



GOVERNMENT OFFICE
FOR YORKSHIRE AND THE HUMBER



Yorkshire and the Humber 14-19 Challenge and Progression Follow up to the launch conference workshop

Introduction

At the launch of the Yorkshire and the Humber 14-19 Challenge a progression sub group was held which aimed to capture feedback from participants in the conference on

- The key issues to be tackled at regional, local and institutional level
- Suggested strategies and processes to be used or established to add value and improve outcomes
- Identified areas of good practice
- Suggested strategies/processes to be used or established to disseminate good practice
- Actions that the challenge needs to develop/put in place to add value

The sub group began with a presentation placing the issues in the context of the current situation in the region and outlining a number of options for consideration by the groups. This context and the options are outlined below and the feedback from the conference participants is then summarised in preparation for prioritising challenge activities.

Context identified in advance of the conference

Progression into education and employment with training is crucial to the economic well being of young people in the region yet many are not undertaking any form of education and training. In July 07 there were 11,582 young people in the region who were not in employment, education or training (NEET) and a further 9,259 were in the not known category. This is simply unacceptably high.

Progress has been made. The percentage rate of 9% NEET and 6.7% not known has reduced significantly, coming down by 1% and 3.5% respectively in a single year. Nevertheless NEET levels remain 1.3% above national averages and the level of not knowns is 0.8% above the national rate.

The challenge is therefore to make a step change to the level of participation of young people in the region and to ensure that those who do participate progress onto employment, further or higher education. This challenge exists in the context of very significant national policy drivers which include:

- the extension of the September guarantee of an offer of an appropriate training place to all 16 and 17 year olds in 2008.
- the PSA target of 86% of 17 year olds to be in learning by 2011
- the planned raising of the participation age to 17 by 2013 and to 18 by 2015
- the target of raising the number of apprenticeship places available by 18% over the 3 years to 2011.
- recent changes in the responsibilities for local authorities in relation to independent advice and guidance services and planned changes from 2010-11 in relation to funding of 16-18 learning in further education.

Options identified in advance of the conference

In responding to the progression challenge the options adopted will need to take account of a number of central considerations which include:

- attitudes to education and training are frequently determined well before the age of 16. Prevention is better than cure and initiatives that inspire young people to want to stay in education will be a crucial element.
- many of the NEET group have started one educational experience post 16 but dropped out from it. Young people need flexible opportunities to re-engage. It is not likely to motivate young people if they are informed that the programme of learning they would like to access in October can only be accessed once a year in September. More high quality provision which is flexibly available throughout the year will need to be made available.
- many of the most hard to reach groups of NEET have very specific needs in that, for example, they are care leavers, teenage parents, have learning difficulties or need to address behaviour issues such as offending or substance abuse. Programmes need to respond to these needs.
- NEET initiatives need to take account of the significant variation in progression between different ethnic minority groups
- the issue of NEETs is integrally connected with the wider Every Child Matters agenda and the issue cannot be tackled in isolation
- the quality and the independence of the advice and guidance given to young people and the support they receive in following up on this advice is a major factor in successfully tackling NEET
- there are strong links between this aspect of the Yorkshire and the Humber Challenge and the 14-19 curriculum pathways theme. A different mix of levels and character of provision is likely to be necessary to achieve high levels of engagement

- ensuring that those who are participating are equipped to make a positive progression is a significant issue and activities which raise the ambition and the ability of young people to aim higher are an important element of the actions

Feedback from the conference – a summary

In consideration of these issues the conference participants recorded a large number of comments which have been summarised and grouped into themes for ease of understanding. Inclusion in the summary does not imply that all challenge members were of agreement about the issue. The themes are listed below:

1. Aspiration

Several delegates stressed the importance of early engagement well before year 11 to raise aspirations. Comments included:

“Provide tasters for young people in year 10/11”

“Raising awareness of parity of academic v vocation with institutions/businesses/parents”

“It is very important to find out the wishes of the individual early and then to support that individual to get onto the provision that best meets their own individual needs.”

