availability of suitable staff, both female and male, and to ensure that they are consistently available to work with individuals and groups;
- mainstream funds tend to be for academic success, but these young people need pastoral care and guidance, and funding for that is harder to fund.

For further details please contact Cathy Hooper on 01908 684473 or catherine.hooper@mkcollege.ac.uk

8 Managing on-demand entry to E2E

Include

Include is a charity which aims to tackle social exclusion among young people. Its work in Wokingham covers several programmes including a number of E2E projects, a programme called Flex targeted at 14-16 year olds at risk of becoming NEET, and one for young mothers called ABC2 ('and baby came too').

Wokingham E2E

There are 25 places on the E2E course at Wokingham, and it follows the same pattern as E2E provision elsewhere with three strands: personal and social skills, literacy and numeracy, and vocational skills.

Include begins with a six-week period during which staff work with learners to assess their needs, and understand the particular barriers which have excluded them throughout their time in education. They also work to understand the learning style of the participant. Include always covers the three strands, but the emphasis is different depending on the needs of the participant. Include employs tutors for literacy and numeracy, as well as project workers who deliver more of the pastoral care for the learners.

The Wokingham E2E provision is different from the other E2E projects that Include delivers. Most vocational provision is delivered through workshops, and students typically get NOCN progression awards. Most are working towards some literacy and numeracy qualifications at levels 1 or 2, which they need to go on to college courses. Many start with very poor school qualifications, and some none.

Typical groups of young people who are NEET with whom the project works include:

- young people with learning difficulties. Include works with them to understand their literacy and numeracy levels, and try to make sure they are pitching the material at the right level for them, to suit their learning style;
- young people who were excluded during school;
- young carers;
- young offenders;
- young homeless people or those at risk of becoming homeless;
- care leavers (though not many of them).

Start Dates

Most students start in September – typically recent Year 11 leavers who have not secured the college place they wanted. Most leave in January or February, when space opens up for another large intake.

The course does allow roll-on roll-off admissions, but Include typically waits until there is a small cohort ready to start together, typically of at least five learners. This is partly because the course is workshop-based, and requires a significant health and safety induction which is easier to provide to a group than to individuals. The project manager acknowledges that there is a trade-off between maintaining a learner's motivation while they wait, and allowing them to feel isolated by joining an already-coherent group.

Limits to the number of people allowed in the workshop at any one time constrain Improve's capacity to invite future learners to taster days to keep them motivated. The project compensates as best it can by having project managers review individual learners to assess when they are likely to leave the programme and free up a place, thus enabling them to give prospective learners a better idea when they can start.

Strictly, waiting lists for the project are for assessment of suitability rather than for a guaranteed place. Staff are worried, however, that some young people on the waiting list are turning down other opportunities, expecting a place, so they are looking at ways of avoiding this and just letting young people know when places will be available.

Funding

Include receives funding from the LSC to run the E2E programme.

Funding is based on a profile of projected learner weeks. At the end of each quarter, the LSC assesses performance against profile: if Include is more than 5% below target, the LSC reduces its profile – and therefore its income – for the rest of the year.

Learner weeks payments make up the vast bulk of their revenue. Include acknowledged that this means that staff focus more on getting the learners to continue attending, than on getting them through a qualification and onto employment or further education – and argue that this is necessary because otherwise they would have an incentive to exclude more 'difficult' learners, whom the E2E programme is designed to help. That is not to say that they disregard positive outcomes for learners, but their approach is far more centred on addressing each learner's unique needs than it is on measuring whether or not they move on to employment or college afterwards.

Problems with Funding

Include wants to be flexible to respond to individual needs, but finds the funding model makes planning very difficult. It allocates staff and resources against profile, but the flexible nature of the programme makes it vulnerable to unexpected changes such as lower-than-expected referrals or higher-than-expected numbers of leavers. Although Include is punished for under-performance, it is not rewarded for over-performance: the LSC *may* pay for weeks delivered over profile, but does not guarantee either to do so, or when it will pay if it does agree to do so. Include finds that this makes flexible provision hard to deliver.

Outcomes

The progression rate to positive outcomes last year was 52%, but Include expects the rate to drop significantly this year because the recession has reduced the number of jobs available, especially 'student-style' jobs.

For further details please contact Tracey Hales on 07717 862714 or thales@cfbt.com

9 Roll-on roll-off, individually-tailored, E2E

Sussex Downs College

Sussex Downs College runs a 14-16 service targeted at young people at risk of becoming NEET, and an Entry to Employment (E2E) service aimed at reducing the numbers of those who are NEET.

There are two main ways in which this programme is flexible. First, the content is tailored for each cohort. Second, it has a flexible roll-on roll-off admissions process.

There are three strands to the programme:

- personal and social skills: eg citizenship, healthy eating, relationships, sexual health
- vocational skills: eg motor vehicle repair, catering
- functional skills: eg language, literacy and numeracy.

Potential learners are referred through Connexions, and the LSC provides the funding on a learner week basis based on a total allocation of places which the College projects it will provide. Funding is triggered by continuing participation, ie the college is paid for every week the student participates, not necessarily for achieving a qualification. Learners stay for an average of 21 weeks, although that has ranged from one week to 56 weeks.

Where appropriate, the college encourages learners to pursue qualifications, and some are simultaneously studying level 1 or 2 qualifications as well as participating on E2E. Others are on BTEC courses, mixed in with other, non-E2E, students. A key distinction with this group is that BTEC E2E students are funded regardless of whether they achieve a qualification or not, while the non-E2E BTEC students are not.

The Uckfield campus of Sussex Downs College has a 100% progression rate to employment or further learning.

The one-to-one contact in the E2E programme is a great attraction for students because they have already fallen through the cracks of a system which was not designed with their needs in mind. With one-to-one help the programme becomes far more learner-centred. Some participants have found attendance very difficult in the past, and others attended well, but were disengaged when present: E2E tries to meet them 'where they are'.

The programme tries to cater for young people who have had histories of exclusion at school, caused by either low expectation from their family, or other poor attitudes in their background, in order to get them to engage more. Other participants have had problems with substance abuse, school absenteeism, or homelessness, or might be young parents.

Issues

A funding system based on predictions at the start of the year of numbers of learner weeks is more inflexible than the way the team runs the course. And the roll-on roll-off admissions process leaves the team "constantly planning". Accurate forecasting of demand is key and the college's experience is that the team has got better at it over time.

The college also finds that the unpredictability of its funding makes it harder to recruit the experienced and qualified staff needed to deal with this group of students.

The College carries the risk of not meeting its targets. In the short term, this means that funds can be 'clawed back' by the LSC. In the longer term, the risk is to the college's reputation, damaging its chances of making a credible case for continued funding.

The Foundation Learning Tier

The college is watching the implementation of the Foundation Learning Tier, anxious that changes might limit the flexibility which it currently enjoys, but confident both that its current practice shows that colleges can work flexibly, and that this experience can be extended to learners on mainstream courses.

The student records team at Sussex Downs College has helped to facilitate progress for E2E participants by making it easy to add new qualifications outcomes for them, without having to specify in advance which qualifications they are.

For further details please contact Jinpa Smith on 01323 637575 or jinpa.smith@sussexdowns.ac.uk

10 Work-focused E2E

TNG

TNG, part of a national network of 59 training centres, provides a range of training programmes including E2E, apprenticeships and Train to Gain. The Preparation for Employment course was set up to enable young people who are NEET to access higher level training by providing basic skills training and individually tailored work experience with local employers.

A Level 1 pre-apprenticeship programme funded via an E2E contract, Preparation for Employment has two aspects: pre-apprenticeship, and child care. Both involve getting young people ready for work. It is a rolling programme with 18 young people on a pre-apprenticeship course and 16 on child care. Staffing comprises one placement officer, two E2E tutors (one pre-apprenticeship, one preparation for employment), and one skills for life tutor.

The aim is employment

Most young people move on to a placement or a job: employment is the aim. They start the programme with three days 'in-house' leading to two days with an employer as they gain experience and confidence. Employers are helpful in providing placements.

The programme includes literacy and numeracy training, and team-based activities with a structure similar to that of a Prince's Trust course. At the end of the programme young people receive a City and Guilds preparation for employment level one qualification.

A 'stepping stones' approach to flexibility

TNG sees Preparation for Employment as the first step in a linked series of courses, developing participants' skills. An advantage of this 'stepping stones' approach is that TNG also has a level 2 programme-led apprenticeship contract with a similar delivery model offering young people training in four vocational areas: childcare, adult care, customer services, and business administration. When participants have reached the age of 19 they can move on to Train to Gain.

Paying for it

Mainstream E2E funding from the LSC.

Why does it work?

The course coordinator comments that "it works because this group of young people needs an E2E level course before they move on to further training or work. By the end of the programme they can look me in the eye, they are more confident and more motivated, they understand more about work. It's also about getting the right people as staff, teamwork is vital, and the staff need to be very careful about making selections to each team."

The coordinator also sees himself in a leadership role, commenting that the main purpose of this type of training is to instil motivation in young people: "it's about wanting a job, and I won't allow them to stay here endlessly. We have good contacts with local employers and the key for the individual is motivation".

One female member of staff is an E2E placement officer responsible for recruiting young people and finding placements. She has developed excellent links with employers and the

Connexions service. Through word of mouth TNG has a waiting list of learners wanting to join the course.

Challenges and next steps

TNG was originally given a small contract and while the LSC encouraged them to over recruit, delays in re-profiling the contract mean that funding is an issue.

There is a large Bangladeshi community in Bletchley, where the programme operates, and TNG is trying to work out ways of engaging young people from that community.

Only 3% of the participants on the childcare course are male, and TNG would like to recruit more of them onto that course.

For further details please contact Dave Carson on 01908 630554 or dave.carson@tng.uk.com

11 Enabling learning through personal support

Oxford and Cherwell Valley College

Oxford and Cherwell Valley College (OCVC) has been running a foundation studies course aimed at 14-16-year-olds for about five years. The course was based in different vocational areas and covered Entry and Level 1. While it provided a good introduction to vocational areas it was not addressing the main issues facing young people entering the college, namely emotional and behavioural difficulties, and problems with literacy and numeracy. Impact was launched in September 2008 to provide a flexible course for 14-16 year olds coming from schools.

Why set up a new course?

Foundation Studies staff had found that a high proportion of young people (over 50%) moving from the college's original 14-16 programme (which they describe as a 'high nurture' course) to a vocational college course did not succeed. They thought that this was due to a lack of social and emotional development, and while acknowledging that young people need qualifications, these students needed to build habits which enable them to learn before they could get those qualifications.

Called **Impact**, the course caters for 10 to 20 young people each year and operates one day per week. The curriculum focuses on social and emotional development mapped to Every Child Matters outcomes. It also provides personal, social and health education as well as learning skills. Students will not get a level one qualification, but the course is viewed as an investment for the future. The students are working towards achieving Entry Level 3 in Making Progress, Solving Problems and Team Working Skills. When OCVC advertised the course it had a very positive response from schools.

Why does it work?

The key is quality staff who are flexible and highly motivated, and who have access to good resources. Staff have found it extremely hard work, but by allowing learners to dictate the pace, and by having two very competent staff members, they are making good progress.

The reasons for this are:

- the team have all recently trained in using the 'building learning power' framework for learning, focused on building resourcefulness, reciprocity, resilience and reflectiveness. They have found this useful in helping students to develop habits of learning;
- learning is active and creative;
- staff help students to recognise when they are developing new social and emotional skills and learning habits so that they feel the difference that a change in behaviour and approach can make;
- staff are innovative;
- staff plan on a weekly basis because of the nature of the client group.

The team have revised the curriculum model for next year which will release additional funding. The offer will now include qualifications in:

- group and teamwork skills
- Making Choices in pursuit of Personal Learning Goals
- assertiveness and decision-making skills
- skills for employability
- Developing Skills for a Healthy Lifestyle

Resources

There are four full-time members of staff, including a newly qualified teacher, and a technician. In addition, to instil confidence in the team, the programme manager teaches one of the groups. The group has use of a well-resourced environment including a kitchen and a carpentry workshop, access to ICT suites, and a horticultural area.

Paying for it

Funding comes from direct payment by schools for individual learners, and where appropriate from qualifications gained.

Challenges and next steps

Staff explained that the current group have been professionally challenging so an innovative and creative vehicle for learning has needed to be constructed, whilst having a resonance of purpose and relevance to the student. Behaviour is becoming more complex as young people struggle to cope with the stresses and expectations of 21 century living. Research and internal perceptions suggest that young people have become de-sensitised, and can struggle to see some of the impact of their behaviour on themselves and those around them. One staff member said “they are not setting out to be difficult, but they can be, and this creates new tensions and challenges for staff”.

Another problem encountered is that some staff lack confidence in working with these groups, which the college attributes not to any lack of will, but to a fear of failing. It suggests as a possible remedy a broader focus on the social and emotional aspects of learning within the national teacher training system.

When receiving potentially problematic students it is important that the information received from schools is accurate and the partnership is fully established to facilitate the flow of effective and helpful information. This enables a careful risk assessment to be made and requires both good quality information and suggested collaborative strategies for working with individual students.

Staff have spent time building a partnership with schools and this has been achieved by having a dedicated link person who brokers the relationship in the best interest of the students. The college understands the measurements of success that schools must evidence.

Attendance can be a problem, further complicated by being measured against externally-driven, college-wide, benchmarks. The staff attribute their success in tackling attendance issues to effective relationships built with parents and carers.

A measure of the college's confidence in this approach is that it has decided to run the course for a small number of young people on its Oxford campus next year.

For further details please contact Angela Petruso on 01865 551645 or apetruso@ocvc.ac.uk

12 Tailored, linked, provision for care leavers

Catch 22: South East Training

Catch 22 South East Training (formerly Rainer South East Training) is a long-established charity providing services to young people in Hampshire, Kent and Surrey. Three different programmes provide services to different target groups with particular provision for children in care or recent care leavers, and young people who are NEET. Certain programmes are roll-on roll-off and Catch 22 encourages participants to progress from one programme to the next. Young people are provided with individual plans and service hours are flexible to encourage them to remain involved. The programmes are particularly sensitive to the issues faced by young people in care, and recent care leavers, such as housing, alcohol and crime.

SET4 Success

This is a roll-on roll-off programme for 14-19 year-olds in care or recently leaving care. Various activities are available through the programme, designed to develop confidence and self esteem. These include independent living skills, literacy and numeracy, confidence and self esteem workshops, activity days and vocational skills and experience.

The programme is split into two elements: a 10-week pre-employment activity programme, and a training support and mentoring package to help in the first 24 weeks of employment or a return to education.

Young people participating are encouraged to progress to further courses leading to NVQ Level 1 qualifications, employment training, pre-apprenticeship training and full apprenticeships. 14–16 year-olds are re-engaged with education and 16–19 year olds are given training or employment support.

