



hidden talents II

getting the best out of Britain's young people

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foreword

Small children often enjoy dressing up as their favourite superhero and playing games based on who they might become when they grow up. Although we quickly realise that we can't all be Superman, no one dreams of becoming unemployed with few prospects and no qualifications at just 16 years old. And yet as a former teacher, I know how it feels to look out at each expectant face in a new class at the start of term, and to know that for some of our young people this is what the future holds.

This is not the kind of world we want our children growing up in. To me, all children have the potential to be super human beings, even if they can't be superheroes. We must build a society that gets the best out of our young people. We must stop focussing on what young people are not and instead start building their confidence and self-belief to be a 'somebody'. We must start by getting rid of the 'NEET' category which is just lazy shorthand. Let's focus on what young people can do and are doing, instead of pigeonholing them by what they are not doing.

This is not just an issue for parents with teenage children but this is something that affects everyone. You should be concerned if you're a taxpayer because your money is being spent trying to tackle these problems. If you're an older person you will be concerned about whether there are people to care for you in older age. If you're an employer you will be concerned about what skills we need in the workforce. We all have a stake in building a place where young people are positively contributing to our society.

One of my priorities this year as Chairman of the Local Government Association has been to ask the organisation to undertake a serious piece of work to look at how we can help the one in six young people who are not in a job, education or training. I also asked for ideas on what we can do to prevent young people falling into this situation and I am very grateful for the particular contribution on prevention and early years from the Centre for Social Justice.

I am also thankful to the whole range of voluntary and community organisations that have contributed to this report and have also arranged for me to meet so many dynamic and motivated young people who are being helped by their projects and by work with local authorities. Special thanks go in particular to Rathbone, the Prince's Trust and Groundwork.

I hope you will consider the policy implications of this important report, and I hope that many of you will be willing to work with us as we work to move these ideas from the realm of policy to that of delivery.



Cllr Margaret Eaton
Chairman of the Local Government
Association

executive summary

Imagine our country with all of its young people who can, making a constructive contribution to building a richer society: learning, working, training, volunteering or caring for others.

We want to promote self-belief and achievement for everyone. But we also want public policy to put real value on informal learning, volunteering and caring as genuinely worthwhile things young people may choose to do. This means abandoning a failed policy of stigmatising 'NEETs' and working with individual young people and their families in ways that suit communities and places.

With the Centre for Social Justice and other partners, we have been building on the best of current practice and experience to explore a new approach that puts young people, their families and the community at the heart of the solution.

the issue

The current arrangements are not working:

- the terminology has become unhelpful; the label Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEETs) focuses on failure, stigmatises young people, masks the very different needs, attitudes and experiences of different young people;
- the current approach has been bedevilled by bureaucratic compartmentalism and artificial age boundaries in the system, best symbolised by the many different policies and funding streams applying to different age ranges;
- there are too many national agencies seeking to address the problem;
- policy has not taken sufficient account of the dynamics of local labour markets, the varying needs of businesses and learners from place to place; and
- the role of local attitudes, community and peer pressure and cultural issues have been systematically neglected by rigid and uniform national policy.

The national policy framework has not proved successful in enabling local and personalised solutions tailored to the needs of the family, the community and other local factors. This is, in our analysis, why it has not proved successful, either, in reducing disengagement.

local principles

Our lens is a local one. But we are not arguing for a simple transfer of responsibility for delivery based on administrative efficiency. The proposals in this report are based on a set of core principles.

Firstly, **a focus on what young people can do** including caring, volunteering, community service and informal learning – all of which can act as a stepping stone to or complement to work, formal education and training;

Secondly, it is the **responsibility** of the young person to undertake meaningful activity, and the **responsibility** of their family and local community to raise their aspirations, instil positive attitudes, help them access opportunities and encourage achievement.

Thirdly, developing ways of increasing participation should be undertaken **with** young people, their families and local communities.

Fourthly, a child's **early years** are of particular importance to their future psychological, physical, social and cognitive well-being, as illustrated by the fact that disengaged young people overwhelmingly report poor early experiences of school and learning. The family has a critical role supporting effective engagement in learning and the development of confidence and self sufficiency.

Fifthly, **no single agency** can address this issue alone. Councils will continue to work in partnership across the public sector, and with the private and voluntary sectors, but need to be free of the top heavy national bureaucracy that characterises current arrangements.

policy proposals

Our approach offers a complete contrast to current policy. Instead of a snapshot of despair bearing the NEET label, we describe policies that support a child at every stage of their journey into learning and work.

acting early

- Provide more support to families through health visitors broadening their skills to look at the wider context of the family (and funding parity for them).
 - Make this support available on an open door basis, not just interventions targeted at acute need.
 - Ensure that Home School Agreements between parents, children and schools are treated everywhere as an important part of education and contribute to a lively and productive home school relationship.
 - Get the full value out of the role of Home School Champion to work with pupils who have behavioural difficulties, poor attendance records and/or are underachieving within school, and liaise with their families.
 - Build on existing courses to increase parental involvement with their child's education (for example focussing on parental relationships with children, managing children's behaviour, supporting their studies and understanding their needs; family literacy classes for parents, especially fathers, to learn to read with their children).
 - Make greater use of tailored programmes and flexible timetabling on campus to provide targeted individual support to learners who do not benefit from the conventional classroom experience.
- Provide more vocational and practical options (and the funding parity)
 - New schools focused on science, engineering and technical skills that strengthen vocational training to meet skills gaps.
 - More alternative provision to pupil referral units. Build better links to the community including business.
 - Provide physical centres for families and not just their children (Family Hubs) as a focus within the community.
 - Family Hubs would be commissioned by councils often using the voluntary sector to deliver the services and including for example parental and relationship education, family and couple therapy, debt counselling, access to family law, as well as those tailored for local need, for example domestic violence and teenage pregnancy.
 - Promote families and healthy relationships by mainstreaming parental and relationship training and advice. The LGA group has already recommended to registrars that they signpost couples wishing to get married to marriage preparation courses.
 - Local area agreements should maximise voluntary sector delivery of services, including plans to implement the Compact fully by members of the Local Strategic Partnership, and initiatives to build local voluntary sector capacity, particularly in the areas of family and educational support.
 - Commissioning must be reformed to preserve innovation and diversity in services. Contracts must be far less prescriptive, without unnecessary reporting requirements, based on outcomes that allow the voluntary sector the flexibility to determine how best to achieve them.
 - Councils should also use other forms of support for the voluntary sector, in addition to direct funding, including match funding and community endowments.

helping young people now

- To make it more effective at a local level, local partnerships should be able to direct the level of EMA payment to different age groups and vary payments to incentivise young people to undertake courses that meet particular skills gaps. For example, in a local area the money might be used more effectively to pay a higher rate at 17 years old and a lower rate at 16 years-old; or to fund only bursaries for key subject areas such as science, technology, engineering and maths.
- There should be local discretion – if local people and their elected representatives want it – to flex the rules and levels of benefit payments where the costs are contained locally so that the system can respond to local need.
- A total place funding regime within which different parts of the public sector pool their budgets removing duplication and administrative inefficiencies in the system building on the effective practice of some children's trusts.
- Local partners should be able to use the redirected future savings from benefit payments to invest resources in either early intervention or helping young people now.
- Locally accredited programmes of informal learning and volunteering should be expanded and included within the definition of meaningful activity.
- Local discretion to vary the benefit rules to enable young people to continue receiving benefits whilst they undertake a programme of activity of this kind.
- Locally-tailored independent information advice and guidance – building on a genuinely localised Connexions service that strikes a proper balance between targeting priority groups and meeting the general need of all young people for high quality information, advice and guidance, in particular on vocational opportunities.

section one – introduction

Why is local government leading the response to the issue of disengaged young people?

