



Executive Summary

The Underachieving Young People Project: an investigation into young people in Fife who are Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET)

A Fife and Tayside Wider Access Forum research
project undertaken by the Research Unit of The
Adam Smith College, Fife



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1 Introduction

The Underachieving Young People Project was an investigation into young people in Fife who are Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET). The project was sponsored by Fife and Tayside Wider Access Forum and was undertaken by the Research Unit of The Adam Smith College, Fife. The project involved three stages: a literature review of the NEET situation in Fife, primary research into the perspectives of young people in relation to NEET (the project originally focussed on males but because a significant proportion of the NEET group is female, some females were included in the study), and the implementation of a NEET prevention intervention. Key findings from each stage are summarised below.

2 Literature review: Fife NEET facts

Key findings from the literature review are set out below:

- Intelligence relating to the NEET group is sketchy as there is no single comprehensive data set. Current sources (school leaver destination data and benefit claimant data) are likely to underestimate the true number of young NEET people and provide only a limited insight into the group's subgroups
- Data indicate that there were approximately 2,000 16-19 year olds in Fife in 2005 who were NEET. The Fife NEET proportion is in line with the national average indicating that Fife is not a NEET 'black spot'
- There is almost an equal number of males and females within the NEET group. If non-Job Seekers Allowance benefit claimants were taken out of the calculation for estimating the level of NEET there would be approximately a 60:40 gender split between NEET males and females respectively
- Benefit claimant data indicate that the NEET group is disparate and significant subgroups are lone parents, people with disabilities, people with mental health problems, and carers. NEET young people come from a range of backgrounds, but are more likely to come from lower socio-economic homes
- There are several measures in schools that aim to combat pupil progression to NEET. These are summarised in Table 1 below:

Table 1: Summary of direct NEET prevention measures in schools

Type of measure	Specific measure
Practices	Information gathering; One to one support; Meetings; Parent liaison
Programmes	Alternative curriculum programmes: Skills for Work courses; Prince's Trust xl; The Duke of Edinburgh Award; June Start Programme; Access courses; Non-mainstream units
	Non-accredited programmes: Pathways programme; College Review programme; Careers Scotland programmes; In-house programmes; LIFT-OFF programmes; Extended work placements

- There are thematic gaps in NEET prevention measures. There are very few measures that target ‘sleepy’ pupils; that is pupils who are not the lowest attaining/worst behaved but are still at risk of becoming NEET, or the parents of potentially NEET pupils
- The main post-school NEET reduction programme is Get Ready for Work. NEET reduction programmes are summarised in Table 2 below:

Table 2: NEET reduction programme providers and associated programmes

Provider	Example programmes
National training contract training providers	Get Ready for Work (GRFW); Skillseekers; Modern Apprenticeships (MAs)
Community Education	Various core skills and personal development type programmes
Voluntary sector	The West Fife Enterprise programme; The FEAT programme; Project Scotland voluntary placements; The FILM programme
Jobcentre Plus	New Deal; Progress 2 Work

3 Primary research: young people’s voices

Primary research was carried out to gain an insight into the perspectives of NEET and non-NEET young people themselves on employment, education and training. A total of twenty NEET respondents took part in individual interviews. All of the respondents were aged between 16 and 19 years and the majority (17 respondents) were male. A total of five focus groups was carried out with 31 young people that are currently engaged in education and training. The respondents were similar to the NEET respondents in age and, like the NEET respondents, the vast majority of them were male.

It should be noted that the research was small-scale and qualitative. While the project sought to illuminate the perspectives of young people, the findings may not be generalisable to the entire 16-19 year old population.

Summary of key findings

- All of the NEET respondents wanted to be in employment, education and training, and most had ambitions to work in a specific vocation, usually a skilled trade type occupation
- Most NEET respondents had a negative perception of their future prospects. Some respondents were less negative and attributed their NEET status to temporary circumstances
- NEET respondents perceived a number of barriers to employment, education and training. Commonly mentioned barriers were lack of qualifications, lack of experience, lack of jobs, apathy, personal problems, financial problems,

and immaturity. All barriers, along with some suggestions respondents had for overcoming them, are summarised in Appendix 1

- A major comparison between NEET and Non-NEET respondents was that most respondents in both sets had ambition to work in a vocational area. A major contrast was that non-NEET respondents had an aversion to being NEET themselves. Comparisons and contrasts are summarised in Appendix 2
- Factors that motivated non-NEET respondents to take up employment and education are summarised in the diagram below:



4 Action Research: school-parent intervention

The remit for the action research phase of the project was to implement a school-parent intervention that involves the parents of potentially NEET secondary school pupils. The Positive Parenting programme: Time out for Teenagers was selected as the intervention for the project. Time Out for Teenagers aims to provide parents with support and encouragement with bringing up their teenagers and also provide some practical ideas on ways to improve child behaviour and the parent-child relationship.