Individual plans and flexible hours

Each young person is provided with an individual work plan to suit their abilities and needs. The programme runs for 13 hours a week, which can be fitted into a flexible timetable at any time in the normal working week. The plans take into account individual circumstances such as housing, alcohol or criminal issues. More straightforward issues such as time or financial management are provided by an in-house support worker and more sensitive issues are dealt with through close contact with social workers.

The programme has a target of recruiting 90% from care or care-leavers, allowing the remaining 10% to be friends, so that target young people are more likely to join.

Programme participation

Participants are encouraged to take up all aspects of what is provided for them, ideally to progress to increasingly more engaging programmes. Programme staff are careful to make a clear distinction between the programme and formal education, and note that all participation is voluntary. Young people can remain part of the programme as long as it is of clear benefit to them.

Paying for it

The SET4 Success programme is provided through ESF funding through the LSC.

Does it work?

The SET4 Success programme has been running since January 2009 with the first participants leaving in March. So far this programme has only been available in Hampshire, with approximately eight young people involved at any one time. The E2E programmes to which students progress have been running for five years and are available in Kent and Surrey as well.

For further details please contact Jessica Nevett on 02392 778986 or jessica.nevett@catch-22.org.uk

13 Meeting the particular needs of young parents

GFS Platform

The Teenage Pregnancy Learning Programme (TPLP) run by GFS Platform on the Isle of Wight is aimed at 16-19 year olds who are expecting a baby, or young parents (both male and female). Its purpose is to support these young people so that they stay in education as long as possible, and return to learning when circumstances allow after the birth of a child. The programme is modular, with flexible roll-on roll-off entry, providing NCFE and other foundation qualifications. There are currently 25 participants, three of them young men.

Background

Against a background of high teenage pregnancy rates in the region, the TPLP has been running across the South East following pilots in 2007-08, with various forms and names, and through differing partnerships. These commonly involve Connexions, colleges, midwives, the youth service, Sure Start and the NHS. It is an LSC initiative, funded through the 14-19 reform budget, with design features which recognise the fact that most existing parenting support programmes do not contain sufficient learning leading to qualifications and progression to be eligible for LSC funding. This example on the Isle of Wight is one of these LSC-funded programmes.

GFS Platform (the campaigning name of the Girls Friendly Society, a national charity) takes the lead on the Isle of Wight, supported by a broad-based steering group, including the LSC, Isle of Wight College and Connexions. The steering group ensures that the programme plugs gaps and avoids duplication of existing work on the island. It has also resulted in much better communication between agencies.

Flexibility

The programme works on a roll-on roll-off basis, and is modular. This means that young people can do a module when they need to or want to, for example stopping to give birth and coming back and doing another module when they feel able.

The programme is broadly set at pre-E2E level, designed to stop young people falling out of education, or to provide a gentle reintroduction for those who have been out of education. It offers a wide range of courses including vocational options, supported by a focus on literacy and numeracy, parenting, self esteem and confidence-building. Participants are currently studying for accredited courses in maths and English, First Aid and an NCFE Level 2 Food Hygiene course. To encourage participants, the team runs an awards ceremony.

From last year's course, seven people stayed with GFS to study ECDL (European Computer Driving Licence) and business administration (GFS also runs further courses) and three went on to study hairdressing at Isle of Wight College, with which the programme team has good links. The college has a crèche, which makes progression easier.

TPLP also provides two NCFE-accredited courses, *Young Mothers To Be* and *Parents With Prospects* (which attracts more young men). Both are modular courses, combining literacy and numeracy with lessons on pregnancy, labour, budgeting, health and other important skills these young people need.

Recruitment

This year the programme team has started running drop-in sessions at places they know young mothers are likely to be. To encourage attendance, there is a 'buddying' scheme, allowing mothers to bring a friend who is also pregnant. TPLP also pays transport costs (a big issue on the island) and texts young mothers to encourage, and remind, them to attend.

There is a marked difference between women and men, with no self-referral among the fathers. To recruit young men, the TPLP team has to go and find them, for example at college. Referrals do, however, work the other way round: TPLP's partner group, Fathers First, is successful in using fathers to recruit their partners for TPLP.

Funding

Programmes are funded by the LSC to £820 per learner, based on 72-96 guided learning hours which can be spread flexibly across a year. This is an unusual, whole-programme, approach to funding which does not involve the LSC prescribing the number of weeks or hours per week within those 76-92 hours, or require qualifications outcomes. Providers must, however, agree a delivery plan which clearly defines the outcomes expected.

LSC funding was originally due to end (for all TPLP programmes in the region) in March 2009, but has been extended for another year, with the intention that the programme will become part of the Foundation Learning Tier (FLT) after that. It is not clear what, if anything, might be lost in the change to FLT funding.

Obstacles and Future Plans

GFS Platform is keen to increase the number of fathers on the course, and intends to advertise to attract them.

The programme team is concerned that the switch to the mainstream (Foundation Learning Tier) may reduce the funding available, or the flexibility with which it can be used: the current programme framework is designed to last only another year, until March 2010. TPLP teams across the region are reported to be keen to try out other qualifications, not all of which look likely to be eligible for LSC funding.

For further details please contact Louise Tatton on 0781 544 4731 or louise.tatton@IOW.gov.uk

14 Supporting learners with mental health issues

Highbury College

Back on Track was initially a NIACE-funded scheme for Headspace, a Primary Care Trust funded charity supporting young people with mental health issues, particularly psychosis. The programme has been running for a couple of years, since the city learning centre of Highbury College was built, including a room designed for the exclusive use of Back on Track students. Students on the course are encouraged to interact with the other college students, for example going to the refectory for lunch.

The course is for young people with mental health issues, all of whom have been identified by the Headspace team. This is because the team choose people who they believe will be able to complete the course, as they want the students to succeed.

The college has assigned two teaching staff to the course, choosing one who is older and able to act as a parental figure, and another who is younger, and much closer in age to the students.

The course is effectively split, with the two college tutors providing the education and the Headspace team providing therapy.

The educational side of the course is made up of City and Guilds awards, key skills and OCN vocational units. As these are students with chaotic backgrounds, they are asked what they are interested in, and provided with taster units, trials and work experience. These add up to a Foundation Learning Tier award, which Highbury College is piloting.

The modular nature of the course enables students to re-join if they have to interrupt their learning for personal reasons. Initially, the students come for half days, from 1:00 till 4:00, as their medication makes it difficult to concentrate in the morning. This is then built up over the year to full days by the end. This is because many of the students want to stay in college, and the jump from a half to full day is too much. During the summer holidays, a course is also run for these students, to keep them engaged so that they return to college in the new year. Many of the students end up doing vocational courses at the college the following year, so this is important.

The students are supported by high levels of mentoring and Information, Advice and Guidance. They are also entered on the college database (which identifies each student's needs and required support), where their level of risk is also flagged. They receive a normal college assessment, supplemented by information from Headspace, identifying what personal support they need. This is important for students who progress to vocational courses for the next year, with the staff being made aware of where they come from. The support also extends to the support panel, where vulnerable students are referred to following behaviour that would usually result in disciplinary procedures or expulsion. This offers an extra layer of support to help these vulnerable students stay in college.

The course is growing and evolving at the moment. Funding for the educational side comes from LSC core funding, and for the therapeutic side from the primary care trust.

Some of the earlier problems have been overcome, as the course is in its second year. These were that the educational tutors became too involved with the therapeutic side last year, meaning the educational side suffered. This year there has been more separation, and adjustments have been made to the length of the day to make the transition to a full day more effective.

There are still problems which need to be overcome, one being that some parents are unwilling to let the college see their child's section 140 (a Connexions assessment of their educational and training needs), as they feel it would cause discrimination against their child. For the college, sight of the section 140 assessment would help it to provide appropriate support for the child from day one, rather than having to work out their needs over time.

This course has overcome its initial problems, and with the partners in the programme being committed to maintaining it, the future looks healthy. The college comments that course participants "start as patients and finish as students".

For further details please contact Sue Ward on 023 9231 3373 or sue.ward@highbury.ac.uk

3. Discussion

- 3.1 We begin by reviewing the case studies to draw out lessons from them, then consider the wider issues raised.

Lessons from the case studies

Alternative start dates

- 3.2 The most striking lesson is very straightforward: **alternative start dates work, not just for traditionally flexible programmes like Entry 2 Employment (E2E), but also for mainstream vocational courses.** Young people do not need to start their course in September, and providers can, and do, design workable systems to manage the process.
- 3.3 The MidKent College case study shows this clearly. The college experimented with January starts in 2008, sorted some initial problems and continued confidently with a much larger group of 75 students in January 2009. The three main features of the MidKent approach are these:
- a planned approach, to ensure that funding is available, both for core course costs and for learning support;
 - active marketing, jointly with Connexions, with a special mini-prospectus for January starts, and events tailored to potential recruits;
 - provision of additional support to meet the expected needs of this particular group of students.
- 3.4 It is worth pointing-out that this follows exactly what happens with September starts: planning is required to a different timescale for January starts, but the nature of that planning is entirely familiar. College staff ask themselves the same questions as they do for September starts, such as: is there a need, and an opportunity? can we fund it? who do we target? how do we attract them? do we work with others to do so? what do we offer? how do we package it? what additional support should we provide? And so on. Some of the answers differ a little from the September start thought process, but the questions are identical.
- 3.5 A further feature of the approach taken by MidKent is worth making explicit: it is that the offer to these young people was presented positively, and not as an awkward second-best for people who did not fit the norm. Research would be needed to be sure, but it seems likely that this positive approach appealed to the target audience.

- 3.6 The MidKent case study is also instructive for the insight it offers into the developing nature of the flexibility process. The college dipped its toe into the water for January 2008, learning some lessons and gaining confidence. Emboldened by its success, it did two things:
- it set up a larger group of January starters for 2009 (aiming for 50 and recruiting 75). And with this larger group of starters in January 2009 came new opportunities. Only eight of the 75 starters had to join infill classes (which are usually agreed to be less satisfactory), because the much larger group meant that whole new classes could be established;
 - it also introduced much greater flexibility in starts for its traditional September starts, challenging the usual absolute cut-off date for course admission and allowing individuals to join in the first few weeks of the autumn term. This, too, needed planning, and the provision of educational and tutorial support so that students starting late could catch up.
- 3.7 It is too early to know how the success rates of these later-starting students compares with their September-starting peers, but it is important to know what the position is, so it is worth further research. We have not found research exploring either the relative success rates of infill students or of non-standard (eg January) starters, or the pedagogical and learner support issues raised (such as how best to manage the catch-up process for infill students). We recommend LSC to encourage Ofsted to do this research, or to encourage participating college staff to do it through the practitioner research programme run by the Learning and Skills Improvement Service (LSIS).
- 3.8 That MidKent College deepened and extended its involvement in providing flexibility after its initial trial is encouraging. It is all the more so that the college is now talking in terms which suggests that this new approach is becoming embedded within its thought processes and its ways of working. If that is the case, it is likely to lead to further innovation to the benefit of young people who are NEET.
- 3.9 The Highbury College January starts case study (number 2) shows a number of similar features – and thereby offers reassurance that this approach can, and does, work in quite different colleges in different labour markets. Highbury carefully holds back some of its travel support funds, for example, to be sure that there is enough available to help January starters, and it uses its database of students with additional support needs to ensure that these later starting students get the additional learning support to which they are entitled (and which a high proportion need).
- 3.10 The Fareham College case study (number 3) similarly shows the value of targeted marketing. Although the college's construction course is set up for continuous recruitment, the college ran a January Open Day to attract students to it.

- 3.11 The Fareham example is of particular interest because it is a vocational course which allows what is, in effect, continual recruitment¹. The course was set up to attract young people in Fareham and Gosport who are NEET, and it allows them to sign up throughout the year. Anyone accepted onto the course must go through a health and safety induction, given the nature of construction trades, but thereafter they get a formal start date which is typically a few days away.
- 3.12 The Entry to Employment programme at Ealing, Hammersmith and West London College illustrates the practical difficulties in managing truly continual recruitment. There are now twelve starts a year: every month. The college began by offering weekly starts, but found that to be unworkable (partly because of the difficulty of getting the paperwork through from Connexions in time), so switched to monthly in the second year it ran the programme.
- 3.13 The college runs an open day every Friday for anyone who might be interested in the programme. This gives the team an opportunity to explain the course and encourage interest in it, and also to get initial paperwork out of the way. Where someone is interested and has to wait for the next start date, and although it's never more than a month away, the team tries to maintain that interest, for example with messages reminding them what they'll be doing. The course leader explains that she tries to strike the right balance between keeping interest warm and helping young people to "develop the skill to be patient", conscious that many are looking for instant gratification. She adds: "it's rare to lose people" who are waiting.
- 3.14 The private sector HIT Training example (see box) shows that such flexibility is not confined to the college sector (and also shows a provider which sees real potential in young people who are NEET, not just problems).

HIT Training: Quarterly starts with a private sector provider

HIT Training is a national company working in the hospitality sector which starts young people on its pre-apprenticeship programmes in London and the West Midlands every quarter, in March, June, September and December.

Although the company's primary purpose is to recruit able young people who will meet the needs of its core customers – employers – HIT Training accepted the invitation from Connexions and designs this provision for young people who are NEET. It is in two phases:

1. an initial three months at 16 hours per week (during which learners can claim Education Maintenance Allowance), with content focusing on employability, much like the E2E programme, supplemented by hygiene and safety training and employer familiarisation visits;
2. a further five months in full-time employment at 40 hours per week, with HIT

¹ We found no example of a provider willing to start young people literally on demand, or even next day, because of the practical (administrative) difficulties - and perhaps to test applicants' motivation even a little.

Training guaranteeing each student a work placement from within its network of employers. Learners are classed as apprentices, earning a salary of £80pw, and studying for an NVQ Level 2. On completion, they can take up a full-time position with the employer with which they have been placed.

Though HIT Training says candidly:

We don't want to simply help Connexions reduce their numbers of NEETs: we want to provide good quality staff to employers in the hospitality sector

staff clearly get real satisfaction from helping young people who are NEET and have adjusted their approach to suit these learners' circumstances and learning styles (for example, making a room available for those for whom private study at home is unrealistic). HIT was disappointed with the 80% completion rate of the first cohort and has pushed the rate to 92% with the second.

Unfortunately, the programme has recently been suspended because of the recession: too few employers are hiring.