For a start, the well-being of young people in the community is councils' statutory core business – it embraces the range of children's services including corporate parenting of looked-after children, social services support to families and the strategic oversight of local schools.

And that core business is growing. New responsibilities are being placed on councils – from April 2008 councils had responsibility for information, advice and guidance to 14 to 19 year olds returned to them through the Connexion service and soon councils will commission learning services for 16 to 19 year-olds. From 2013, they will be responsible for ensuring that young people, and employers, comply with a higher learning leaving age.

Councils are also responsible for the economic wellbeing of their place. Rising unemployment is a source of anxiety for councils across the country, currently at nearly 2,500,000 people, its highest level for 14 years, and expected to rise to three million. Nearly one million young people aged between 16 and 25 are now outside employment, education or training.

Helping disengaged young people in the 16 to 18 age group was already a top priority for local government and their partners before the recession – 115 out of a total of 150 local area agreements¹ include it as a priority, more than any other single area for action.

These various responsibilities are captured in one word: leadership. The identification of problems, marshalling of resources and co-ordination of the community response are the essence of place shaping.

As the economic position has deteriorated, councils have led the local response to support local businesses and local people through hard times. Where there is local need, it is hard-wired into the council DNA to respond. Whether it is as an economic, social or young people's issue, local government feels and takes responsibility. Councils have been doing this for years. In the recessions of the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s, local government has consistently shown itself willing to help young people to learn, train and find work². They have a reservoir of knowledge and expertise based on helping young people for many years.

Councils know that the formative experiences of young people play an important role in determining their future economic, physical and mental well-being. Where young people are self reliant and productive, communities are more cohesive and happier.

Councils are concerned to manage the necessary future cuts in public spending. The Total Place Pilots³ are looking at how public resources effectively focused on a place can make a greater impact.

The time is therefore right to explore whether what is in place now is working well, and to discuss the policy changes necessary to promote the best approaches to supporting young people to succeed in life.

This report is a response to our analysis of the issues published in July⁴. Together with the Centre for Social Justice we took up this challenge, drawing on the insights of partners and practitioners in councils, the public, private and voluntary sectors, we describe a new approach to engaging young people in productive activity.

section two – the issue

In villages, towns, cities around the country, a significant minority of our young people are detached from work, training, or education.

But this is not a new phenomenon. For a decade this has been a high-profile matter of national and local concern – yet despite a sustained national policy drive⁵ through successive cohorts of young people, it has proven an intractable problem with about 10 per cent of 16 to 18 year-olds defined as not in education, employment or training⁶ at any given time.

The number of young people who are disengaged now is higher than 10 years ago when the Social Exclusion Unit first coined the term “NEET”.⁷

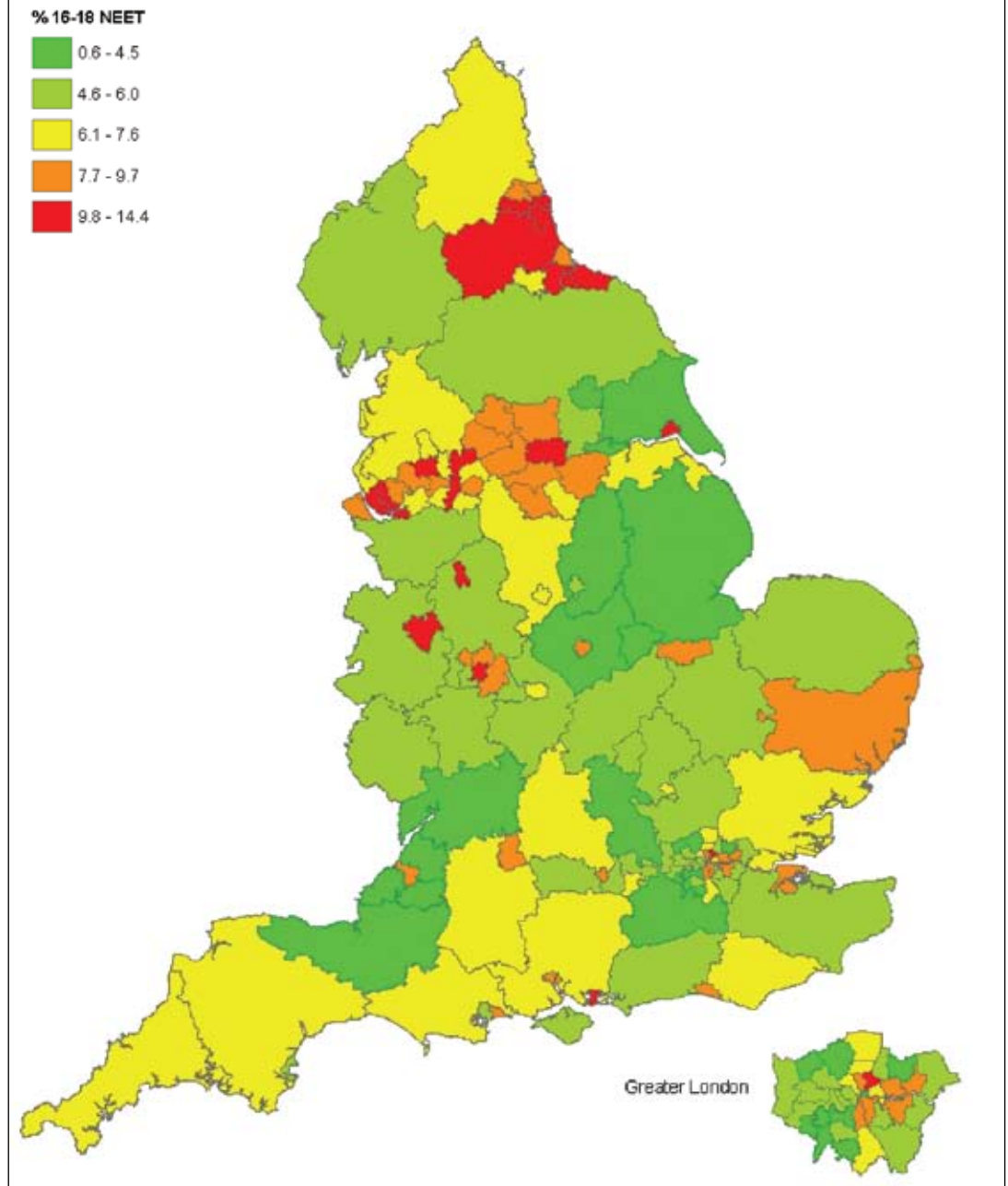
The recession has thrown this problem into starker relief. Young people have been hit harder by the recession than other age groups. The number of 16 to 24 year-olds not in education, employment or training had risen to 959,000⁸ in the year to June, or about one in six of the age group. But the alarming fact is that the trend in 16 to 24 year-olds not in education, employment or training has been upwards, even over the past decade of consistent economic growth.