2. Information advice and guidance and transition support

This was identified as important by all the group discussions. Amongst the comments were:

“Improve partnership working, particularly with local careers/connexions services and use forensic data to target IAG and provision to meet the needs of NEET segments – very successful in Bradford”

“Additional learning support is needed to progress non participants pre-16 into post 16, blurring these edges with transitional support for individual mentorship.”

“IAG needs major investment: School’s perceptions of status of vocational routes is problematic, mandatory course advice sessions are needed at all schools”

“How do we ensure young people are offered a range of products e.g. apprenticeships, 6th form, college and university”

3. Funding Issues

Amongst the comments were:

“Ongoing funding 19+”

“Growth requires adequate funding”

“LSC funding policy of growth for 16-18 will be an issue”

“Inflexible funding”

“Short term funding unhelpful – want three year planning and streamlined processes not time gaps between funding or contracts drafted requiring spend within financial year”

4. *Curriculum offer issues*

Amongst the issues raised were:

“Level 1 progression routes”

“Provide more entry/Level 1 provision”

“Need an easier interface beyond September for moving into, out of and back into education”

“Modular approach allows flexible start dates”

“Mid year starts must be supported by planned funding and provide flexibility of outcomes. NEETs need tailored (and therefore more expensive) provision – if they could slot into current offers appropriately they probably would have already

“Re-engineer curriculum to match employment/progression opportunities to meet the aspirations of YP from Connexions”

“Curriculum mapping to ensure progression routes at all levels”

“Recording mechanisms don’t encourage in year starts”

“Ensuring various programmes are linked e.g. schools required to work with Aim Higher”

“16+ no recognition of ASDAN”

“Appreciate coherent approach re 14-19 but social issues can’t be addressed by this.”

“Squaring the circle between what sector skills councils want and what industry wants i.e they don’t want level 1 qualifications but level 1 useful for NEETs themselves”

“There is a need for half level qualifications as some are too big a leap”

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5. *Employer engagement issues*

Comments included:

“Need employers of 16-19 to work with training providers”

“Employer engagement, a bottleneck for apprenticeships”

“How can SMEs and micro businesses be encouraged to engage”

6. *The importance of the focusing on the whole experience of young people*

Comments included:

“Household income on benefit compared with EMA is an issue”

“Involving parents – family learning”

“Is a gap year at 16 OK for some?”

“Underlying learner issues can make it extremely difficult for a young person to engage”

“Vulnerable young people who are actually in age 16+ education need, for example, an engagement officer/mentor to keep them in education as their other issues carry risk of being disengaged.”

“Possible holistic (whole household) approach to supporting the family e.g. parents on incapacity benefit and children NEET – all need help”

“Sub-divide NEETs, their needs differ so educational routes need to differ”

“Prisons need to be platforms for success not failure”

7. The role of the voluntary and community sector

Comments were:

“Funding for voluntary and community organisations”

“Need to equip 3rd sector – can’t expect them to just be there ‘on tap’ as funding is switched on and off.

8. Policy issues

Amongst the comments were:

“FE post 16 league tables only cover A levels and therefore don’t give credit for work with NEETs”

“Attainment league tables appear to encourage coasting amongst schools that have a better chance”.

“Absence of a repository of information – could LSC help with this?”

“Translating partnership theory into practice – especially when institutional need and the young person’s personal need are competing”

“Enable providers to do what needs to be done i.e. engage NEETs – targets and outputs need to be against engagement not qualifications”

“Develop credit transfer to enable learners to progress”

“HE providers could review entry requirements which are dictating curriculum pre 18 and possibly putting off students”

Good practice

Amongst the examples of good practice identified prior to the conference was flexible work by the voluntary sector and the NEET strategy and action plan applied in Barnsley. What had worked in Barnsley had been a co-ordinated partnership approach. Prevention had been improved via a RAG rating of each individual in the year 11 cohort and developing in depth partnership agreements with schools to address individual need. A referral and tracking group and clearing house events had focused on turning the September Guarantee into a reality. Increased flexibility in start dates and direct engagement with NEETs in localities had been important weapons in achieving significant reductions in NEETs.