- 3.15 The National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) study which we consider in the literature review² attempts to categorise different sub-groups within the overall NEET group. NFER argues that roughly two-fifths of young people who are NEET can be described as 'open to learning' (those who are most likely to re-engage in learning or training and who tend to have a higher level of attainment in the education system). NFER describes another two-fifths as 'sustained NEETs' (characterised by a negative educational experience to date and subsequent poor attainment). It labels the final fifth 'the undecided NEET group': they have similar attainment levels to the 'open to learning NEETs' but are dissatisfied with the range of options available to them. The evidence from HIT supports NFER's research that many young people who are NEET are indeed, 'open to learning' and can achieve mainstream success when given the opportunity.
- 3.16 Provider staff with whom we have discussed infill for vocational provision have commented that it works best where learning is modular and different students can learn topics in a different order from each other. They think it works much less well with courses which are "linear", ie where each week's work builds on what was taught the week before. They therefore explain that infill works well in broad-based construction courses, where learners can try different trades in turn, and the order in which they do so is unimportant, and poorly in an academic A-level course. (We should add that staff in one provider told us that infill does not work for workshop-based courses because of the need for prior health and safety induction: the Fareham example shows that others have successfully overcome this difficulty).

² Appendix B

- 3.17 The Abingdon and Witney College case study (number 4) shows another example of a college making a success of infill into vocational courses. The driving force in this case is a clear commitment by the college not to turn away anyone who wants to learn there if it can possibly avoid it. Finding a solution for any individual is easier if the college is below target and can therefore source LSC funds, but the college's commitment goes beyond this. It has therefore set up the seven step "Steps Programme" of flexible provision for those whose needs might broadly be described as "pre-vocational", ranging from the first step, for people with severe learning difficulties and disabilities, the seventh, a fairly standard Level 1 pre-vocational preparation course.
- 3.18 The programme offers infill at step 6, the vocational choices programme, which is designed for the vocationally-undecided: a key NEET group. It is full time and modular and involves vocational tasters combined with literacy and numeracy, and designed to provide progression route to step 7.
- 3.19 The NACRO case study (number 5) shifts the focus from a largely pre-determined "course" to something much more flexibly-designed and personally-tailored – in many ways typical of the more flexible approach classically associated with Third Sector providers. This example is funded through the European Social Fund, which has long played a particular role in the UK supporting provision which complements the more structured mainstream, within a framework which still focuses on outputs, but defines them more broadly.
- 3.20 As so often, the staff aim to strike a balance between what individual young people *want*, and their own judgement about what they *need* – but the framework within which that balance is struck is one which allows a good deal of flexibility to design a programme where the compromises are struck for an individual, rather than for a group.
- 3.21 The purpose of the programme is very clearly to get young people into work³, so use of qualifications is pragmatic, focusing on National Open College Network (OCN) qualifications, because they are less daunting than NVQs, yet also respectable and respected. (OCN courses should become better known when the Qualifications and Curriculum Framework is fully working from 2010, and they are recognised as one of the building blocks).

³ It is worth noting that NACRO, like TNG (case study 10), does not currently distinguish between 'jobs' and 'jobs with training' when it tries to get young people into work.

- 3.22 The NACRO case study also shows the importance of balance between the structured processes of helping young people to get a job, and the qualifications which might help them, and the necessarily much less tidy processes associated with providing personal support to people who can be very needy. Some young people on NACRO's Training into Employment course are accompanied to interviews, for example, which is no doubt hugely valuable to most of them, but also hugely expensive. One-to-one support of this nature enables the "provider" to shape everything they say, and do, to their best judgement about an individual and what would be helpful to them – and done well that is bound to make it more likely that individuals will succeed. But one-to-one support is inevitably expensive.
- 3.23 Southampton City College (case study 6) is an example of a college which has reached the same conclusion about the value of personal support, and made arrangements with the city's Youth Service for them to provide it. It's not a cost-free approach, but it is a good example of a college looking for more imaginative and flexible ways of providing a service than assuming that it has to be done internally.
- 3.24 The college also sub-contracts some of its work to well-regarded local charity The Wheatsheaf Trust, achieving flexibility in use of resources by buying-in its expertise when it needs it without having to carry the cost of having such expertise permanently on its books.
- 3.25 Both the Southampton City College and Milton Keynes College examples (case study 7), as with Abingdon and Witney College (case study 4), show how flexibility can be enhanced by considering opportunities for young people as part of a linked chain, and not just isolated courses. As the well-known example of the transition to secondary school shows, managing the transition for young people into a programme, and off it again at the other end, can be really important in ensuring that their experience is a successful one.
- 3.26 Oxford and Cherwell Valley's Impact project (case study 11) shows how the transition can be managed well from school (a dedicated programme for 14-16 years olds) to college.

Find Out About Learning Programme

The Association of Learning Providers in Surrey co-ordinates this county-wide project designed to re-engage disengaged 16-19 year olds. It is a two week, 16 hour, programme, providing fun activities and exercises and practical career guidance and assessment which has been running since September 2008 and has so far engaged over 150 young people. It is designed to encourage young people to progress to Entry 2 Employment and pre-apprenticeship programmes, apprenticeships, further education or employment.

- 3.27 A number of providers running flexible entry E2E courses commented to us about the risk at the other end of the programme, when they let go. Having carefully arranged flexible programmes of typically 22 weeks and tailored what they offer to individuals' needs, providers' influence over what happens afterwards is limited. If a young person leaving an E2E course does not have a job, they can have a long wait until September for the next courses. Colleges which offer a chain of courses are therefore better placed to ensure that young people do not fall into a period when they are NEET (and sometimes 'NEET again') when they finish their well-designed and tailored course. (For completeness we ought to add that it may not be in a young person's best interests – to say nothing of the taxpayers' – for them to keep moving from one course to another: at some point they should stop and get a job).
- 3.28 The five E2E case studies (6-10) show a number of common features and the benefits of making provision flexible for young people who need to be encouraged back into learning, or shown a route which catches and channels their enthusiasms better. These programmes offer:
- as much tailoring ('personalisation') of the curriculum as is compatible with (a) the professional judgement of the staff in balancing needs and wants, and (b) the available budget;
 - a willingness to use a wide range of qualifications in order to motivate participants. Again there is a trade-off, between want (getting a young person to believe that any qualification is both attainable and appealing) and need (offering qualifications which some currency with employers, or in opening access to the next stage in continuing education);
 - a mix of vocational preparation (tasters, and work experience where possible), functional skills centred round literacy and numeracy, and personal and social skills such as healthy eating, relationships and sexual health, and usually with a work focus such as information and advice about the labour market). Some of this (eg Oxford and Cherwell Valley College) is clearly mapped against the five Every Child Matters outcomes, but for the rest the central design principle appears to be providing the right mix for individual participants;
 - modes of attendance which enable participants to fit their learning round other commitments (which is inevitably easier if the course takes 12 hours a week than if it takes 20);
 - a deep commitment to helping participants as individuals, backed-up by better-than-usual resources (typically more adults per learner than would be the case with a mainstream vocational course).

- 3.29 The lesson from E2E for mainstream vocational programmes is that mainstream providers in the public, private and Third sectors have shown that they can run flexible provision with a high degree of personalisation – though much is run with rather higher unit costs than mainstream vocational courses.
- 3.30 Our three remaining case studies feature provision for young people with readily-identified particular needs: those leaving care, young parents and young people with mental health issues. The core of what they get is very similar to the E2E programmes, with additions to suit learners' circumstances, such as independent living skills, and confidence and self esteem workshops for those leaving care.
- 3.31 The LSC-initiated Teenage Pregnancy Learning Programme (case study 13) offers a particularly interesting example of flexible funding tailored to the needs of young people with unquestionably atypical needs. Young mothers need to take a break from their learning when their babies are born so any funding regime which seeks to encourage them to learn both before and after must find a way of accommodating this inevitable break in continuity.
- 3.32 What has happened here, very positively, is that the LSC has followed through the logic that it wants these women too to continue their learning and accepted the principle that learning does not have to be continuous to be fundable, so long as agreed objectives are pursued. It is the equivalent of replacing an employee's contract requiring attendance of 37 hours per week with an 'annual hours' work contract, defining the job by what work is to be done, not by the time set aside for it. In the case of TPLP, the cost to the taxpayer should be no greater than a conventional course and the opportunities for the learner should be no less. Though it has not been tested in these terms, results measured as learning outcomes will surely be better than if the young women concerned had been unable to continue their studies after giving birth, and had to start again on another course.
- 3.33 The programme is small-scale, and dependent on funds which have so far been agreed annually: it may not be possible to continue it as it stands. But the TPLP has done an important job not just for those who participate in it, but also through establishing that learning does not have to be continuous to be fundable. Other groups of young people who are NEET would benefit from application of that principle. Many lead messy lives and a funding model which assumes that all programme participants are "learners", able to give real commitment to their learning misses the fact that for many learning is something which can be fitted in only when other circumstances allow. A "time out" model which enables them to maintain their commitment to learning, but with a break, maybe even breaks, to allow them to sort out other problems – such as unexpected homelessness – may well keep more young people in learning, and prevent them becoming NEET.

- 3.34 In considering the needs of particular sub-groups, it is worth noting here that we have not looked at what might be termed “emergency flexibility” of the kind provided by some Youth Offending Teams keen to find an immediate alternative to custody as a first step back onto a more positive path for those in trouble with the law. Good work is clearly being done in this relatively small but important corner of the NEET field, but further exploration would raise quite different issues about effective partnership between education and youth justice agencies. These are well worth separate study but would be a distraction here.

Why is there not more flexibility?

- 3.35 It is clear that many providers across the South East, and beyond, have found effective ways of running provision for young people who would otherwise be NEET which encompasses significant flexibility designed to encourage them to join, to stay and to succeed.

- 3.36 The Government’s commitment to flexibility as part of its NEET Strategy is also clear:

We will now seek to increase the flexibility of the system to enable more young people to start programmes during the course of the academic year ... It is particularly important that we ensure that young people can start courses in January, which has historically been a moment when some young people drop out, having made a poor choice in September. Some colleges are already making flexible offers of this sort.

- 3.37 Why, then do some providers seem reluctant to follow the lead shown by some? We have identified two broad reasons:

a. reluctance related to the flexibility of availability of funding;

- many young people who are NEET offer a much riskier business proposition than mainstream students. It is not so much that they are commonly (though by no means always) costlier to train: it is that the funding model poses risks to providers which many see as lop-sided. Everyone understands that many young people who are NEET cost more to train than mainstream young people, for two reasons: (a) many are less likely to get qualifications at Level 2 and above, which are the easiest to fund through LSC, and (b) many require ‘additional learning support’. The LSC has therefore long made funding available for more costly young people (though there is no guarantee that funding will be available).

The risk, however, is that if providers *under*-perform (which is more likely with these young people: they are harder to predict), they risk both the current year's income and reputational damage which might affect future years' income, but if they *over*-perform there is no certainty that they will be rewarded for doing so, despite the high priority given to the NEET group. There is no LSC financial incentive to take on young people who are NEET and in need of a flexible response – nor any disincentive for not doing so. The financially prudent thing to do is to set a safe target and stick to it.

- some providers also indicated to us a relatively new anxiety as the current economic difficulties put new pressure on public finances, namely that whereas in the past there was often a good chance that the LSC would provide additional funds for “over-delivery”, they feared that the LSC would now be much less able to do so: ie the perceived risk associated with deliberate over-delivery (taking on young people who are NEET, over and above contract) is now much greater than it was.
- the mainstream funding model effectively produces a calculation that a certain minimum class size is required to make a particular course financially sound for a provider to run. Where a provider builds in a safety margin that margin would commonly be greater for young people who are NEET (especially if the whole group are NEET) because they are less predictable. That is fine when building courses for a September start, but much harder to achieve at other times of the year when numbers are smaller.

b. reluctance related to practical management issues:

- staffing requirements are different for many learners who are NEET, not so much in volume terms (which is essentially a funding issue), but because different skills and personal qualities are required – and all the more so if additional flexibility is called for, as the MidKent College case study indicates. Finding the right quality staff is not straightforward, and is best done on the basis of long-term commitment to this group of students.
- some staff are reluctant to work with young people who are NEET. Some of that reluctance is uninformed and based on assumptions that all ‘NEETs’ are the same; some of it is conscientious, based on a well-informed assessment of how different and how difficult the job can be (not everyone is suitable for the role, however well-trained they are), and all of it reduces the flexibility which managers have to deploy their staff team as they wish.
- non-standard start dates, such as January, and infill into existing classes, are harder to manage.

- 3.38 Perception is all. Some providers have considered their options and pressed on anyway to set up flexible provision for those who are NEET, indicating that there are no insuperable barriers here. Many staff are deeply committed to this group of young people and keen to be as helpful as possible to them, and therefore creative in finding ways of being helpful.
- 3.39 Other providers will no doubt be looking ahead to local authorities taking over funding responsibility for young people when the LSC closes, and the later obligation to find places for all under-18s, and considering how to gear up for greater flexibility before they are required to do so: we have not sought to identify any provider's future plans.
- 3.40 In all of this it is important to remember that the three strands of the Government's NEET Strategy –
- an excellent universal offer for all young people to prevent them from disengaging;
 - an efficient service for getting back into education or work-based learning those young people who become NEET but have no specific barriers to engagement;
 - more targeted and intensive support for those young people with particular barriers to engaging with the system;
- begin with that commitment to “an excellent universal offer”. No modern definition of good educational practice would commend *in*flexible provision, and almost everything in this report focusing on the learning of young people who are NEET would also be valuable for the learning of young people who are *not* NEET.
- 3.41 That is why we began our discussion with vocational courses, and why we have emphasised that young people are not inherently “NEET” – ie a homogenous group, of lesser ability, to be treated as a class apart – but temporarily NEET, varying hugely in ability and potential.

Summary: what is flexibility?

- 3.42 Taking a September start as the norm, we have identified four different types of flexibility in start dates, as follows:
- January starts – or starts at other fixed points in the year than September (which could be either learners starting exactly the same course as they would have started the previous September, or a truncated version of it, leading to a partial qualification);
 - infill into existing courses;

- roll-on roll-off;
- monthly starts (which is effectively 'managed roll-on roll-off').

3.43 Flexible starting dates are, however, by no means the only form of flexibility helpful to young people who are NEET. We would add:

- preventing drop-out from a course through tailoring provision;
- preventing drop-out from a course through tailoring support;
- allowing interrupted participation in learning (like the Teenage Pregnancy Learning Programme);
- setting a course within a chain of linked provision, so that young people do not 'fall between the cracks';
- preventing drop-out from subsequent employment by ensuring that course participants improve (a) their literacy and numeracy, and (b) their employability skills;
- setting-up a rapid response to redundancy and unemployment.

3.44 It is not necessary to challenge the whole orthodoxy of academic years starting in September to acknowledge that this orthodoxy need not apply to everyone all the time. Though "personalised learning" has become something of a mantra in recent years, turning that good ambition into effective reality is proving challenging. It is clear from our research that many providers have found ways of making flexible provision available for young people who are NEET, and are committed to looking for further ways of doing so.