The national average figures are alarming. In some areas the figures are much worse with economic and social costs for both the community and the young people. Map 1 illustrates the variation at upper tier local authority level using the government’s definition of 16-18 year-olds not in education, training or employment. A key point is that areas with both high and low numbers of disengaged young people occur in the same region; this shows both how local factors are at play, and that making policy at a regional level would not necessarily provide better targeting on need.



Map 1 – Proportion of 16-18 year old NEET
(not in education, training or employment)

England 2008



Source: DCSF, Participation in Education, Training and Employment, 16-18 year olds in England, June 2008

Research shows that young people who have long periods where they are not taking part in productive activity earn less throughout the rest of their life and are more likely to find themselves in a downward spiral that can include homelessness or crime.

For example, Godfrey et al found that the 157,000 young people who were NEET aged 16-18 years present in the UK population in 1999 would accrue additional lifetime costs of around £7bn in resources terms (essentially lost productivity) and £8.1bn in additional public spending (using 2001 prices). The per head equivalents are £45,000 in resource costs and £52,000 in public finance costs.⁹

Compared to other modern economies we have low levels of participation by young people – the graphs at figure 1 from 2007 highlight the relative position of the United Kingdom for the 15-19 age group and the 20-24 age group.

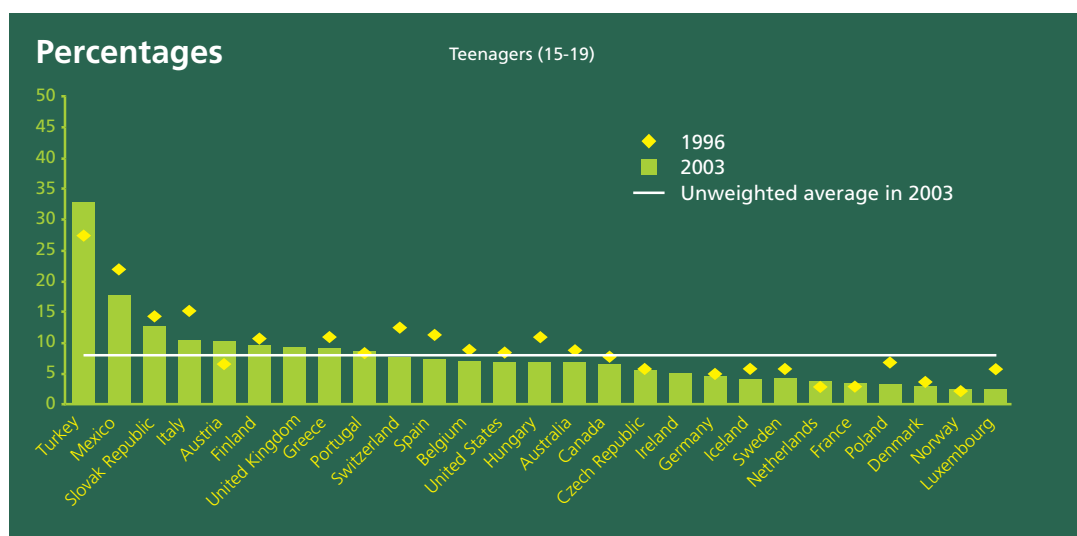
Yet compared to other comparable economies¹⁰, we incur high public spending costs both to get young people involved and to maintain them on benefits when they are disengaged – see table 1 below. More detailed figures are available at www.lga.gov.uk/hiddentalents. The bill for JSA, IB and IS alone for young people age 16 to 24 years old is nearly £2bn a year alone.

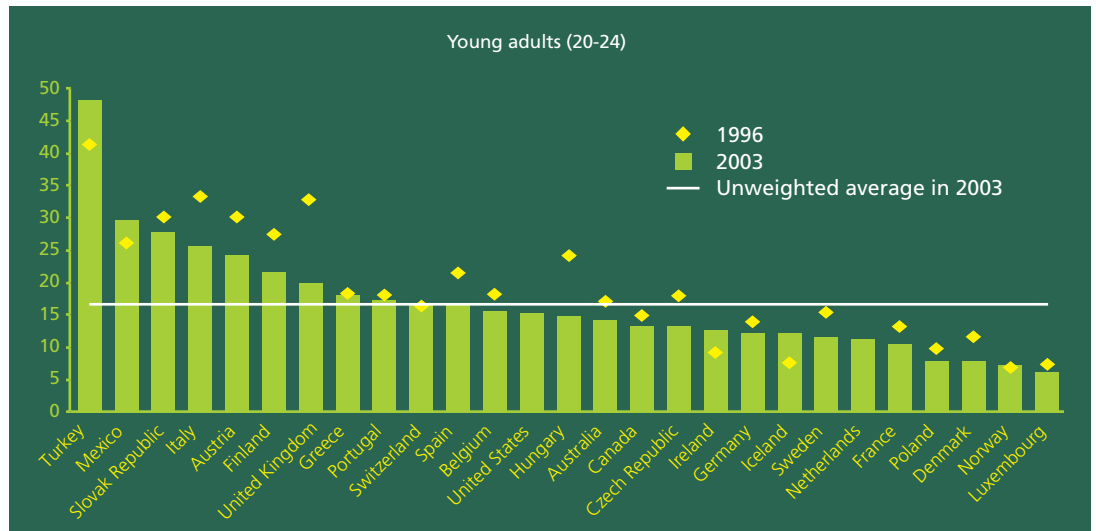
Why is Britain spending more to get worse results? It is obvious that how much gets spent is less important than how it is spent. On this evidence, we are spending badly.

Table 1 - annual public spending costs

Benefits – JSA, IS and IB	£2 billion
Child Benefit 16+	£1.22 billion
Education Maintenance Allowance	£549 million
Connexions	£500 million
Training programmes – apprenticeships, Future Jobs Fund	£3 billion

figure 1: Share of teenagers and young adults neither in education or employment (a)





source: Quintini et al 2007¹¹

In our view, business as usual with its complex overlapping arrangements is neither sustainable – the current economic and social costs are unacceptably high and we are eroding our economic base for the future – nor affordable – the future constraints on public spending mean we must get better value for money.

section three – why haven't we solved the problem?

The paper *Hidden talents* which we published in July showed five reasons why, on the issue of youth disengagement, we have been spending taxpayers' money to so little effect over the last decade.

First, the current language in which policy is made is itself unhelpful. The label Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEETs) stigmatises young people. Under cover of a caring policy, government has handed tabloid newspapers a handy shorthand for youth pariahdom. Even in professional circles, NEET has become the shorthand which masks the differences between young people in this group.

In fact, we know that 'NEET' conceals a huge diversity of needs and attitudes that defy easy labelling. While a minority of NEET young people face easily defined barriers to participation, most are put off by experiences, attitudes and barriers which are unique to that person¹². If we want to abolish the NEET phenomenon, the first thing we must scrap is the lazy use of the NEET label. The national Public Service Agreement target¹³ and the indicator for local government¹⁴ focus resource on 16 to 18 year-olds at the expense of other age groups. These targets also count young people who are volunteering and have caring responsibilities as NEET, stigmatising valuable, socially worthwhile activity.