Other examples of good practice highlighted by delegates included:

“Pre 16 preventative - in Wakefield all schools work with Connexions on an annual activity survey production. A list of young people is fed into schools on

a weekly basis – the result is that the number of not knowns at 16 is virtually nil” Schools also have year 11 cohort of potential NEET identified – these are monitored”

“Providing the wrap around support for young people at level 1 and 2 – able to provide them with a level of esteem and not labelling people as ‘not bright’ “

“Empowerment programmes for parents/carers to support their children (Leeds Aim Higher)”

“Mentoring programmes for 16-19 – Leeds Aimhigher”

“Mentors for care leavers and joining up with social services”

“Attendance mentoring (early intervention with poor attenders) to keep in EET”

“Greater flexibility to access provision e.g. Jan and Easter starts and summer school – very effective at Bradford College”

“Roll on roll off programmes pre E2E – are helpful for NEET young people.”

“Young apprenticeship programme – apprenticeships need to mirror the places available”

“Working with young people in small enough groups to be helped to work their way through and be prepared for what is at the end be it education or employment”

“On line application systems”

“Events to bring providers and employers together”

“Work based learning pre-16 which fires their imagination”

“Managing young people’s experience e.g. giving them a phone call when absent”

“Evidence based quality assurance of the providers”

“HE providers going into schools to spark learners interest”

“Guarantees of progression”

The next steps for the challenge

Though there are a wide range of progression issues the Challenge will initially focus on the issue of NEETs as a crucial area where a step change in performance is both necessary and possible.

Clearly addressing NEETs is a complex issue. Ensuring that activity at a regional level adds value is just as complex. It is important that the challenge focuses its activities on the areas where regional activity can make the biggest difference. Activity that duplicates what is already underway at an area or local level will be avoided.

One of the key messages to emerge from the progression group was the effectiveness of co-ordinated and targeted initiatives that focus on individual needs. When each individual had been carefully tracked and support had been provided to ensure they were able to participate in a programme that was right for them personally then this appeared to have made some of the most rapid inroads into increasing progression. Much of the good practice work of this nature has been developed as programmes of action designed to tackle issues in areas where there have been historically high levels of NEETs.

It is therefore proposed that the first focus of the challenge work should be on ensuring that the actions that have resulted in significant inroads being made into high levels of NEET in areas such as Barnsley and Hull are effectively disseminated and applied. An exchange of good practice for practitioners will therefore be organised via the challenge to focus on actions that are effective in areas with high levels of NEET.

A second key message that emerged from the conference is that there needs to be an increase in the flexibility of the choices available for young people. Central to achieving this will be the effective use of £21million of newly commissioned ESF activity in Yorkshire and the Humber focused on reducing NEETs. This work is currently in the process of being tendered and will result in organisations being appointed to act as Co-ordinated NEET Response Managers. The organisations will thus have significant finance available to them to make a major contribution to tackling issues such as flexibility of the available opportunities. They will be responsible for working with local partnerships to ensure that gaps in local provision are flexibly addressed. At regional level there is real potential for gain by working closely with these organisations to ensure that the issues identified at the conference are addressed and that successful activity in one locality can be rapidly identified and spread to other localities. The second focus of Challenge activity will therefore be to work with the appointed NEET Response Managers at Regional level to maximise the effectiveness of ESF investment in addressing NEETs.

If the most effective practice in identifying and following up on individual need is coupled with the most effective practice on flexibility of supply and this is spread across the region then we can achieve the biggest step change in the

shortest period of time. Continuing to strengthen action plans for the areas with the highest levels of NEETs and ensuring that maximum value is gained out of the major ESF investment across the region are therefore the initial areas identified for gaining added value from the work of the Yorkshire and Humber challenge on the theme of progression.

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