4. Recommendations

4.1 We offer a small number of recommendations designed to support the LSC's ambition to promote greater flexibility.

- ⇒ Recommendation 1: the LSC should promote the case studies of flexible practice to show providers these examples of what others are already doing. It would also be worth showing them to local authorities, who are taking up strategic responsibility for ensuring that the NEET problem is tackled effectively, and also to those who influence NEET provision, such as local 14-19 partnerships (which are becoming more influential with current organisational changes) and the two main providers' representative bodies, the Association of South East Colleges (AoSEC) and the Association of Learning Providers in the South East.
- ⇒ Recommendation 2: the LSC should consider a more balanced approach to risk-sharing so that providers feel more confident in taking on mid-year young people who are NEET who are over and above agreed targets.
- ⇒ Recommendation 3: the LSC should consider whether it is possible to extend the "time out" funding model piloted in the Teenage Pregnancy Learning Programme (ie where an individual's entitlement does not require a continuous period of learning, and allows a break) to other groups of NEET young people.
- ⇒ Recommendation 4: the LSC should ask providers whether they can identify any further steps which the LSC itself could take which would make it more likely that they will adopt flexible practices.
- ⇒ Recommendation 5: now that it is clear that flexibility is both possible and widespread, the task is to ensure that it is combined with excellent results for students. The LSC should therefore invite Ofsted to research the pedagogic and support issues surrounding learners who start their courses at non-standard times of the year, with the intention that good practice might be identified and codified.
- ⇒ Recommendation 6: the LSC should also encourage providers' staff to do their own research through the practitioner research programme run by the Learning and Skills Improvement Service (LSIS).
- ⇒ Recommendation 7: the LSC should encourage LSIS and Lifelong Learning UK (LLUK: the Sector Skills Council for the lifelong learning sector), to consider what training might be appropriate to support flexibility for NEET young people, focusing at two levels: managers, and those who work directly with young people.

Appendix A: Data Review

In this section (originally prepared as a working paper at an early stage of this project) we present the available data regarding young people who are NEET. This data includes national and regional data, numbers who are NEET, targets set by local authorities and reason for young people being NEET.

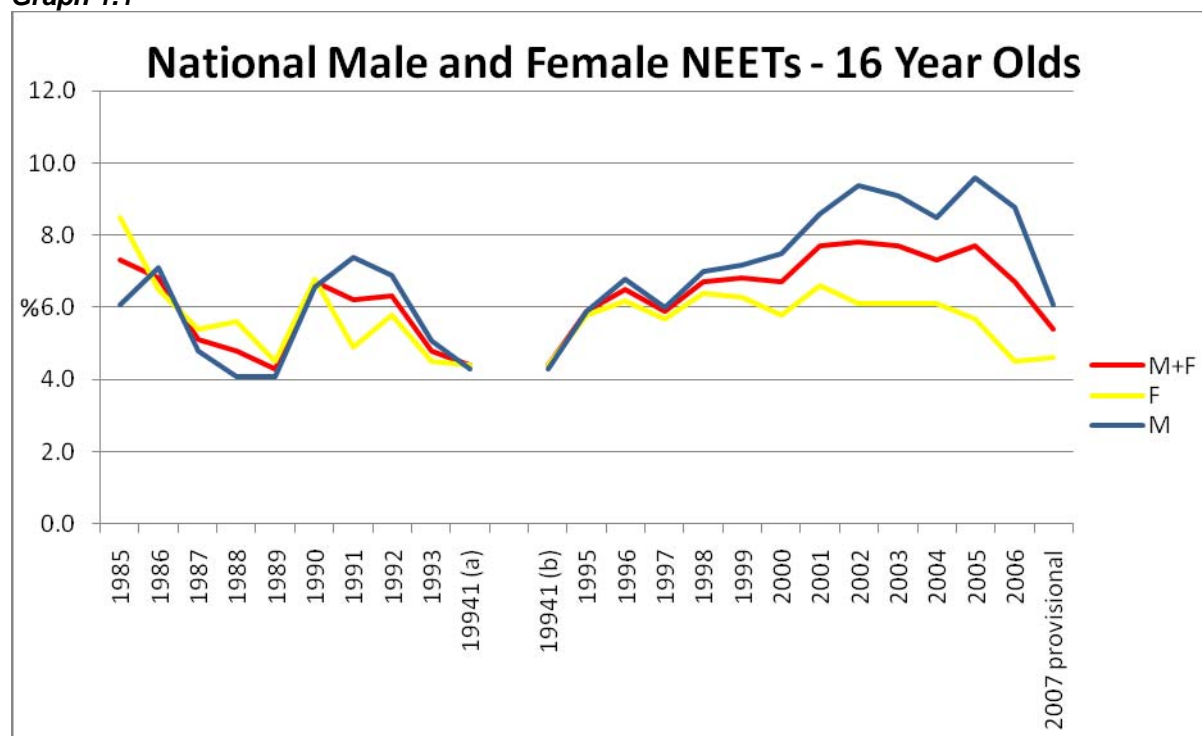
It is important to note that the two main sources of data work in different ways and should not be compared. The national time series uses Statistical First Release (SFR) data, from which the Connexions regional data differs in the following ways:

- Connexions' Client Caseload Information System (CCIS) records all young people who have completed compulsory education, and who are aged 16, 17 or 18, whilst the SFR covers young people based on their age at the start of the academic year.
- CCIS data does not record young people as NEET who are taking a known gap year, or who are in custody.
- CCIS data relates only to young people known to the service – primarily those who were educated in the maintained sector in England. By contrast, the SFR covers the whole 16-18 year old population.⁴
- The SFR data is also unreliable at regional level, because of how it is collected. For this reason, we will use the SFR data for national statistics, and for the regional analysis we will use the CCIS data.

First, we illustrate the NEET situation over time. To do this, we have used SFR data going back to 1985. These figures show the NEET proportion in each age cohort, broken down by gender, at a national level. (There is a break in this data at 1994, due to changes in the way the data was measured).

⁴ Information on differences between data from DCSF website:

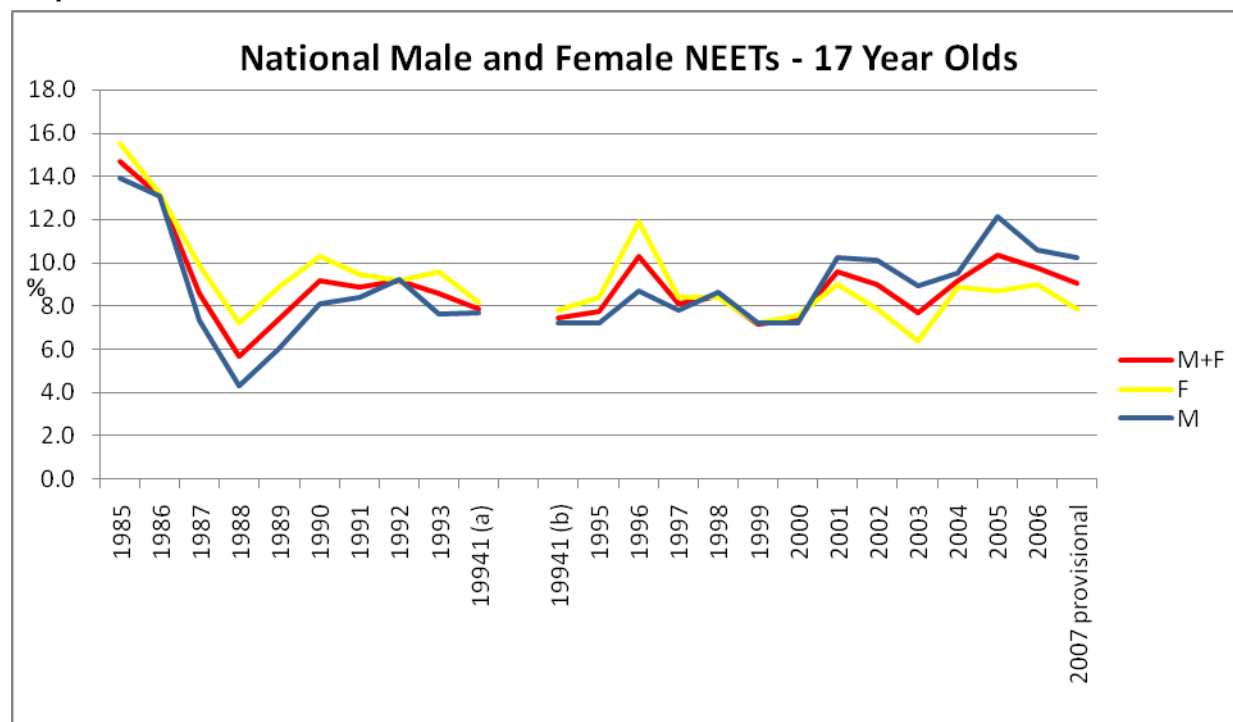
<http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/14-19/index.cfm?go=site.home&sid=42&pid=343&lid=337&ctype=Text&ptype=Single>

Graph 1.1

SFR data, from DCSF *Participation in Education, Training and Employment by 16-18 Year Olds in England*.

Graph 1.1 shows the proportion of 16 year olds who are NEET. Since 1995, the proportion of young men who are NEET has been higher than young women. The gap had been widening until 2006, although the provisional 2007 figures suggest a dramatic closing of this gap⁵. There is no clear pattern before the 1994 break. The overall trend since 1994 has been slightly upward, although since 2005 there has been a seemingly rapid decline. Before 1994 the general trend was that the proportion of 16 year old NEETs was in decline, although in 1990 there was a large leap.

⁵ Rather unhelpfully, 2007 SFR data is still the most recent publicly available.

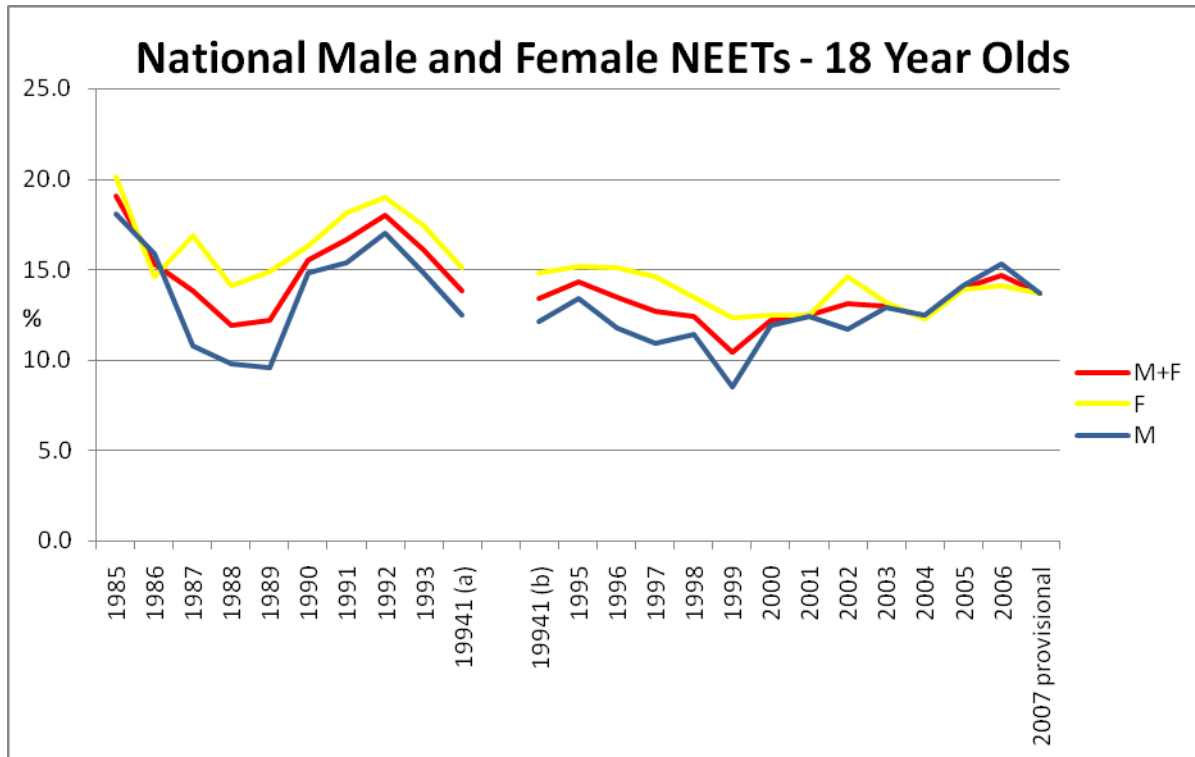
Graph 1.2

SFR data, from DCSF Participation in Education, Training and Employment by 16-18 Year Olds in England.

Graph 1.2 shows the proportion of 17 year olds who are NEETs. The trend here is slightly different, with the proportion in both genders higher than that of 16 year olds. Since 2001, there has been a higher proportion of male NEETs than females, but before this, using both measures, it had either an even number of males and females or a higher proportion of females. The general trend is similar to that for 16 year olds, with a slight increase since 1994 and a general decrease from 1985. However, this decrease was concentrated between 1985 and 1988, and between 1988 and 1994 there was also a general increase.