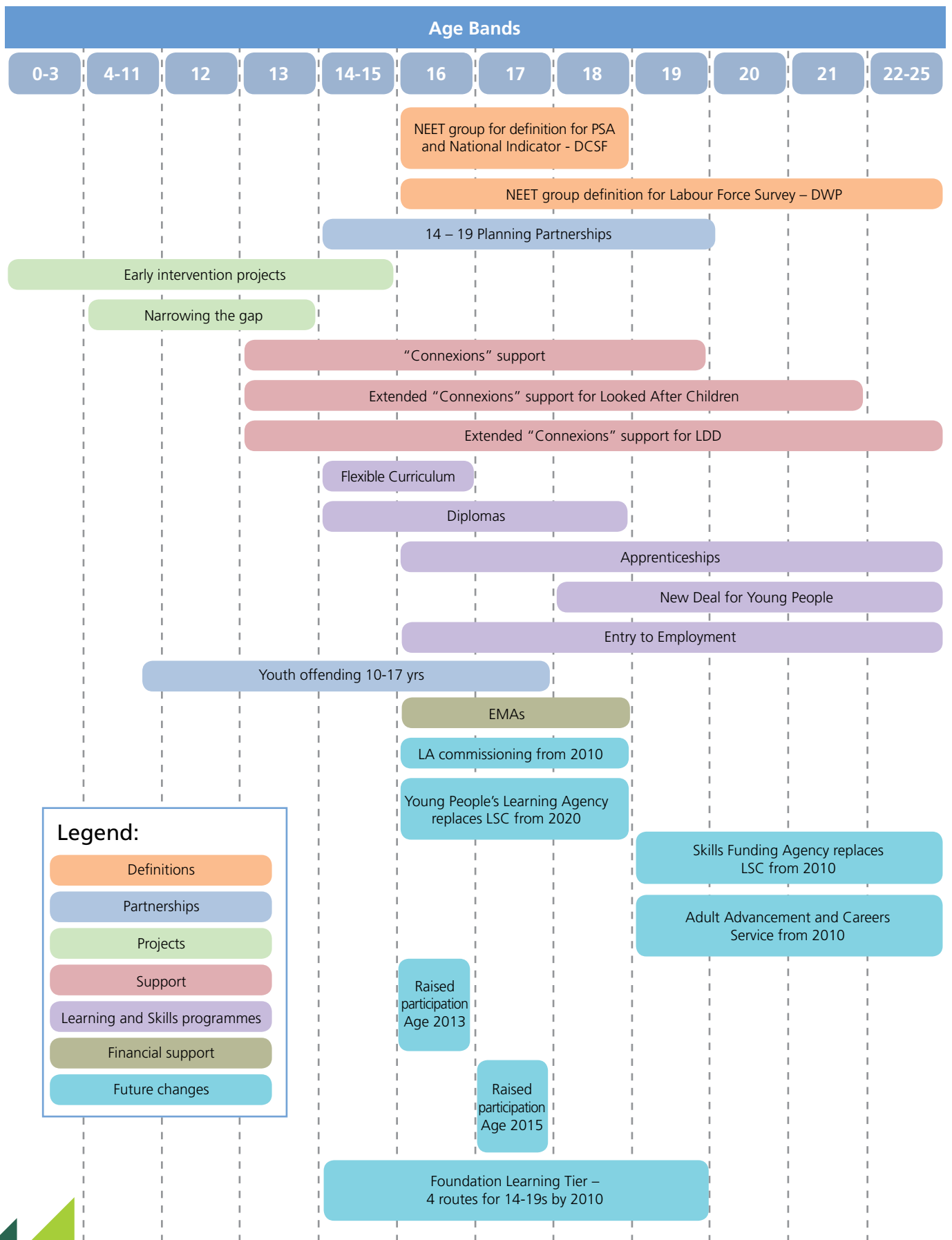
Secondly, the current approach has been bedevilled by bureaucratic compartmentalism. This manifests itself in a plethora of artificial age boundaries, with different policies, funding streams and performance management, applying to different age ranges in a way that is as good as random.

The chart overleaf illustrates this point:

- the Aim Higher programme to widen participation in higher education is targeted at 14 to 19 year-olds; but
- the Connexions service applies to 13 to 19 year-olds; while
- apprenticeships cover 16 to 25 year-olds and entry to employment 16 to 18 year-olds;
- the government PSA applies to 16 to 18 year-olds not in education, employment and training;
- people are entitled to JSA and other benefits from age 18 years except in cases of severe hardship;
- the Future Jobs Fund is available to 18 to 24 year-olds;
- Education Maintenance Allowance is payable to young people age 16 to 19 year -olds;

whilst other rules determine which young people's families may claim benefits and tax credits because they are still at school.

Thirdly, as the table below illustrates there are too many national agencies seeking to address the problem. The landscape is cluttered with public sector bodies. At best, valuable resource is wasted in the extensive transactions co-ordinating between agencies who may be accountable to either national, regional or local masters. At worst, this results in needs being only partially met, with gaps that fail to address a key barrier to participation or at the other extreme, services that overlap or duplicate. The net result is confusing to young people and their families.



Who	Responsibilities in relation to NEETs	Coverage
DCSF Department for Children, Schools and Families	National NEETs strategy National Indicator 16-18 Early intervention policy Families and Parenting policy Apprenticeship strategy (joint with DBIS) Sponsor for Young People's Learning Agency Children's Plan	England
DWP Department for Work and Pensions	18-25 Job Centre Plus provision New Deal Programmes Welfare benefits	England and Wales
BIS Business, Innovation and Skills	Responsible for post-19 education and training policy Apprenticeships (joint with DCSF) Responsible for Skills Funding Agency	England
DCELL Department for Children, Education, Lifelong Learning	Learning Responsible for NEETS strategy	Wales
Learning Skills Council until March 2010	Funding agency for post-16 education outside of HE NEET performance and tracking	England
Young People's Learning Agency from April 2010	Will provide funding and guidance to Local Authorities for the 16-19 commissioning role Responsible for the Academies	England
Skills Funding Agency from April 2010	Next steps agency operating within DBIS Will be responsible for channelling funding for adult learning outside of HE in line with policy, need and quality Will manage the National Apprenticeship Service, the Adult Advancement and Careers Service and the National Employer Service Responsible for ensuring quality	England
Regional Development Agencies	Skills strategies from 2010	England
Local authorities	Responsible for Early Years, schools policy, 14-19 implementation and planning, adult learning Securing places for all 16-19 year-olds for school and in FE for 2010 Duty to co-ordinate Children's Trusts Holistic approach to outcomes and well-being for children and young people Responsible for NEETs performance and tracking Offering multi-agency support through integrated youth support Monitoring take-up of EMA and Care to Learn Economic well-being duty – all ages Duty to track children missing education Connexions services up to age of 19, or 21 for Care Leavers, or 25 for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities Maintaining 14 – 19 prospectus	England

Who	Responsibilities in relation to NEETs	Coverage
Further Education Colleges	Deliver of programmes for 14 -19 and 19 + Duty to co-operate with the Children's Trust Notify Connexions of offer of places/drop out Identifying and supporting those at risk Liaising with schools and employers	England Wales – with variations
Schools	Early intervention initiatives Identify and supporting those at risk of disengaging Working with parents/employers and colleges	England and Wales
Learning providers	Deliver of programmes for 14 -19 and 19 + Notify LA Connexions of offer of places/drop out Identifying and supporting those at risk of becoming NEET Liaising with schools and employers	England Wales – with variations
Voluntary sector providers	Support and advocacy on behalf of young people at national and local level, including the National Youth Agency Delivery of flexible programmes, specialist programmes and mainstream programmes Supporting progression Liaising with other providers, connexions, employers	England and Wales

There is no apparent strong and defensible logic to these different age boundaries. However they create additional and artificial barriers which professionals and young people alike have to navigate.