Summary of key findings

- Overall most participants felt that their child's behaviour had improved and their relationship with their child had improved at least to some extent. This is especially an achievement given that it was a short programme with the

parents of children who already had, in some cases, severe behavioural problems

- Interviews with participants and facilitator reflective diaries indicate that the majority of the participants benefited from the programme through either the stimulation of dialogue with their child, improving the relationship with their child, improving the behaviour of their child, and/or receiving support from other parents
- Almost all of the participants particularly benefited from having contact with parents in a similar situation to their own, and for many this was the greatest benefit of the programme

Project implications

A number of implications for future projects of this kind were generated through the evaluation process and project steering group discussions. These are:

- Parents would benefit from continuous support opportunities with bringing up their teenagers, possibly starting before children reach their teens
- The programme should be oversubscribed to compensate for inevitable withdrawal by some participants
- Those promoting the programme should be knowledgeable about the programme so that they are able to persuade parents of its potential benefits
- The recruitment process must not reinforce feelings of inadequacy in parents as this may be a barrier to take up, and goes against the philosophy of the project
- Recruitment should be done over a long period time to ensure that it is handled sensitively and to allow opportunity for face to face contact with potential recruits
- A member of school staff should attend the start of the first programme session to answer any concerns participants may have regarding the participant selection process
- Alternatively, recruitment through Parent Forums may have less negative connotations for parents than recruitment through Guidance Departments and may therefore enhance take up
- Recruitment and retention may also be improved if childcare is made available
- An appropriate venue for the programme is a college or college outreach centre
- It may be beneficial to involve children in the programme

Appendix 1

Barriers and related sub-barriers to employment, education and training and NEET respondent suggestions for overcoming barriers

Barrier	Sub-barrier	Suggestions for overcoming barrier
Lack of qualifications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of vocational qualifications • Lack of core skills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • GRFW programme • Skillseekers/MA programme • Mainstream college programme
Lack of experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employers unwilling to employ school leavers • Lack of general work experience • Lack of occupation specific work experience 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Speculative work experience • Work experience through GRFW/mainstream college programme • Voluntary work • Better work experience in school
Lack of jobs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of apprenticeship/trainee jobs • Too old to get apprenticeship • Lack of low qualification type jobs • Unwillingness to engage in low qualification type jobs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family/friend connections • Travelling to an area with more work opportunities • Get qualifications/work experience
Apathy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of planning/organisation • Lack of drive/determination 	
Personal problems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mental health problems • Alcohol/drug problems • Homelessness 	
Financial problems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lose benefits if work/attend college • The need to work while at college to support oneself • Travel expenses to get to college • Lack of study bursaries 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discuss how benefits may be affected with careers advisor/job centre/college
Immaturity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regret at not having attained at school • Regret at past criminal behaviour 	
Confusion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do not know what they want to do • Lack of knowledge on college courses/prospective jobs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Taster /vocation specific GRFW programmes • Better careers advice in schools
Lack of aptitude	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Difficulties coping with level of college course 	
Employability skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of confidence • Poor timekeeping • Poor communication skills • Untidy personal appearance 	
Reluctance to go to college	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Perception that college is boring • Fear of returning to education 	
Difficulty getting onto a desired college course	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Course not available locally • Course does not exist • Course full/competition for course places 	
Reluctance to travel	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unwilling to travel to college • Unwilling to look work outside local area 	

Appendix 2

Comparisons and contrasts between NEET and the non-NEET respondents

Area	Comparisons	Contrasts
Motivation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ambition to work in a specific vocational area • Financial incentives important 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NEET respondents have barriers to college and hence realising ambition • Some NEET respondents do not have ambition to work in a specific vocational area
Perceptions/ attitudes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Education, training and employment desirable • There is a lack of jobs • College is prime route to employment in a specific vocation/any 'decent' job 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Most NEET respondents apathetic; non-NEET respondents tended to be more ambitious • Most NEET respondents have pragmatic attitude to learning; most non-NEET respondents have intrinsic interest in subject • Non-NEET respondents have aversion to being NEET
Circumstances	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some non-NEET respondents NEET in the past • Some NEET respondents had been non-NEET in the past 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Most NEET respondents not ready for mainstream study; non-NEET respondents all on mainstream programmes • Some NEET respondents do not want to continue learning beyond GRFW; non-NEET respondents all on mainstream programmes
Influencers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Friends are important influencers • Older siblings are important influencers • College is an important influencer • Parents provide encouragement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More instances where non-NEET respondents influenced by parents/family • More instances where non-NEET respondents influenced by school • More instances where NEET respondents negatively influenced by friends