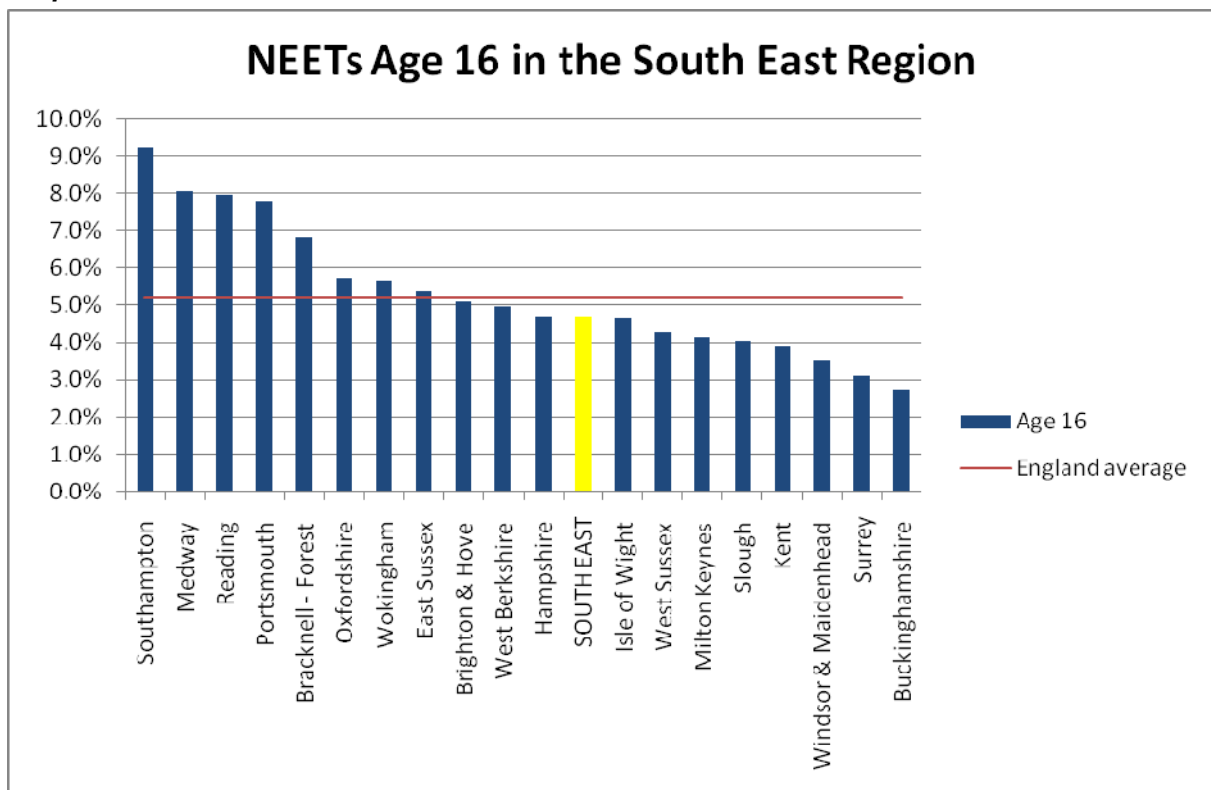
Graph 1.3 shows the proportion of 18 year olds who are NEET. This again is higher than the previous age range, meaning that as age increases so does the proportion of NEETs. However, in this group the pattern is different, despite the general trend being a slight increase in the percentage of NEETs since the 1994 break, and a decrease before that, mainly concentrated in the mid 1980s. However, there are only three years where there are more male than female NEETs, and despite these being recent years, the provisional data for 2007 has both genders at the same percentage of 13.7%.

Graph 1.3



SFR data, from DCSF Participation in Education, Training and Employment by 16-18 Year Olds in England.

Graph 1.4

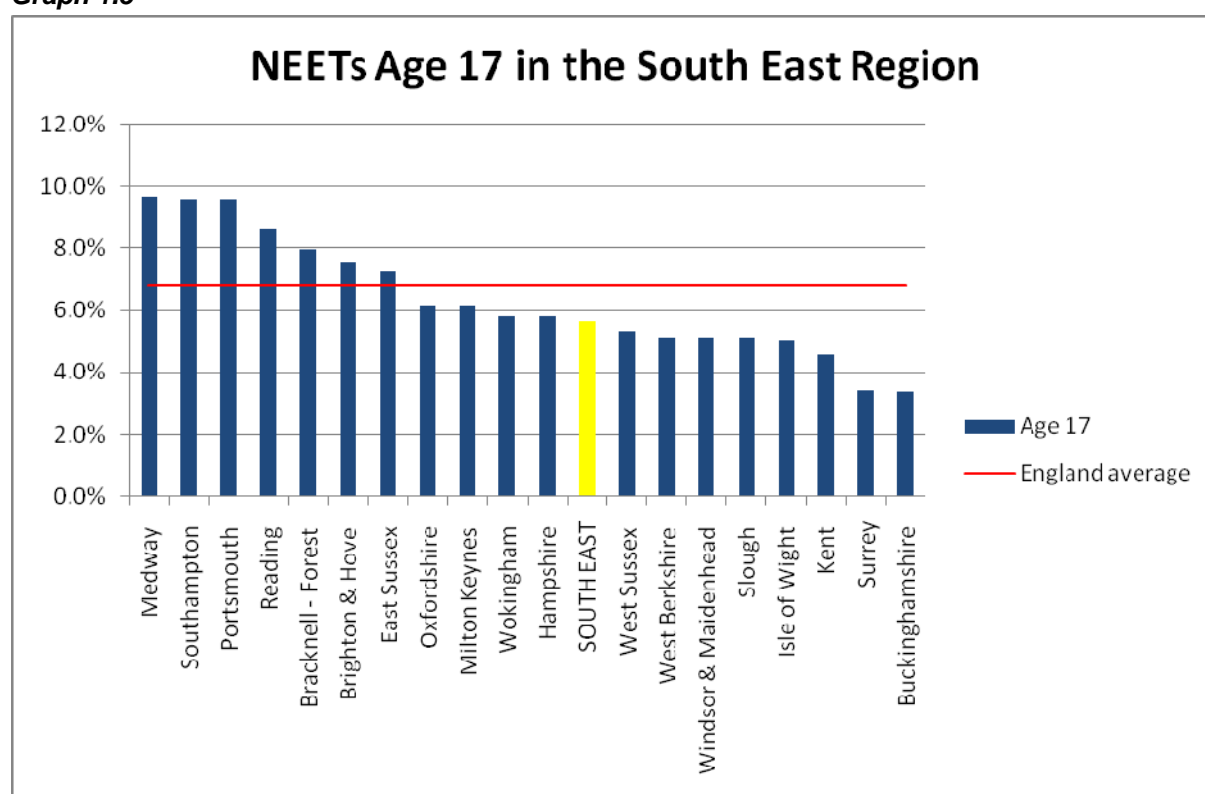


NCCIS data, from Connexions and LSC South East, November 2008.

In graph 1.4 we show the percentage of NEETs at local authority level, which are compared to the South East and national averages. This highlights the fact that the South East level is below the national average, and that there is a lot of difference between the local authorities in the region. For example, in Southampton the level of 16 year old NEETs is 9.3%, whereas in Buckinghamshire it is 2.7%. The areas with the highest levels of 16 year old NEETS are mainly, but not exclusively, urban areas.

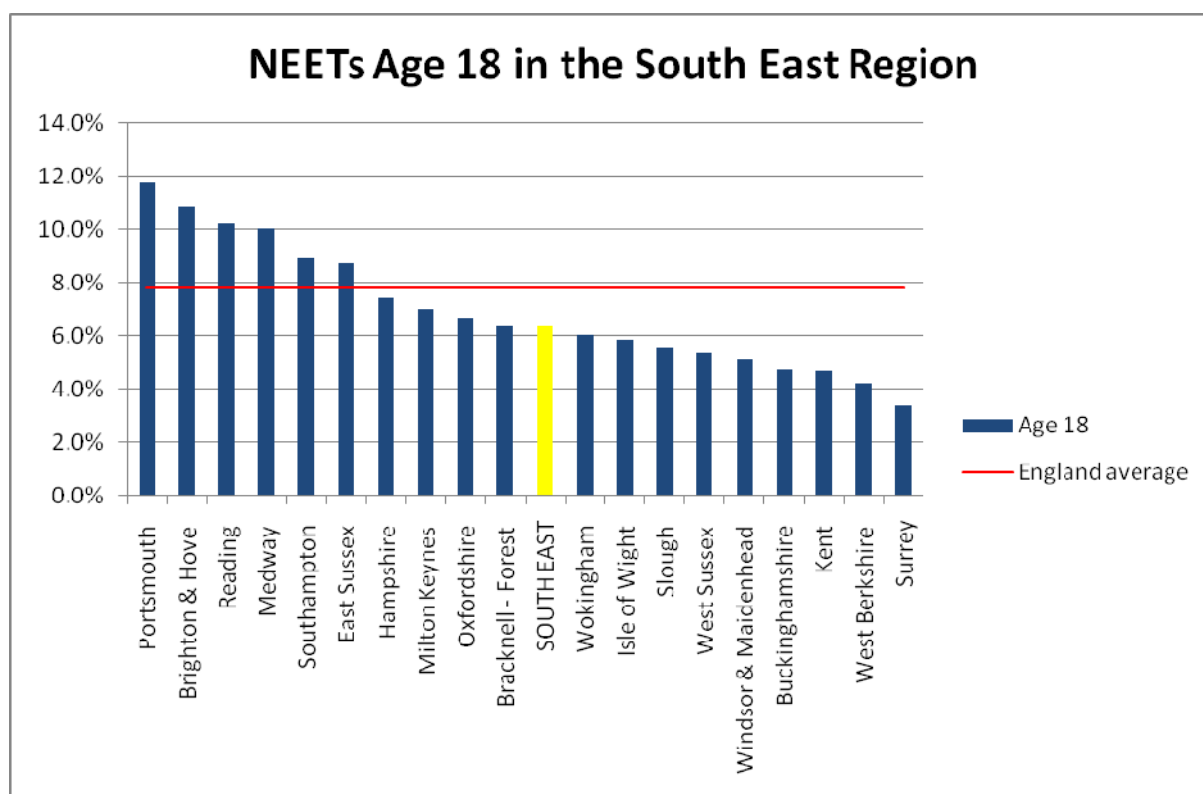
Graph 1.5 shows the same information as Graph 1.4, for 17 year olds. Again, the South East average is below that of England as a whole, and urban areas are predominately those above the national average. Buckinghamshire again has the lowest level of NEETs, at 3.4%. The graph also shows that the percentage of NEETs is higher at this age than at the age of 16 in every local authority, as well as for the South East and England averages.

Graph 1.5



NCCIS data, from Connexions and LSC South East, November 2008.

Graph 1.6



NCCIS data, from Connexions and LSC South East, November 2008.

Graph 1.6 shows the average for England and South East, as well as for the local authorities, percentage of NEETs at age 18. This follows a similar pattern to the previous two graphs, with the average for the South East lower than that of England, and the areas which have a higher proportion of NEETs than the national average being mainly urban areas. Also, in most areas, the positive correlation between the percentage of NEETs and age continues, with only Bracknell Forest and Southampton showing a decline between the ages of 17 and 18.

Overall, the data shows which parts of the South East are above and below the England and South East averages. The areas with the highest proportion of NEETs in the 16-18 cohort are:

- Portsmouth
- Medway
- Southampton
- Reading
- Brighton and Hove (mainly in the age 18 cohort).

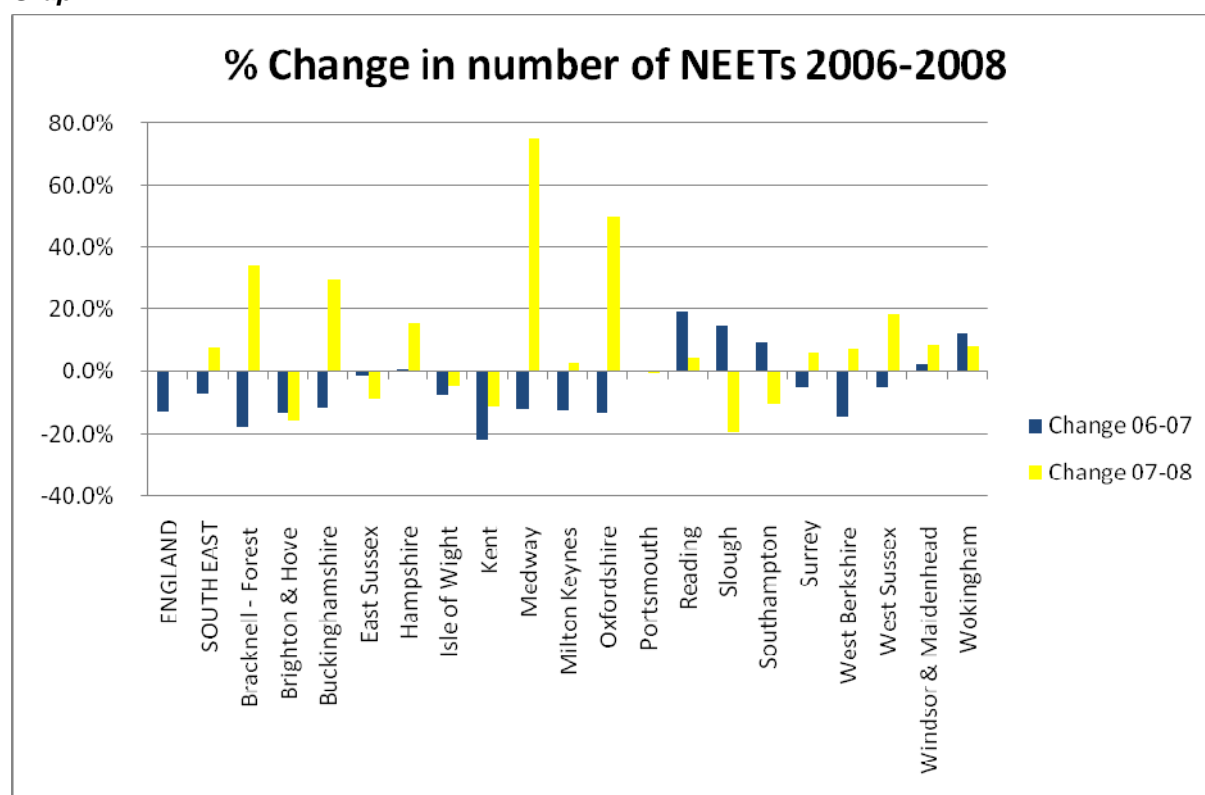
Conversely, the areas with the lowest proportion of NEETs are:

- Surrey
- Buckinghamshire

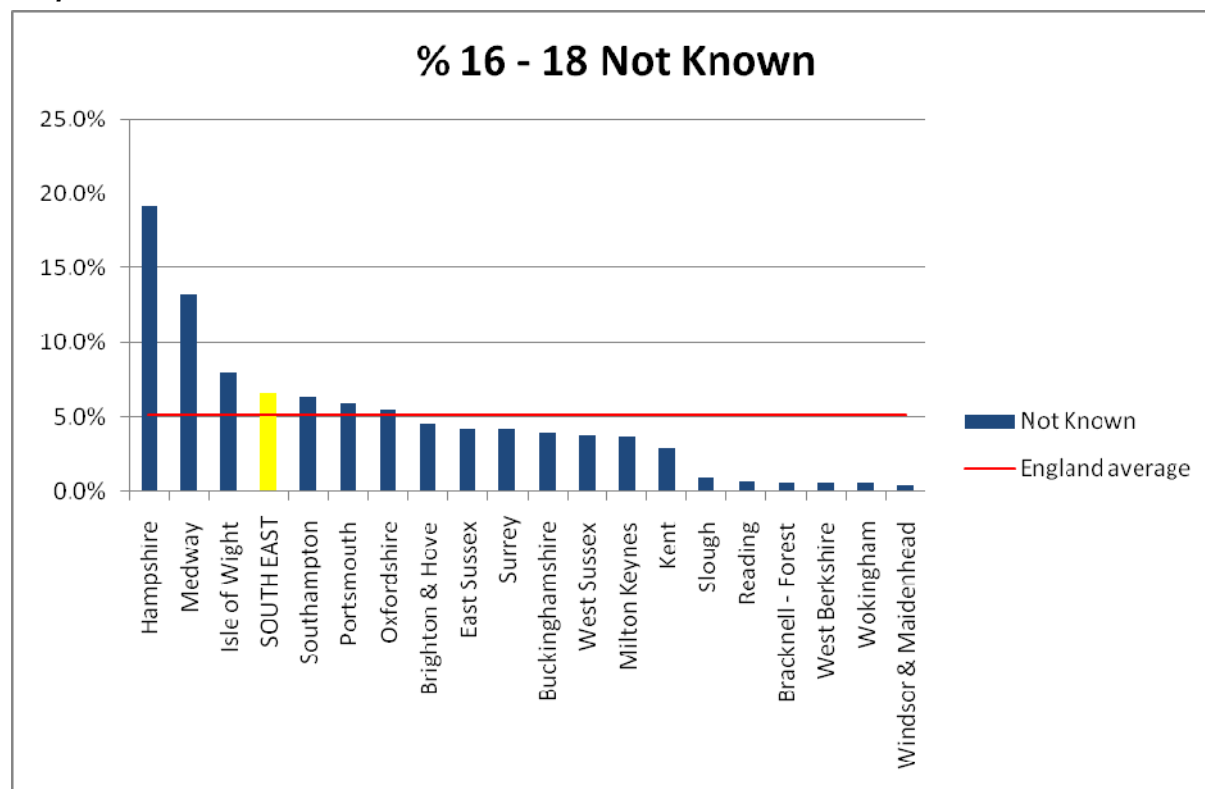
- Kent
- Windsor and Maidenhead
- West Berkshire.