We argue instead for a new approach that spans from birth to age 24 years, in particular to dismantle the transition at age 19 years where a gulf develops in the support to some disengaged young people. Academic evidence supports this view.

For example, Tom Schuller (*Inquiry for Future of Lifelong Learning*) says that there is no justification for the drawing of deep lines at 16, 18, 19 and 21 years old. He argues that there is mounting evidence that young people continue to mature for longer than was originally thought physiologically and otherwise and that young people's passage into adulthood is likely to be more prolonged and unpredictable.¹⁵

Eligibility for state help should be driven by need, not age or an agency's mandate. Young people, their families, and the professionals trying to help them, should have access to the support they need based on professional judgments about what will help them within a local allocation, not clumsy inflexible criteria designed in Whitehall to ration a national budget.

Fourthly, policy has not taken sufficient account of the strong sub-regional and local features of the labour market where vacancy rates, wage rates, skills-needs and employment rates all vary from one sub-region to another. For example, payments to skills providers have been for NVQ level 2 and 3 qualifications at times when local businesses have been denouncing those qualifications as irrelevant and crying out for short courses that close skills gaps.

Fifthly, the context of family and the influence that peers and the local community have on young people has been overlooked.

They provide the bearings that determine young people's decisions about education, work and training. Research shows that the early years home learning environment and parents' qualifications are the most important background factors relating to a child's attainment in reading at Year 5¹⁶.

what works – a focus on the individual

Shane's story, The Yard Project, Lowestoft

In 2006, upon release from prison, Shane moved into temporary accommodation at a dryhouse in Lowestoft. It was at this point that Shane was referred to The Yard, a local voluntary and community sector project.

At The Yard Project, Shane was actively involved in refurbishing a derelict building. As a result he gained a wide range of practical skills and experience, such as bricklaying and plastering. He also gained a number of qualifications and certificates, such as an AQA in bricklaying, a gardening skills qualification and a first aid certificate. Whilst Shane values these qualifications and the credibility associated with them, he also gained confidence and self-respect from the project.

The progress that Shane has made is attributable to the holistic support provided by The Yard Project. It is not simply about the transfer of practical skills (although this is important) – the project also offers intensive one-to-one support.

In 2007 Shane left The Yard project to find employment. Since this time he has had a number of jobs, but has also remained in regular contact with the project, often contributing on a voluntary basis. This experience has helped Shane to realise that he can make a positive contribution.

The case for change

In summary, national policy starts with national statistics, tries to ration budgets by rules based on those statistics and organisational boundaries, and does not account for the preferences of individuals, the influences of the family, the community, and ignores variations in the local labour market, employers' preferences and other local factors. No wonder it isn't working.

section four – our principles

Against a background of an intractable structural problem, exacerbated by the recession, high public spending costs, unaffordable economic and social costs and a confusing landscape of public bodies, we need a new approach.

We propose the following principles:

firstly, it is **the responsibility of the young person to undertake productive activity**, and the responsibility of their family and local community to foster their self-belief, raise their aspirations, instil positive attitudes, help them access opportunities and encourage achievement;

secondly, **a focus on what young people can do**, rather than what they are not doing; widening our view of productive activity to include caring, volunteering, community service and informal learning – all of which can act as a stepping stone to or complement to work, education and training;

thirdly, **developing ways of increasing participation is a local process that should be undertaken with young people, families, local communities, voluntary organisations, faith groups and employers**. In their response to our consultation, the Foyer Federation said “[we need] an approach that promotes active and engaged citizenship where the voice of the service user is taken into account in the shaping and delivery of service provision”;

fourthly, **a young person’s risk of dropping out of work and learning is shaped years before they face the crucial choices of work or training**. The role of the family in supporting learning is vital. Councils and local partners have the primary responsibility for ensuring the well-being of children in their earlier years and are uniquely placed to understand the combined effects of family, community and school on a young person;

fifthly, to the extent that the public sector is needed to support the efforts of individuals and their families, **councils have a unique and lead role as the democratically elected body in the area to join up the response**. Local approaches need to be founded on the local partnerships that embrace the private sector, voluntary organisations and faith groups where local culture and psychology, economic opportunity and social and housing policy and their interdependencies are well understood.

In *Hidden talents: re-engaging young people* we proposed two new models for visualising how this might work.

The first – the A4 model (see page 18) – emphasises the central role of the family, supported by role models, peers and personal relationships built by participating in local organisations (which we refer to as *the community*) and describes a pathway from early formative experiences (setting aspiration and attitudes) to opportunity and educational attainment and entry into work (access and achievement).

The second is a re-engagement model (see page 30) that describes joined-up ways of working with young people who have already become, or are at risk of disengagement from learning and employment.

Both models put the individual at the centre of the discussion and reflect the complexity of the factors that shape each person’s attitudes to learning and work.

Building on these models, the following two sections explore better ways to ensure young people do not become disengaged and better ways to support those who are already disengaged back into learning and employment.

section five – acting early

Little things matter and we can ignore the small beginnings at our peril.

“For want of a nail the shoe was lost, for want of a shoe the horse was lost, for want of a horse the rider was lost, for want of a rider the battle was lost, for want of a battle, the kingdom was lost.”

This is certainly true of a child, its upbringing, education and life chances. For that reason, any policy response to the problems of young people without meaningful education, work or training, must include a response to the ‘small beginnings’ of today that left unchecked will yield the problems of frustration, criminality, wasted talent and lost opportunity for the next generation.

This section tracks a child’s journey from the start of their life into education and their passage through it. Put another way, building aspiration means that where you have come from need not dictate where you are going to. This applies to children from all backgrounds: low, middling and high income.

introduction

The policy recommendations below are a direct response to the issues raised in *Hidden talents*. They draw on numerous sources, and many ideas being demonstrated in best practice. It was striking that where there were fresh insights into old problems, similar themes emerged. Three particular influences are important to acknowledge.

- The A4 model identifies the crucial role of family support for the development of positive aspirations and attitudes, helping to provide access to opportunity and celebration of achievements. Where the family cannot do this, then the community around an individual must assist. It is the role of public services to enable this, not replace it.
- The policy work of the Centre for Social Justice has been a key influence. Its landmark publication *Breakthrough Britain* (July 2007) placed family breakdown firmly on the political landscape. Their rigorous approach to policy development described how this and four other ‘pathways to poverty’ (addictions, debt, welfare dependency and educational failure) often combine to create a perfect storm that overwhelms individuals. Subsequent work, including collaboration with the Smith Institute on early intervention (*Early intervention: Good Kids, Great Parents, Better Citizens*, September 2008 and *Getting in Early*, November 2008) are particularly relevant to the following proposals.

leading delivery

This section approaches the problem with two key assumptions:

- a focus on prevention tackling cause not just effect;
- the need for a long-term and strategic view. It follows that investment in the life of an infant today may have little visible effect until at least a decade has passed, and possibly a further decade before society receives a positive economic benefit.

