

Summary

Approaches to supporting young people not in education, employment or training – a review

Julie Nelson and Lisa O'Donnell



Against a backdrop of economic recession, high youth unemployment and a sustained reduction in public funding, the task of supporting young people to make effective post-16 transitions into further education or employment is highly challenging.

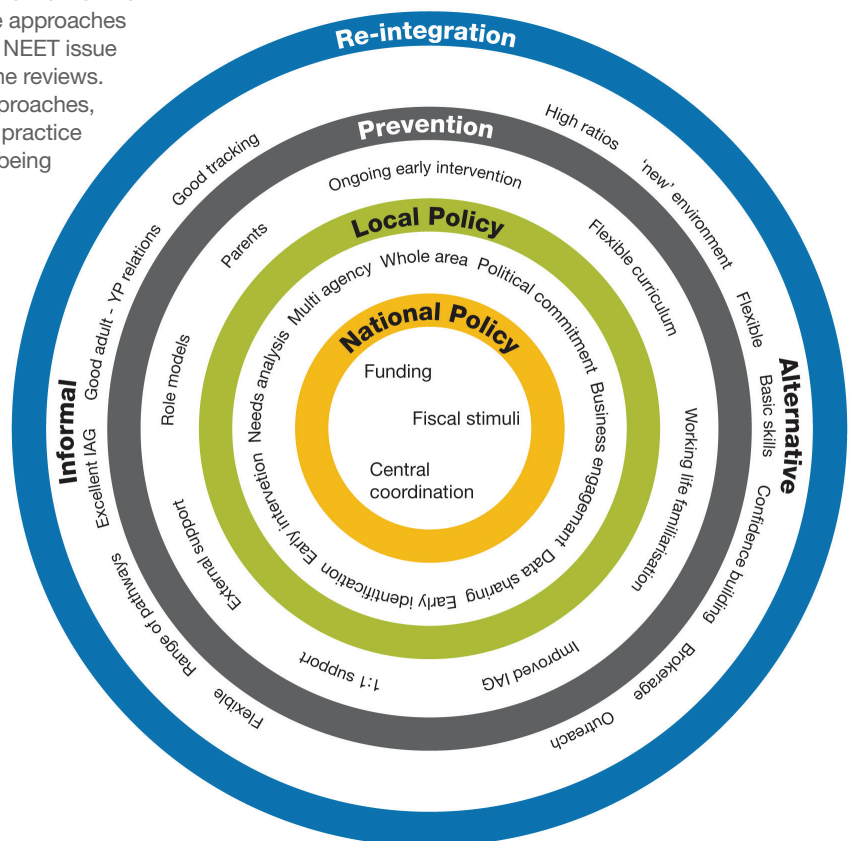
This literature review is one of four produced under **The NFER Research Programme**, as part of the **From Education to Employment** theme. Collectively, they identify strategies for assisting young people at risk of becoming not in education, employment or training (NEET) to make effective post-16 transitions into learning or employment. The reviews build upon recent NFER research¹ identifying three discrete sub-categories of NEET young people:

- **‘Open to learning’ NEETs** – most likely to re-engage in education.
- **‘Sustained’ NEETs** – characterised by a negative experience of school, high levels of truancy and exclusion, and low academic attainment.
- **‘Undecided’ NEETs** – similar to ‘open to learning’ NEETs but dissatisfied with available opportunities.

This first review explores successful approaches to re-engaging young people with education and training at a general level, as well as at the level of these different NEET sub-categories. It identifies the importance of a coordinated approach of national and local policies and highlights practice-level methods for both preventing young people from becoming NEET, and reintegrating those that are NEET into work, further education or training.

In these four reviews, NFER offers a unique perspective on the research and evidence-based practice of the last five years in this area and identifies the gaps for future research. We acknowledge that although there is evidence of good work, sustainable progress can be hampered by the complexity of local and national approaches, together with government policy. A series of easy to use guides for practitioners, school leaders and local authorities based on the findings will also be made available.

This figure is an overview of the range of desirable approaches to addressing the NEET issue identified within the reviews. Many of these approaches, particularly at the practice level, are already being implemented.



¹ Spielhofer, T., Benton, T., Evans, K., Featherstone, G., Golden, S., Nelson, J. and Smith, P. (2009). *Increasing Participation: Understanding Young People Who Do Not Participate in Education or Training at 16 and 17* (DCSF Research Report RR072). London: DCSF [online]. Available: www.education.gov.uk/publications/RSG/Youthandadolescence/Page7/DCSF-RR072 [20 October, 2011].