Graph 1.7 shows how the percentage of NEETs has changed in each local authority area since 2006. There have been significant fluctuations in some areas, with the proportion of NEETs in others remaining fairly stable. The widest variations were seen in Medway and Oxfordshire, with both having sizeable decreases after one year, and then huge increases between 2007 and 2008. The areas which managed to decrease numbers over both periods were: Brighton and Hove, East Sussex, Isle of Wight and Kent. Reading and Wokingham both had increases in the level of NEETs.

Graph 1.7



NCCIS data, from Connexions and LSC South East, November 2008.

Graph 1.8

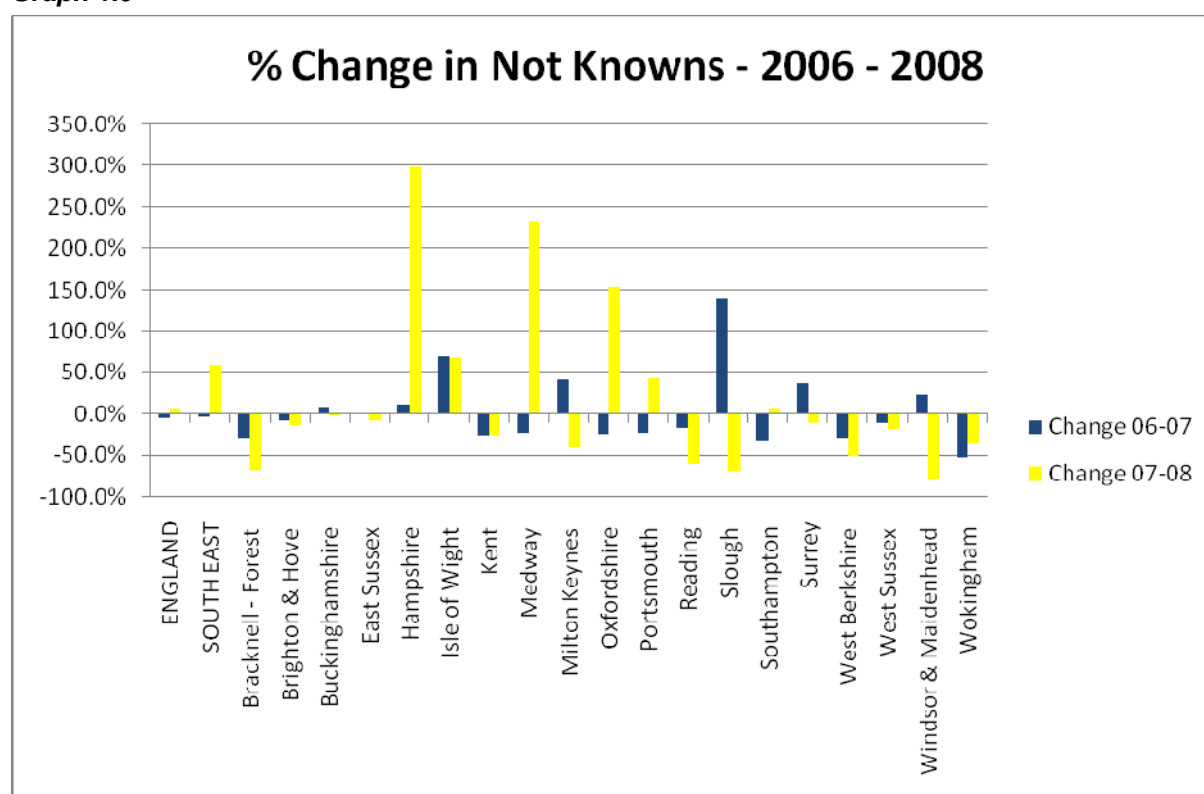
NCCIS data, from Connexions and LSC South East, November 2008.

Graph 1.8 shows the number of young people who are classed as ‘unknown’. This means that Connexions staff have been unable to contact these individuals, and have no information about what they are doing. This group is potentially more worrying than the NEET group recorded by Connexions: if a person is known to Connexions they are receiving some advice on education or careers, whereas this group is not. If they are not receiving advice from Connexions, they are less likely to know about potential work and educational opportunities, and therefore less likely to enrol or apply for openings. The graph indicates that this group is disproportionately high in Hampshire, Medway and Isle of Wight. We are aware that data collection difficulties have been a problem for the four Hampshire authorities (ie Hampshire, Portsmouth, Southampton and the Isle of Wight) and Medway, which could explain why these areas have the highest proportion of unknowns, and upwardly bias the South East average.

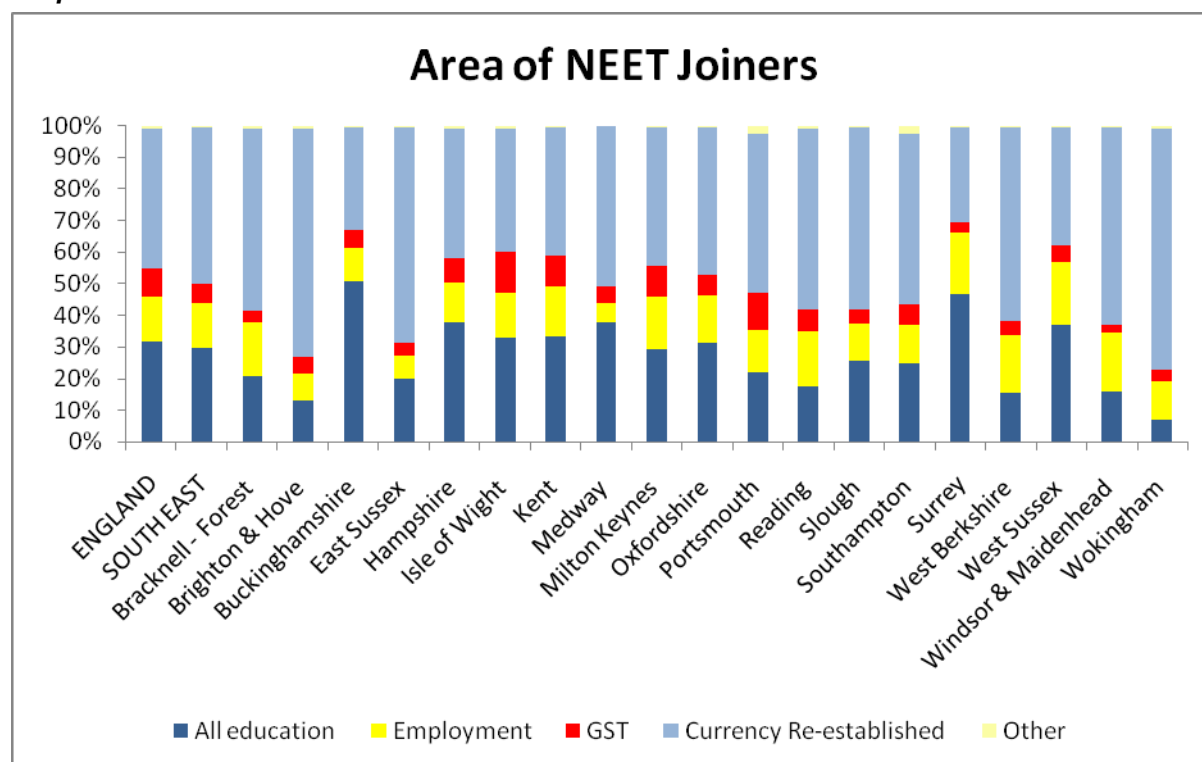
The trend with respect to age and unknown individuals is the same as with NEETs, in that the percentage generally increases with age. This is to be expected, as at age 16 Connexions will have contact with young people as they attend and leave compulsory education, but through time it can become more difficult to contact them as there is not a specific place they are supposed to be. In the South East, the number of unknowns is above the national average, and this is because of higher levels at older ages (3.3 percentage points above the national average at age 18 compared to 0.1 percentage points below the national average at age 16). However, it must again be noted that these figures are potentially upwardly skewed due to data collection issues in Hampshire and Medway.

The change over a three period in the number of individuals not known is shown in Graph 1.9. This shows even greater variation than in the numbers of NEETs. The greatest disparities in numbers were in Hampshire, Medway and Oxfordshire, all reporting increases in the percentage of not knowns in excess of 100% (nearly 300% in Hampshire). In seven of the areas, a decrease in the percentage of 'not knowns' was reported year on year for both periods, with only the Isle of Wight reporting increases for both periods.

Graph 1.9

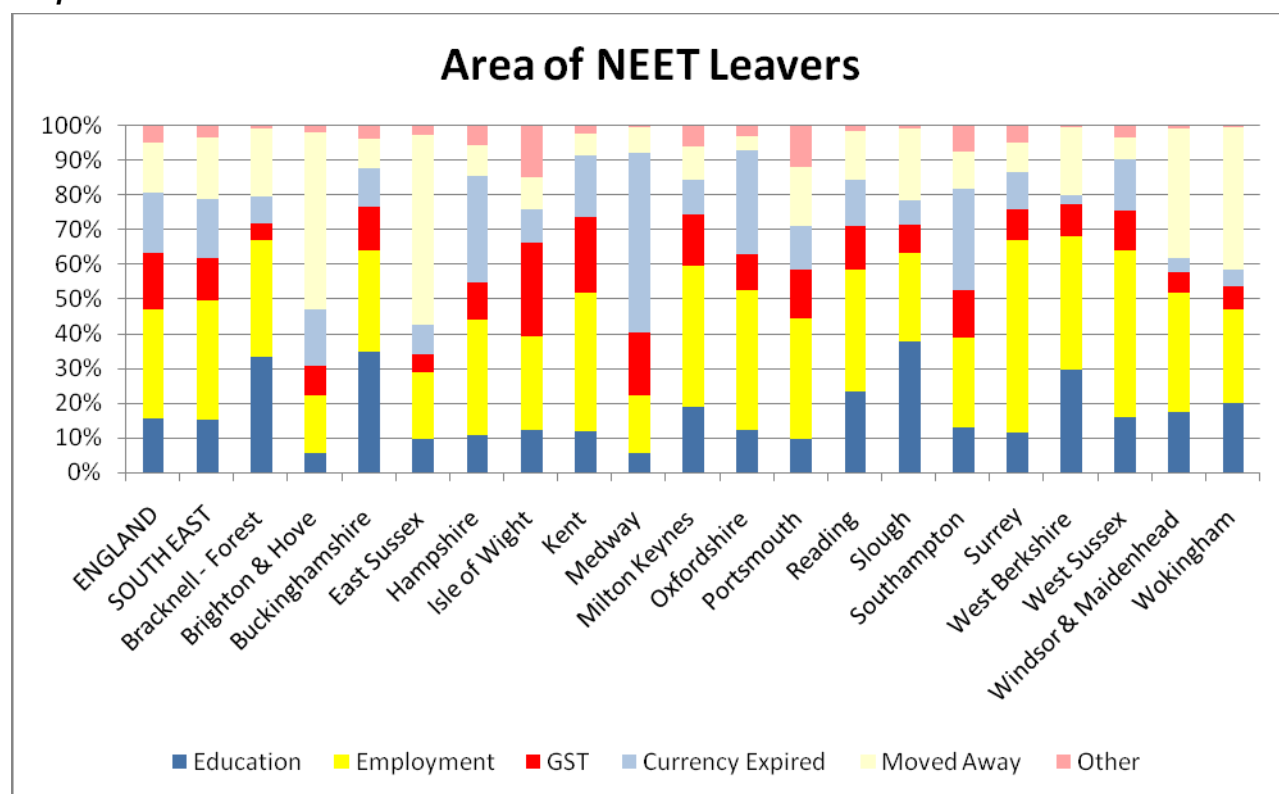


NCCIS data, from Connexions and LSC South East, November 2008.

Graph 1.10

NCCIS data, from Connexions and LSC South East, November 2008.

Graph 1.10 shows the areas which young people are joining the NEET group from. The largest proportion of people are joining as 'currency re-established', which means Connexions staff have managed to get in touch with individuals who had previously been unknown. This is positive, as it means that the largest group of people who are becoming NEETs are people who are now receiving advice, when previously they were not. The other main group of people joining the NEET group come from education, and in some parts of the South East this is the largest group. We would expect the group coming from education to be large, as the majority of the age cohort are registered as being in education. This means that people joining the NEET group from education is not a disproportionate amount given the number of young people in education in any area, but the number coming from 'currency re-establishment' is high given the number of people in the unknown group.