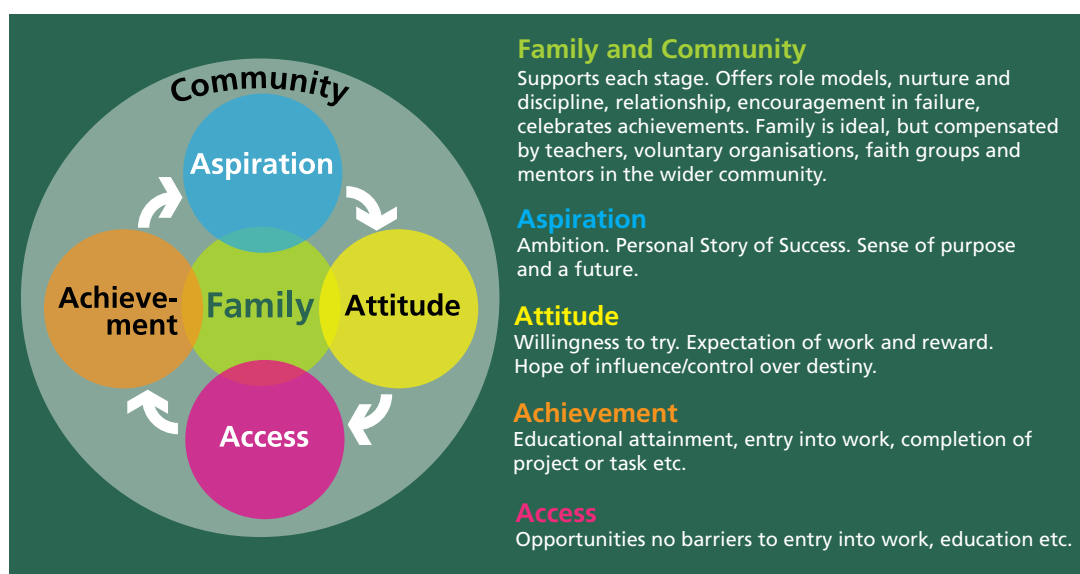
leading within a community

The A4 model highlights family and parental involvement as the most important influence on a child.

But it also recognises that families are themselves part of a wider community which can influence children and young people either positively or negatively. In that wider community, voluntary groups, faith-based organisations, and informal networks play a vital part. They can exert influence and build a community's social capital in a way that formal arms of the public sector cannot.

They are trusted in a way that the public sector's professionals often are not. This means that the role of the voluntary sector needs to be promoted, supported, and enlisted as an ally and delivery partner by the public sector.

Despite progress in recognising this at the political level in recent years, there is a long way to go in according the third sector its proper place in policy delivery. The issue of re-engaging young people is an important case study in how that can be taken further.



The A4 model

a journey we all take

The following section focuses on the current group of young people who are disengaged. Often this is the result of influences on a young person that have been years in the making. It is crucial therefore to look at the child's journey from infancy, into primary school and secondary school education.

A key contrast with current national policy is a shift in focus from 'chasing the child' to ensuring every family matters. Under current policy, the school in particular is recognised as the best opportunity to engage with and intervene to good effect. But a child spends only about 15 per cent of their time in school. Therefore a focus on the family's support on the journey from infancy through childhood is a better framework for looking at the best way to support a child's development.

The stages on this journey are summarised in the table below.

stage	issues	Policy focus		outcomes	
Infant	During these years a child must develop the foundational systems for emotional regulation, kindness, empathy and concern that will be used throughout life	STRONG FAMILY	High-quality of relationships and interactions experienced by the infant in the Early Years .	VOLUNTARY SECTOR	Secure, consistent attachments improve self-esteem, confidence and sense of identity.
Primary school	A child's early experiences of, and attitudes towards, the educational system are shaped by the parent.		Creating a positive attitude to education in the child by engaging the parent.		Creating a love of learning within disadvantaged communities – making education inspiring and relevant.
Secondary school	Excluded pupils have been failed by pupil referral units and risk falling out of and with the system.		Encouraging an increase in the provision of alternative and flexible learning .		Providing flexible curriculum to help prevent children from being 'blown off course' during schooling.

the early years

When Freud argued that human beings enter the world 'not quite finished', he highlighted the vital importance of our early experiences with adults in determining our personal development.

In the early years of life, the quality of infants' relational experiences is a key determinant in their future emotional well-being, self confidence and their chances of forming happy and sustainable relationships. Babies who are surrounded by supportive parents and other adults, who react sympathetically to distress, are more likely to develop into children who are able to cope with stress without resorting to defensive behaviour.

Even if the absence of adult or parental reassurance lasts only for the first three years of childhood and is subsequently redressed, Dr. Bruce Perry has shown that this may not be enough to compensate.¹⁷ Just as worryingly, while a child who starts with these advantages on their side has opportunities to catch up if they fall behind, one who does not is less likely to be able to recover, even if they start their education well and only encounter problems later on.¹⁸

The development of a child deprived of positive stimulus, nurture, attachments and care in its early years will be significantly impaired. The effects of this disadvantage on the child's self-esteem and confidence will have a negative effect on educational outcomes and affect their ability to empathise and form relationships later in life. For example:

- the broad contours of educational inequality are well-defined when a child is 22 months old – and children with a 'low socio-economic status' have a much slower development than children with medium or high 'socio-economic status'¹⁹;
- a child's developmental score at 22 months is a predictor of educational outcomes at 26 years old²⁰.

As bad as the problem is today, there is every indication that it is worsening. The children or siblings of those who are out of work or training are more likely to experience the same.

Current policy is ineffective and misdirected:

- it is focused on intervention after 'inevitable' family breakdown, and fire-fighting the consequences (for example help for children with mental health problems is triggered by extreme behaviour, which is not evident in 0-3 year-olds);
- the focus on intensive interventions for a vulnerable minority of families has led to the neglect of low-key support for the needs of the majority;
- a top-down approach makes public service integration difficult and leads to a fragmented approach;
- Sure Start has failed to balance competing financial and nurturing needs of parents, skewing performance in favour of supporting them into work, and removing choice for those who wish to prioritise the nurturing needs of their child(ren).

To catch potential problems early, there is a need for universal provision, offering a range of support from widespread, low-level 'on demand' support, often available in their own community – through health visiting, to co-ordinated interventions by statutory agencies in cases of acute need. This is not about bossiness or nanny-state 'intervention', or about an army of snoopers taking the state into people's homes. Rather, it is about connecting people to support within their own communities to develop existing health visiting into a more multifunctional service that has the well-being of families, and not just their infants, at its heart. This is what the best family nurses and health visitors already do – helping people find the support, often informal, in their neighbourhood and community.

We therefore propose:

- **providing more support to families through health visitors broadening their skills to look at the wider context of the family; and**
- **making this support available on an open door basis, not just interventions targeted at acute need.**

benefits and delivery

There will be significant long-term economic benefits across the public sector. Studies have shown that effective support to families with young children can yield savings up to seventeen times the cost of the initial programme²¹.

Existing children's centres recognise that a child's wellbeing is inseparable from that of its family and the high risk of disadvantage transferring between generations. However, they are a different model focussed on public sector delivery.

The recommendations of the work co-authored by the Centre for Social Justice and Smith Institute²² making the case for this kind of support were well received and endorsed by the leaders of all three main parties.