National policy-level strategies

The review looks at international research and identifies three core elements of an effective national policy-level strategy for supporting young people back into work, further education or training.

- **Macro-economic funding** for youth training and employment opportunities is crucial. Governments should invest in cost-effective, tailored, employment programmes for young people.
- **Fiscal stimuli** (such as a waiving of employers' national insurance contributions for young people aged under 25) can help incentivise employers to employ young people. Governments should also do more to increase the supply of apprenticeships, for example, the £1 billion Youth Contract.
- **Central responsibility** for, and coordination of, efforts to reduce the number of NEET young people is needed, with leadership at local and national levels.

Local policy-level strategies

Local authorities should have a whole-area action plan for reducing the number of NEET young people. Clear targets and deadlines should be closely tied in to other relevant area-wide strategies including economic development. Political commitment and strong monitoring systems are vital to ensure success. Local authorities should follow a number of strategic approaches to:

- identify need early
- intervene early with families at risk of poor outcomes
- develop informal learning and volunteering opportunities
- develop alternative and flexible learning opportunities
- offer financial support.

Local authorities should engage employers in the design of strategies to avoid disengagement, as well as work with them to raise awareness of what they can offer, making links with other supporting agencies and encouraging employers to work with schools in offering effective information, advice and guidance (IAG). Many local authorities are already focusing on these things.

Practice-level preventative approaches

A number of strategies are identified that can be adopted by schools and other organisations such as youth services, to prevent young people disengaging from learning or losing direction, thus reducing the likelihood of them becoming NEET in future.

- Intervention should begin as soon as signs of difficulty at school or home are detected, as early as preschool, and should continue to be monitored throughout primary and secondary school, providing targeted support where appropriate.
- The education curriculum should be varied, flexible and relevant to the world of work. It should also take account of different learner needs and styles using innovative and experiential teaching methods.
- IAG should be impartial, realistic, responsive and available to all young people, ideally from at least year 9. The advice should be tailored to the specific needs of the individual and provided by independent and impartial staff. This looks to be challenging given the removal of Connexions and the uncertainty of career guidance in schools.
- One-to-one support should be sustained and of a high quality. It should be face to face and available to all young people at key transitions points such as from primary to secondary school, from year 9 to year 10, and from year 11 to further education or work.
- Parents should be given the necessary support so that they are engaged in interventions being used with their children, as well as school life generally.

Practice-level reintegration approaches post 16

The review considers the positive outcomes of a number of specific programme evaluations, and identifies two generic success factors in reintegration approaches that are most effective in helping young people get 'back on track'.

- **Informal learning programmes** benefit young people who do not necessarily have substantial barriers to learning. They incorporate flexible programme features such as frequent start dates, a range of pathways including good quality vocational options that are relevant to labour market needs and also excellent IAG.
- **Alternative provision** typically benefits young people within the 'sustained' NEET group. It centres on the development of a positive trust relationship between a young person and an adult role model. To be most effective, this provision requires a high ratio of staff to young people, a learning environment that is different from formal schooling and good initial assessment with measurable and motivating targets.

Identifying Research Gaps for next stage research

Most research assessed in this review is concerned with the strategies that have greatest impact on young people in the 'sustained' NEET sub-category, and rarely makes explicit links between the NEET sub-categories and different types of provision.

This suggests a gap in research around effective strategies to engage or re-engage those who are 'open to learning', or 'undecided' NEET. This area will be the focus of our next phase of work in the From Education to Employment theme. Key features focusing on 'open to learning' or 'undecided' young people will be:

- the development and implementation of indicators that can identify young people at an early stage
- the trialling and evaluation of specific support strategies
- the validation and dissemination of good practice.

Through this programme of research, we hope to go some way towards reducing the gap in what is known about effective NEET prevention strategies, and to make a difference to the lives of learners.

The NFER Research Programme

This Programme was set up in 2011. Funded by NFER, it is developing partnerships with organisations and individuals who share our commitment to solving unanswered challenges young people face in education. The Programme targets key areas of education, highlighting gaps in existing evidence and conducting new research to provide evidence to fill the gaps. Current areas of focus are: *From Education to Employment, Developing the Education Workforce and Innovation in Education.*

© 2012 National Foundation for Educational Research

National Foundation for Educational Research
The Mere, Upton Park,
Slough, Berks SL1 2DQ

T: 01753 574123
F: 01753 691632
E: enquiries@nfer.ac.uk

www.nfer.ac.uk