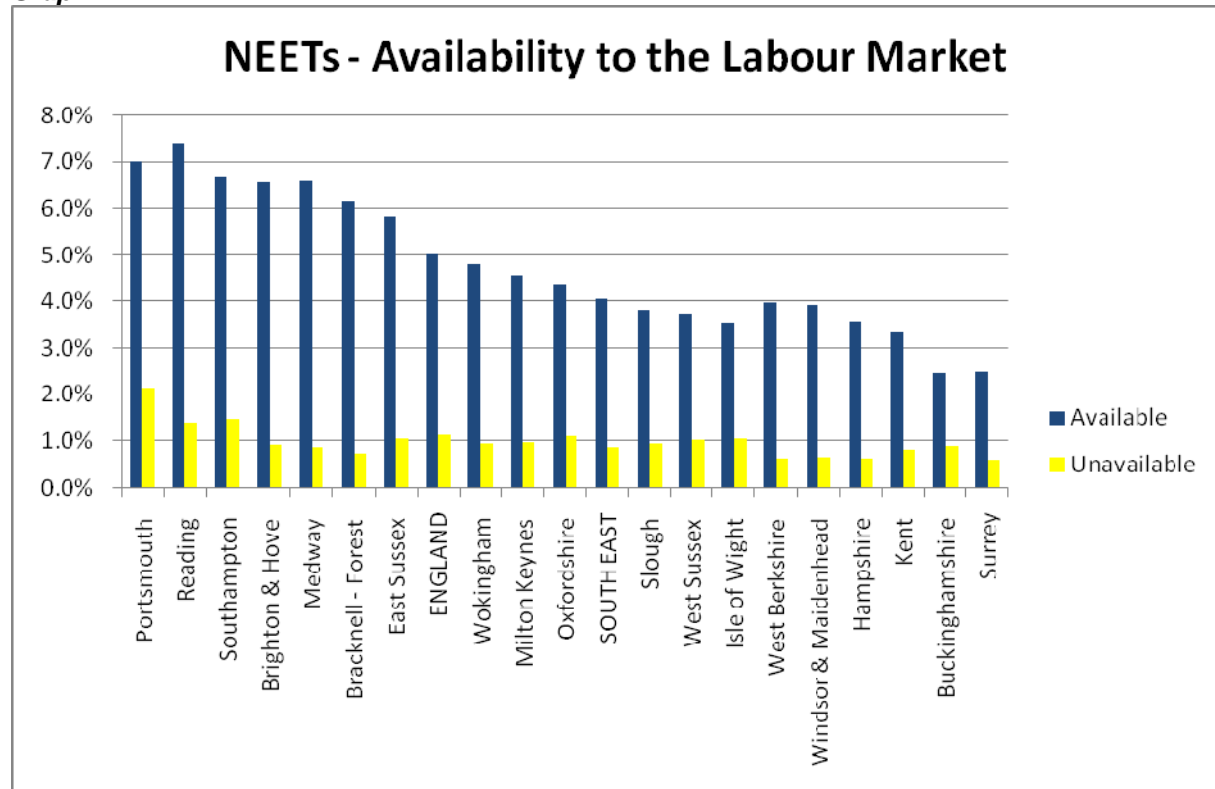
Graph 1.11

NCCIS data, from Connexions and LSC South East, November 2008.

Graph 1.11 shows, by area, where people who leave the NEET group end up. In most local authorities, most people seem to move into employment, although this is by no means universal. This is highlighted in Medway, where proportionally few people move into education, with the majority of leavers leaving because their currency expired. In many areas the number of NEETs entering education is low (for example Brighton and Hove, Medway and East Sussex), and introducing more flexible provision in these areas could have a significant effect. It is important that we stress that the last two graphs are proportions of joiners and leavers, not proportions of the cohort or NEET group.

There are various reasons why young people are in the NEET group. The following graphs show some of these reasons, and their relative importance in the different parts of the South East.

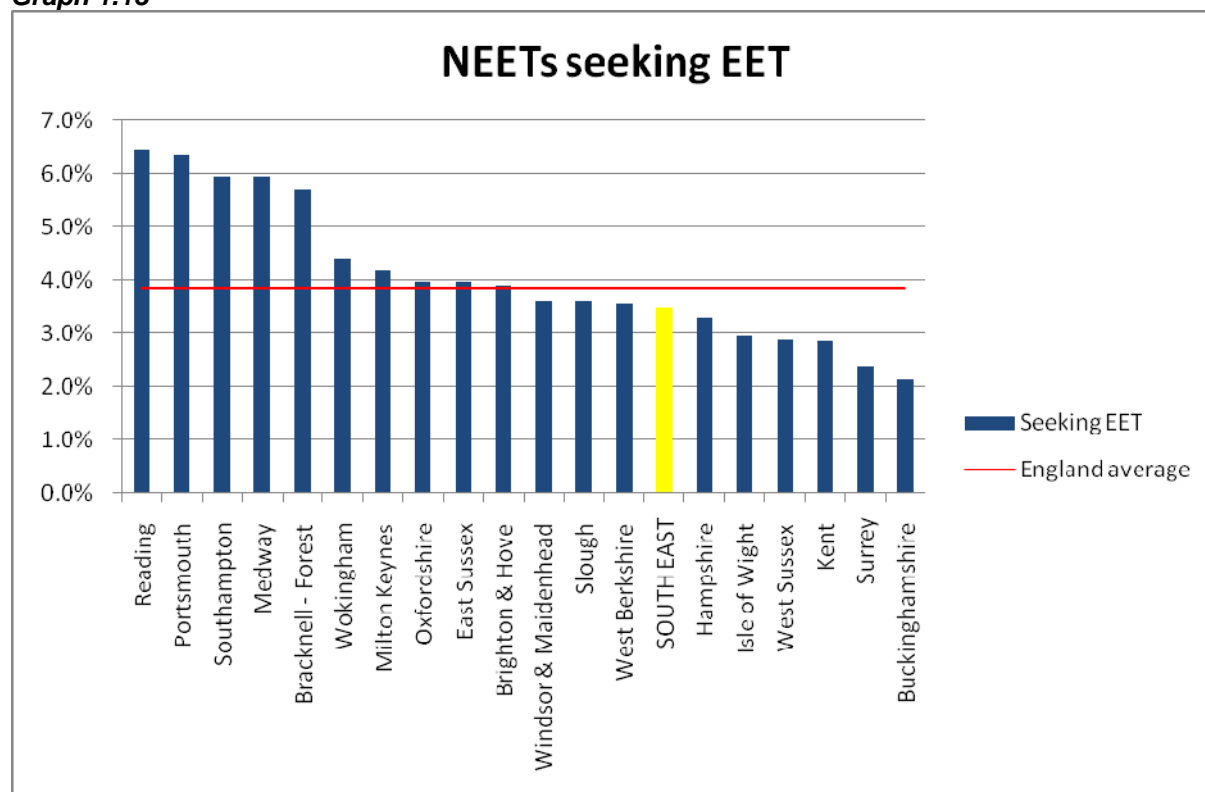
Graph 1.12



NCCIS data, from Connexions and LSC South East, November 2008.

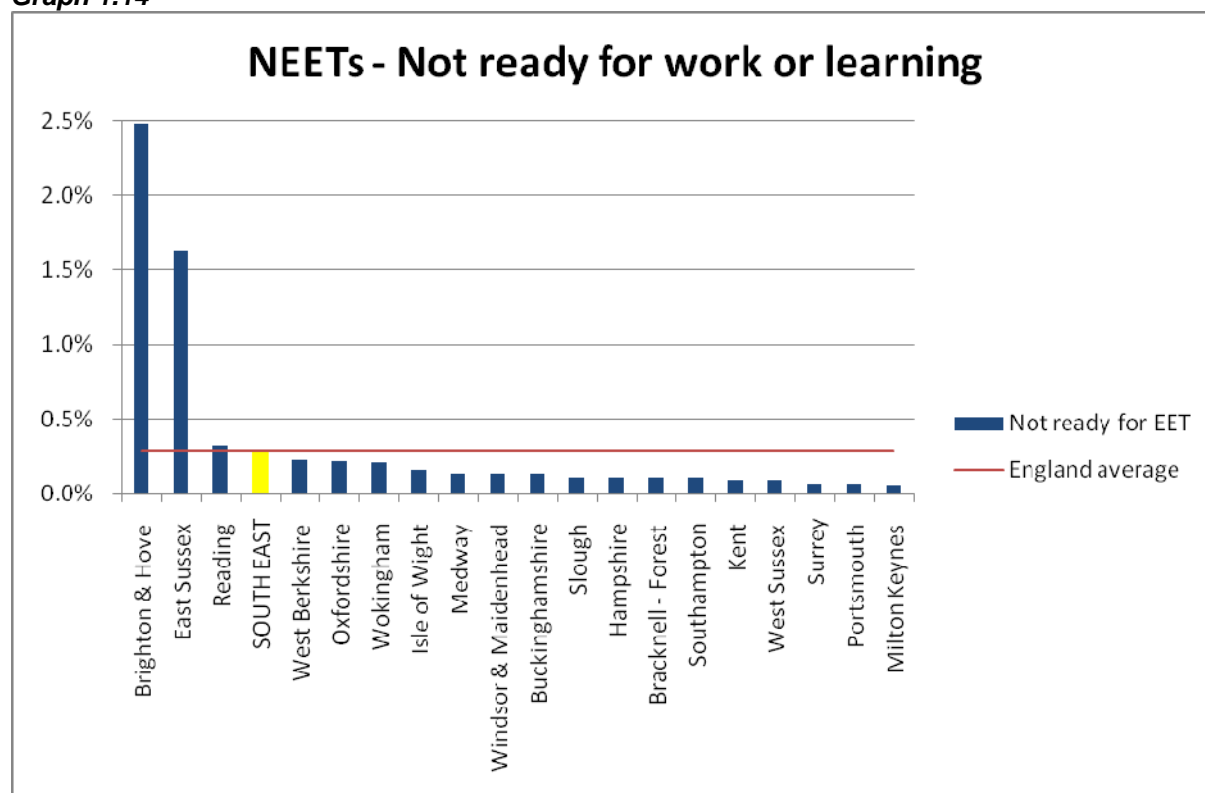
In Graph 1.12 the availability of NEETs to the labour force is shown, as a percentage of the whole age cohort. This shows that the majority of NEETs are available to the labour market in all local authority areas.

Graph 1.13



NCCIS data, from Connexions and LSC South East, November 2008.

Graph 1.14

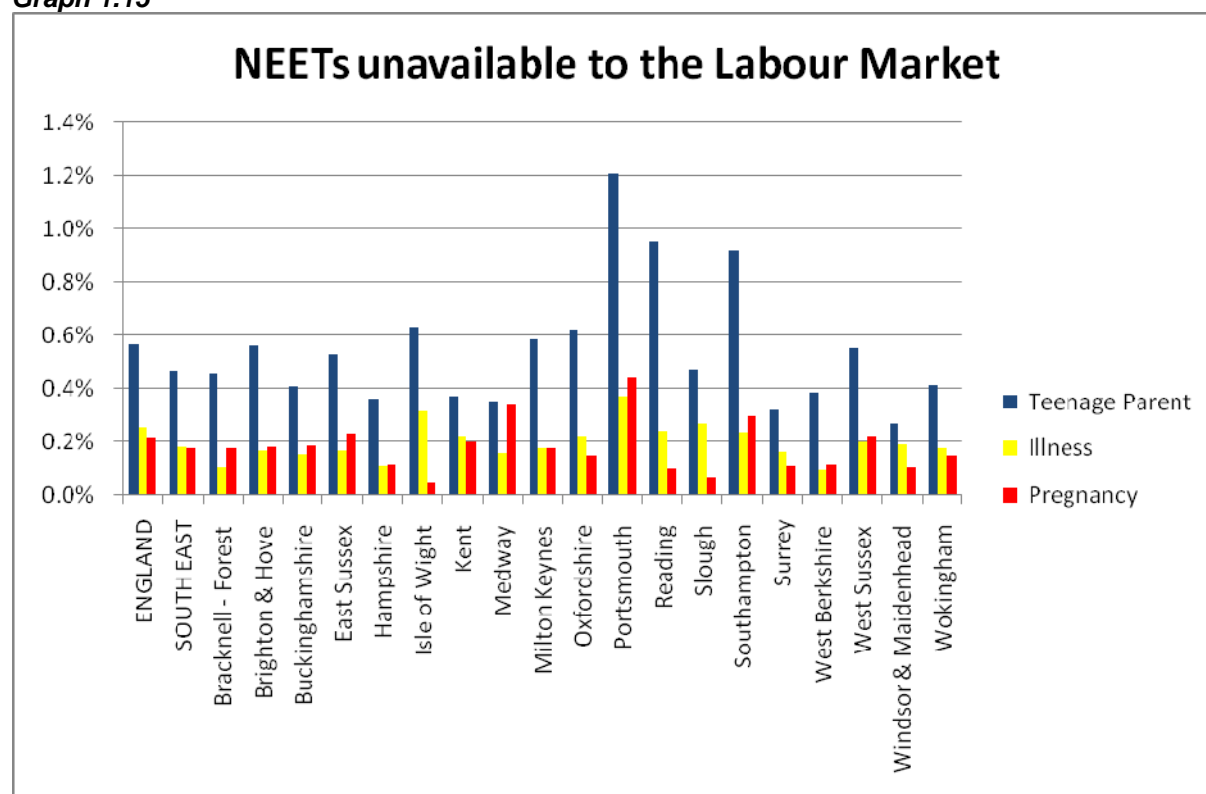


NCCIS data, from Connexions and LSC South East, November 2008.

Graphs 1.13 and 1.14 show the two most common reasons for young people to be NEET and available to the labour market. In Graph 1.13, the percentage of the cohort who are seeking EET is shown. This is the largest group of NEETs. As the data shows the number of NEETs seeking EET as a proportion of the entire age group, the areas with the highest level of NEETs remain at the top in terms of those seeking EET. However, Graph 1.14 is a little more surprising. This shows those NEETs who are not ready for work or learning, and that the two local authorities with the highest levels are Brighton and Hove and East Sussex. This is surprising as they are not the areas with the highest overall percentage of NEETs, and Southampton and Portsmouth, with high overall proportions of NEETs have amongst the lowest levels of NEETs not ready for work or learning.

These are not the only reasons young people are in the NEET group and are available to the workforce. However, the numbers in these other groups are small, and therefore presenting them would add help paint a clearer picture of the differences between local authorities in the South East region. These other reasons include awaiting places on a course (at various levels), waiting to start a course, those on Personal Development Opportunities and being on an Activity Agreement.

Graph 1.15



NCCIS data, from Connexions and LSC South East, November 2008.

Graph 1.15 shows the three most common reasons young NEETs are not available to the labour market. Again, these numbers are a percentage of the entire age cohort, so are small. It shows that the most common cause for a young person who is NEET being unavailable to the labour market is being a teenage parent. This is true in every local authority, with the next two most likely causes being illness and pregnancy, although there is no particular pattern as to which one of these is a more prominent reason in any particular area. A further reason why a young person may be unavailable to the labour market is being a young carer, however the numbers are low and therefore graphing them would not be beneficial.