Again local government has a key role in delivery. The business case for commissioning will require considering a funding horizon beyond the four-year term of an administration. Factoring economic benefits outside local government will be made simpler by whole area approach to public spending and more collaborative budgeting. Commissioning also allows local government to increase the co-operation between councils and Primary Care Trusts, and formalise the involvement of the voluntary sector.

primary school

A supportive home environment in the earliest years is only a foundation, however, and must be followed later in childhood by reading aloud, painting, drawing and other activities like visiting the library, all of which are crucial to intellectual development. As important, these create a culture of learning and inquiry within the child, preparing them for formal education.

The real inequality issue in education therefore is that some children will start primary school already burdened with the severe disadvantage of their parents' lack of engagement and interest in their education. Without effective support the disadvantaged child that falls behind will be left behind.

Therefore it is imperative that parents are involved in the education of their children. YouGov polling for the Centre of Social Justice in April/May 2007 showed that:

- 79 per cent of people believe that parents are primarily responsible for ensuring that children "work hard, behave well and attend school". Just seven per cent of people say that the responsibility lies with head teachers or teachers.
- 65 per cent believe that "parents have a vital role to play in children's education and parenting classes would help them understand their responsibility".

Key responses are therefore to strengthen the relationship between parents and children and families and schools. Clear expectations must be set for the role each plays in the development of the child. Policies are needed therefore that will enable parents to engage positively with their children's school, take greater ownership of their child's education through that relationship and help them identify and overcome barriers to their children's attainment.

We therefore propose to:

- ensure Home School Agreements between parents, children and schools are treated everywhere as an important part of education and contribute to a lively and productive home school relationship;
- get the full value out of the role of Home School Champion to work with pupils who have behavioural difficulties, poor attendance records and/or are underachieving within school, and liaise with their families;
- build on existing courses to increase parental involvement with their child's education (for example focussing on parental relationships with children, managing children's behaviour, supporting their studies and understanding their needs; family literacy classes for parents, especially fathers, to learn to read with their children).

benefits and delivery

Home School Agreements set the context of the relationship between parent and school and provide the framework of expectations based on key values, pupil behaviour, teacher responsibilities and parental duties. They could be developed and reviewed on a consultative basis, based on the views, situation and needs of the school and the immediate community it serves.

Exemplars of this thinking exist in Australia (*the National Framework: Nine Values for Australian Schooling*) and the US (KIPP Academy, *Commitment to Excellence*). Support, information, examples and guidance could be provided through a simple website. Costs could be minimal, and provided for from existing school budgets.

the learning family

*"In the learning family every member is a lifelong learner in their own right however, it is much more than a collection of individuals on learning programmes: the intergenerational combination of encouragement and involvement in each other's learning activities by all family members raises aspirations and creates a long-term change in the culture and patterns of learning. Such a family supports parents, grandparents and wider family members to be active participants in their children's learning as well as learners in their own right: both elements are crucial in building resilience in families, in creating community well-being, economic prosperity and social cohesion."*²³

Building on the existing Parent Support Adviser Programme, Home School Champions help identify problems early and work with those pupils who are at risk of educational failure. In the school this will prevent disruption and distraction to other pupils around them and leave teachers to concentrate on teaching. At home, Home School Champions will work with parents and families to identify and address the causes of the problems observed in school. To do this to best effect, Home School Champions should be drawn from the local community, in part to ensure specialist local and cultural knowledge but primarily to maintain independence from statutory agencies. Costs will vary depending on the means of the voluntary sector partner (from fully funded to free).

Courses to build parental involvement with their children's education can be delivered by voluntary and community groups. These are low cost (typically a few thousands of pounds, based on similar courses being run), and can be defined by local need. These courses may also help promote greater parental involvement in the school, for example on boards of governors.

Crucially the curriculum should be developed in conjunction with schools and parents – they need to be developed locally in the community – not delivered as a top down fiat from a national quango.

The shared experience of learning which occurs within family learning classes has relational benefits as well as educational ones. The child and parent see and respond to each other's interest in the subject.

alternative and flexible learning

The damaging effects of poor parent-child relationships upon the child's development are not limited to their abilities to cope with stressful situations or to socialise with their peer group. This development continues as the child moves into adolescence, and later, adulthood.

One of the legacies of a 'top down' approach by central government to the problems we face is to emphasise economic and academic measures at the expense of the crucial underlying relationships and experiences.

A UNICEF report rated Britain bottom of a survey of 21 industrialised countries on the 'family and peer relationships' dimension, which can be seen as a reflection of the disregard that current government policy has for the importance of these relationships.²⁴

A child disadvantaged in the ways described, struggling to relate to peers, authority and the constraints of a system and formal education may rebel, leading to their exclusion. At this point, they have in effect been blown off course. They are not equipped to return into mainstream education, insufficiently skilled to gain meaningful employment and scarred from their encounters with the public services. We know that children excluded from school are at a much higher risk of becoming excluded from employment and training later on.²⁵

For such children, alternative education pathways become vital.

When children are excluded from schools they are not catered for well. Excluded pupils are regularly sent to Pupil Referral Units at a cost to the state of £228m per annum²⁶. However OFSTED stated, in 2006, that Pupil Referral Units (PRU) are the 'least successful of all' provision in ensuring pupil

progress although its more recent reports suggest they are improving.²⁷

There are many and diverse causes of disruptive behaviour, including children who struggle behaviourally for academic reasons. Clearly these are very different to those whose behaviour stems from domestic or other social disadvantage.

A further disruption for pupils may be encountered when they must make the transition between primary and secondary school. Children may find it hard to cope with the curriculum and expectations of their new school²⁸ or the new school simply may not have a good understanding of the backgrounds of new pupils. Tragically, even the good progress that disadvantaged children make in pre-school is not sustained in primary school or in the crucial transition between primary and secondary schooling.²⁹

The key response is to improve the prospects of children at risk of exclusion and re-integrate those who have been excluded by responding to the cause of the exclusion and providing an alternative learning route. Many countries such as the Netherlands recognise this and high quality vocational subjects are a key element of the secondary school curriculum.

Policy recommendations are to:

- **make greater use of tailored programmes and flexible timetabling on campus to provide targeted individual support to learners who do not benefit from the conventional classroom experience;**
- **provide more vocational and practical options (and the funding parity);**
- **new schools focused on science, engineering and technical skills that strengthen vocational training to meet skills gaps;**
- **more alternative provision to pupil referral units;**
- **build better links to the community including business.**

benefits and delivery

Practical learning helps young people to increase their confidence, literacy and numeracy and improves levels of self reliance, communication and innovation which businesses value highly.

Government should use a proportion of the funds currently spent on Pupil Referral Units to stimulate the expansion of successful alternative providers.

Funding is clearly an issue with these recommendations. Although it is beyond the scope of this report, schools could also attract more investment and involvement from local businesses and individuals if there were a wider range of tax reliefs available.

strong families

Throughout a child's journey into young adulthood, the family is a common thread. It is the natural environment to provide the stimulus for the infant, the culture of learning and interest within a young child, and help with the transition into adolescence and adulthood.

Breakdown of the family leads to reduced social outcomes for the children involved including worklessness and educational failure. Just 12 per cent of the 60,000 children in care in England will gain five good GCSEs. If you have experienced family breakdown, you are 75 per cent more likely to fail at school, 70 per cent more likely to offend, 70 per cent more likely to become a drug addict and 35 per cent more likely to experience worklessness.

Current government policy towards families with young children, in common with its snapshot approach to the problem of NEETs, is focused upon what might be termed 'fire-fighting' approaches, dealing with the consequences of family breakdown, and emphasising the treatment of the resultant problems.