Table 1.1: Local Authorities adopting LAA target 117: Percentage of 16 to 18 year olds who are not in education, training or employment				
	Baseline	Target 08-09	Target 09-10	Target 10-11
Bracknell Forest	5.2	5	4.8	4.6
Brighton and Hove	9.3	7.6	7.1	6.7
East Sussex	8	7	6.2	5.4
Hampshire	5.3	3.8	3.5	3.3
Isle of Wight	5.9	4.1	3.5	3
Kent	5.27	To be revised due to economic situation		4.7
Milton Keynes	5.8	5.9	5.9	5.9
Oxfordshire	4.2	4.2	4	3.6
Portsmouth	9.6	7.9	6.7	5.9
Slough	5.3	4.7	4.4	4.3
Surrey	A target will be agreed at the refresh period of the LAA and will be based on further analysis of local issues, performance and progress including the impact of the new measures and further discussion with key partners about their contribution to the NEET strategy.			
West Sussex	4.4	4.2	4	3.8

South East region LAAs, from <http://www.idea.gov.uk/idk/core/page.do?pageId=8399659>

Table 1.1 shows the areas which have included a policy on young people who are NEET in their Local Area Agreement (LAA). These figures may not correspond to the early figures because they are from a different source – the LAA. All the areas, with the exception of Milton Keynes, are targeting to reduce the number of NEETs. It is also interesting to note that some areas with a high proportion of NEETs do not include this in their LAA, for example Medway and Southampton, whereas some areas with low numbers of NEETs have included it, for example West Sussex and Surrey.

Appendix B: Literature Review⁶

In November 2007, the Government estimated that 206,000 16-18 year olds were not in education, employment or training (NEET). Past studies have shown that the cost to taxpayers of each new young person who is NEET dropping-out of education at 16 will be an average £97,000, and as much as £300,000 for some⁷. While there has been variation in the numbers of young people who are NEET, the proportion has not fallen below 8% of the overall population of 16-18 year olds in the last decade. The Children's Society has recently suggested that this proportion will rise during the economic downturn as it has in previous recessions.

The economic cost as well as the political importance of the issue at a time when skills and training have never been higher on the agenda informs the priority the Government has given to solving the problem. Before we review the range of policies proposed and enacted, it is important to understand the nature of the NEET group.

The NEET group is not homogenous and distinct sub-groups have been identified. Sub-groups have been defined according to different criteria depending on the study: some based on the characteristics of the young people in them, and others reflecting administrative categories, or the young person's unmet needs. Some young people fall into more than one category, and of course, not all young people who have a high risk of becoming NEET do so.

The group is transient too. Only 1% of all 16-18 year olds remain NEET through each of the three equally spaced survey points at 16, 17 and 18⁸.

One study⁹ defined the following groups of those most at risk of becoming NEET:

- **BME young people:** Young people from African-Caribbean, Pakistani, Bangladeshi and African-Caribbean mixed backgrounds are likely to have lower attendance and achievement rates at school than Indian, Chinese or white young people. However, Pakistani and Bangladeshi youths are more likely to be in employment, and so NEET figures are lower than for white youths. In the years after formal education, BME young people find it harder to access training, and are more likely to be unemployed.
- **Young people leaving care:** Three-quarters of care leavers have no academic qualifications, and suffer unemployment, homelessness, depression and eating disorders at higher rates than their peers.

⁶ We originally produced this section as a working paper at an early stage of this project.

⁷ 'Regional and sub-regional variations in NEETS – reasons, remedies and impact', LSDA, March 2006.

⁸ 'Reducing the number of young people not in education, employment or training (NEET)', DCSF Strategy, p. 3

⁹ One in Ten: Key messages from policy, research and practice about young people who are NEET http://www.rip.org.uk/publications/rr_detail.asp?pub_id=102

- **Teenage parents:** Young parents are often single mothers. They are more likely to suffer poverty, and lack access to good-quality work. About one in five young women who are NEET have children to care for, and a third of teenage mothers are NEET before having a child. Being NEET also increases the likelihood that a young woman will have a baby before the age of 21. Parenthood presents obvious barriers to participation in work or learning because of the time commitment and cost of childcare, but the presence of children can also be a motivating or transformative influence for the parent.
- **Young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities:** This group is six times more likely than their peers to be excluded from school, making them likely both to leave school without qualifications and suffer unemployment. Overall, these young people are twice as likely as other young people to be NEET. The barriers to participation they experience include a restricted range of educational and work opportunities for them to access, as well as attitudinal barriers and discrimination.
- **Young people supervised by the youth offending service:** These young people are among those most likely to be NEET for extended and repeated periods. They can be harder to motivate, and their behaviour may serve as a barrier to remaining in employment. Of individuals coming before the Youth Courts, 80% have been NEET for six months or more, and that prolonged absence from participation increases the opportunity for being involved in crime.

A major project of 2008¹⁰ studied why pupils disengage from mainstream schooling. They quantify this notion through examining exclusion rates: “There is a clear link between being excluded from school and becoming NEET later in life.” Upon being expelled, it is the local authority’s responsibility to ensure that an expelled pupil is placed in appropriate provision within six days. Despite this, the study asserts that expelled pupils “disengage completely from the education system”. This effects a tiny proportion of the overall school population (12 pupils in every 10,000 in 2006-07) but any policy to reduce NEETs should account for it.

Truancy is another indicator of future NEET status. The Longitudinal Study of Young People¹¹ showed that young people who were persistent truants were more than twice as likely not to be in full time education compared to those who had never played truant. While it is important to recognise progress (in 1989, this figure was eight times more likely), such a level of truancy means some pupils have entirely disengaged from education by the time they have left compulsory education at 16.

¹⁰ Rathbone/Nuffield Review Engaging Youth Enquiry, 2008

¹¹ Youth Cohort Study & Longitudinal Study of Young People in England: The Activities and Experiences of 16 year olds: England 2007, DCSF, 2008

There are many reasons why young people find themselves in such a situation. A National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) study¹² attempts to categorise different sub-groups within the overall NEET group. They argue that roughly two-fifths of NEETs can be described as 'open to learning' (those who are most likely to re-engage in learning or training and tend to have a higher level of attainment in the education system). Approximately two-fifths again are described as 'sustained NEETs' (who typically face a lot of personal and structural barriers to re-engaging with learning, commonly compounded by poor school attainment). NFER labels the final fifth 'the undecided NEET group'. They have similar attainment levels to the first group but are dissatisfied with the range of options available to them. Similarly labelled sub-groups are reflected throughout the literature.

A range of policies and initiatives have been developed to reduce the number of young people who are NEET. Some were designed directly to do so, and others have indirectly served that end.

- Connexions Partnerships were set up in April 2001, to help young people make informed choices about education and training. They provide information, advice and guidance (IAG) tailored to the needs of the young person. Connexions were also charged with targeting those who were most in danger of underachievement or not presently in learning.

Despite wide variation between the performances of Connexions teams in different areas, they were found to be reducing the number of NEETs by the National Audit Office, and most young people who had contact with a Personal Advisor found it helpful in terms of discussing their options. Connexions Partnerships have recently been reintegrated into local authorities.

- Education Maintenance Allowances (EMAs) are a payment made to young people from low-income families in years 12, 13 and 14, who abide by their Learning Agreement¹³. This payment is based on their parents' annual income and is £10, £20 or £30 per week. The scheme started nationally in 2004. Evaluations of the pilot showed that participation in year 12 increased by around 4% and in year 13 by over 6%.
- Modern Apprenticeships (MA), with Foundation Modern Apprenticeships (FMA) at level 2 and Advanced Modern Apprenticeships at level 3. A report into MAs found them to be a success, with widening participation. A criticism of MAs has been low levels of retention by employers, with an average participation rate of one year out of two, or two years out of three for longer MAs. There was also an inadequate assessment of basic skills and key skills needed for training, and a lack of integration between work based and classroom learning.

¹² 'Increasing Participation: Understanding Young People who do not Participate in Education or Training at 16 or 17' – National Foundation for Educational Research, 2009

¹³ A further pilot started in 2006 is Activity and Learning Agreements, working with 16 and 17 year olds not in school or lacking basic skills. These young people sign a contract with their Personal Advisor, and get paid between £20 and £40 per week in return for committing to a plan to re-enter education or training. In some areas this is also aimed at 16 and 17 year olds in Jobs Without Training (JWT).

- Entry to Employment (E2E) was launched in 2003. It is aimed at those not deemed ready to go on an apprenticeship and combines classroom and work based learning. Young people on this programme are given an individual learning plan, and sticking to this gives them positive experience and confidence to move on to an apprenticeship or other form of further education. However, the Adult Learning Inspectorate found only 6% moved into MAs, but 34% did move into a job or some other form of education, and 33% of people enrolled with disabilities did the same. More recently, due to an oversubscription to E2E programmes, stricter entry requirements have been introduced, leading to criticism that this is excluding some young people who are NEET.
- The September Guarantee was implemented nationally in 2007. The guarantee is that, by the end of each September, a place in learning will be offered to young people completing compulsory education (16 year olds completing high school). This policy was extended to 17 year olds in 2008, to allow for those who had taken a one year short course. This should ensure that everyone has, and is aware of, the option to continue with their education. However, this could cause problems with retention of individuals on courses. As individuals have to be offered a course, over-optimistic information about a person's ability could be put on the system, meaning they are offered a course they are unable to complete¹⁴.

The Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) published an integrated NEET strategy in 2007. This outlined a strategy to make sure that the system provides:

- an excellent universal offer for all young people to prevent them from disengaging;
- an efficient service for getting back into education or work-based learning those young people who become NEET but have no specific barriers to engagement;
- more targeted and intensive support for those young people with particular barriers to engaging with the system.

The DCSF approach involves ensuring that the provision of courses is flexible enough to meet the demand (which does not necessarily want a uniform September start):

We will now seek to increase the flexibility of the system to enable more young people to start programmes during the course of the academic year... It is particularly important that we ensure that young people can start courses in January, which has historically been a moment when some young people drop out, having made a poor choice in September. Some colleges are already making flexible offers of this sort.

¹⁴ London Borough of Newham: Reducing the Number of NEETs
<http://www.idea.gov.uk/idk/core/page.do?pagelId=9288309&aspect=full>

This goal of flexibility has been recognised as an integral element of the approach to reducing the number of 'open to learning' and 'undecided' NEETs (using the terminology of the NFER study).

Flexible Provision in Education

For people who are NEET to take-up or continue in learning, they will need to believe that the benefits of doing so exceed the costs, broadly conceived. A Welsh Assembly study into Early Leavers from FE found learners make this rational calculation when deciding whether to continue with their course. Changing circumstances during a learning programme can upset that equation and lead them to drop out. The most commonly cited reasons for leaving early were dissatisfaction with course choice, illness, caring responsibilities, and lack of time to study¹⁵.

DCSF believes that flexibility enables learners to re-engage quickly if they have dropped out, or if they failed to take up learning. It highlights the September start as a key inflexibility which creates a barrier to learning take-up. Given that many young people simply miss the deadline for choosing courses, and many others drop-out, particularly in the run-up to Christmas, DCSF argues that no young person should have to wait until the following September to re-engage with learning¹⁶.

Flexibility in terms of start-dates is only one way of giving students greater control over how they access learning. As an example, a study of flexible provision in Australian HE¹⁷ offers the following domains as a starting point;

- the *time* at which study occurs;
- the *pace* at which the learning proceeds;
- the *place* in which study is conducted;
- the *content* that is studied, which includes the concept of flexible points to a programme;
- the *learning style* adopted by the learner;
- the *form(s) of assessment* employed;
- the *option to collaborate* with others or to learn independently.

¹⁵ FE / WBL Early Leavers Research – Welsh Assembly Government, June 2006. p13
http://wales.gov.uk/docrepos/40382/4038232/403829/4038291/403829/FE_and_WBL_Early_Leavers_Research1/early-leavers-executive-sum1.pdf?lang=en

¹⁶ Using flexible provision to meet the needs of young people NEET, (pp 1-3).
<http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/14-19/documents/NEET%20flexible%20provision.doc>

¹⁷ The Effectiveness of Models of Flexible Provision of Higher Education – Australian Department of Education, Science and Training, 2001.
http://www.dest.gov.au/archive/highered/eippubs/eip01_9/eip01_9.pdf

It is worth remembering that the expected payoffs for FE participation are lower than for HE students¹⁸, making it even more important to lower the barriers to participation. It is plausible that the above flexibilities could help some overcome the barriers which cause them to be NEET. For example, a young person taking care of a family member might benefit from being able to control the pace, time, and place of learning.

UK Evidence

UK based research and consultations have consistently demonstrated a demand for flexibility in services, including education, for those who are NEET. Welsh schools and NEET service providers said they wanted “more flexibility, in terms of a broader range of options and the capacity to tailor learning to the needs and abilities of the individual”¹⁹.

A Scottish literature review of services for NEETs highlighted that greater flexibility is particularly needed by people with learning disabilities and mental health problems²⁰. Several of the Beacon Awards, presented by the Association of Colleges to their members and sponsored by bodies such as the Welsh Assembly and the Learning and Skills Council have flexible provision as a key criterion²¹.

In the South East region in particular, there are examples of flexible schemes aimed at reducing the number of NEETs. These included short courses, such as the 123 project and Opportunity Plus. These were both used as a means of reintroducing young people to the prospect of employment or education. To do this, various confidence building, teamwork and communication exercises were used. These were not in educational facilities, but the 123 project did include visits to them. Despite some criticism that the courses were too short (there was the opposing view stated that if they had been longer the young people would have lost interest), 50% of the people on the 123 project and 79% of those on Opportunity Plus had entered education or employment.

There are many other independent projects like the two mentioned above throughout the South East region, often using areas the young people may be interested in to help reintroduce the idea of education or employment. Interests included water sports, DJ workshops, art, music and IT.

Costs and Cost Effectiveness

¹⁸ Choosing to Learn – Delorenzi S., Robinson, P. (2005). P.30.

<http://books.google.co.uk/books?id=ei2Bfkwe9isC&printsec=frontcover>

¹⁹ Research into Post 16s who are not in education, employment or training (NEET) in Cardiff and the Vale of Glamorgan. p.99

https://www.careerswales.com/documents/20081113_Cordis_Bright_Research_Report.pdf

²⁰ Literature Review of the NEET Group. Scottish Executive Social Research (2005). p.50, p75.

<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2005/10/27175707>

²¹ Association of Colleges Beacon Awards Prospectus 2008/09

<http://www.aoc.co.uk/download.cfm?docid=A2B64590-7000-4F16-86887155562E9AAF>

Association of Colleges Beacon Awards Winners 2008/09

<http://www.aoc.co.uk/download.cfm?docid=F1D33626-6C1C-41A6-872EABEDE0DB5C17>

As the Australian HE study suggests:

Flexible provision tends to make marginal additional demands on infrastructure costs. In most cases it makes additional demands on support services and academic staff time. The additional demands on the resource academic staff time are not usually reflected in additional budget allocations. The demands on academic staff time are satisfied in part at the cost of time spent on research and in part by staff working longer hours.

Similar issues may apply in designing flexible provision which helps young people to avoid NEET status, or to lose it faster.