The well-meaning but inadequate tactic of firefighting needs to be replaced instead with a renewed focus upon what factors contributed to the family breakdown, involving the identification of early indicators and, where necessary, attempts to prevent the catastrophe before it occurs. This reflects a simple desire to recognise the importance of healthy family relationships, and the influence which they exert on economic and academic outcomes, which represent the focus of the government's Early Years policy.³⁰

The Sure Start initiative was originally intended (1998) to strengthen families through promoting the social and educational development of their children, and by meeting both their financial needs and their need to nurture their children. However, the programme has gradually come to prioritise the economic side of its remit, focussing upon ensuring that mothers can return to work and, in the words of the late Norman Glass, a key architect of the programme, seeking to support parents both 'as parents and in their aspirations towards employment'.³¹

In this way, the programme has the unintended consequence of promoting employment growth over children's wellbeing. It has redefined one of its roles as a replacement for parents who wish to, or are required to, return to employment.

In fact, studies such as the European Early Promotion Project have found that the future mental health of a large proportion of the population can be improved through widening the reach of health visitors and through the focussing of resources on prevention. The government's shift in emphasis towards getting mothers back to work has moved resources away from what is best for their children.³²

Ensuring that the population at large has access to health visiting will only increase the chances of detection of the problems that can occur in all sections of society – and mitigate the effects

that are felt in all sections of society. A culture of widespread health visiting avoids the stigma and disruption that late interventions ahead of identified problems can do at present.

We propose a focus on the family and an open door of support to those who would like to take it up:

- To provide physical centres for families and not just their children ('Family Hubs') as a focus within the community.
- Family Hubs would be commissioned by councils often using the voluntary sector to deliver the services and include core services (for example parental and relationship education, family and couple therapy, debt counselling, access to family law) as well as those tailored for local need (for example domestic violence, teen pregnancy).
- To promote families and healthy relationships by mainstreaming potential and relationship training and advice. The LGA group has already recommended to registrars that they signpost couples wishing to get married to marriage preparation courses.

benefits and delivery

Studies³³ show that better outcomes for children follow across care, health, criminal justice and other services: fewer children in care and under Child Protection Plans, better well-being and mental health, increased educational attainment, fewer not in employment, education or training, lower addiction and teenage conception rates.

a strong voluntary sector

Sadly, we do not all enjoy the benefits of a strong family. Many of those with problems today do not have a family they can turn to for support, counsel, help or even simple understanding. Therefore the role of community is essential within the A4 model (see page 18). Where family fails, it must be the wider community that stands in the gap.

The voluntary sector is an invaluable part of the picture, and an essential tool of policy.

It has a unique ability to access these hard-to-reach groups and individuals and to get alongside and deliver innovative, highly personalised services. The public sector can play a key role in fostering a strong and healthy local voluntary sector realising the benefits of innovative and effective work to support its own services in education and welfare.

Public services are expensive to deliver, are tailored to the norm and tend to be impersonal. They often cannot reach those who are most in need of the services required. The importance of the voluntary sector and its strengths are well known and acknowledged in the Compact, but this is often regarded as toothless.

Engagement with the voluntary sector has therefore tended to result in annual grants (often very small) that do not allow meaningful planning and delivery, or very large, central contracts that are in effect public services by proxy. Where contracts do exist they are cumbersome, prescriptive and often inappropriate for voluntary sector, faith groups and informal networks.

The squeeze on voluntary sector activity is reflected in the fact that the DfES (now the DCFS) forecast that for 2007/8 they would spend just £283m on the voluntary sector, out of a total budget of £64.9bn.

As Colin Cripps, chief executive of In-Volve, says³⁴

“At one time contracts used to recognise the expertise, innovation and creativity available in the third sector: the fact that we could ‘reach the parts that others can’t reach’. We could use our particular qualities to effectively deliver the required outputs and outcomes in ways that played to the strengths of the voluntary sector and its roots in community. Nowadays tenders increasingly prescribe the numbers of staff to be employed, their qualifications, the methodology to be used, the software data is to be collected on and generally micromanage the contract delivery in advance. This effectively makes us an extension of the statutory sector, managing only in the sense that we deliver at the cutting edge of cost and bear all the financial risks.”

Three key shifts in thinking are needed to harness the strengths of the third sector. All will require a change of thinking and culture: all will require local government to take the lead.

- Respect the ability of the voluntary sector to innovate and adapt and provide effective support for families and education.
- Utilise the ability of the sector to reach hard-to-reach pupils and families, where the public sector may be regarded as hostile or a threat (through removal of benefits, housing or even children).
- Protect the very ‘smallness’ of many voluntary sector organisations that helps with the personalisation of their interventions.

Many voluntary groups and charities across the country have a track record of turning around entrenched educational failure – often without fuss and fanfare. These will be released if unnecessary regulation was eased and funding made more flexible. Many local councils have begun this process, working with voluntary sector partners to deliver local area agreement priorities. This includes working with the voluntary sector at the early stages of commissioning to ensure that the procurement process allows them to compete effectively for contracts.

We propose:

- **Local area agreements should maximise voluntary sector delivery of services, including plans to implement the Compact fully by members of the Local Strategic Partnership, and initiatives to build local voluntary sector capacity, particularly in the areas of family and educational support;**
- **commissioning must be reformed to preserve innovation and diversity in services. Contracts must be far less prescriptive, without unnecessary reporting requirements, based on expected outcomes that allow the voluntary sector to determine how best to achieve them;**
- **councils should also use other forms of support for the voluntary sector, in addition to direct funding, including match funding and community endowments.**

benefits and delivery

Effective engagement with the voluntary sector is essential to provide family support and pupil engagement across the policies identified to those with the greatest need.

LAA's are tightly prescribed by central government targets and priorities, however the inclusion of voluntary sector delivery would be a voluntary addition and a strategic response to enable better delivery.

The National Procurement Strategy has ensured that councils have well defined procurement processes. These encourage the development of a business case, into which the long term benefits of voluntary sector delivery can be factored. Similarly, tender scoring and decision-making can factor in voluntary sector friendly policies (for example encouraging local responses over remote, national bodies). Standard contract/reporting protocols can be eased to remove some of the unnecessary barriers to voluntary sector involvement.

Finally, one of the big challenges for a council will be to build voluntary sector capacity locally – expanding what is there, but also fostering new growth and initiatives. Best practice and learning from other projects and councils will be vital, as well as using a mixture of funding mechanisms and support.

section six – helping young people now

introduction

While the previous section set out how we can act early to prevent young people facing the consequences of a life scarred by a period out of productive activity, the problem remains how to help the nearly one million young people between 16 and 25 years old not in education, employment or training.

The recession has added to our fear that we are failing a significant minority of our young people. There is concern too that when the recovery comes, some young people will be ill prepared to compete for the employment opportunities that emerge.

In this section we explore what can be done to help young people more effectively, whether they are either currently disengaged, or at risk of being disengaged in the near future.

We apply a critical lens to the current arrangements, using a re-engagement model viewed from a young person's perspective.

current policy

Engaging young people more effectively is not a new issue.

One of the first acts of the incoming Labour administration in 1997 was to put in place the New Deal for Young People. There have been stream of reforms since then including tracking and monitoring, reform of the qualifications framework with increased flexibility, personalised guidance and support and financial incentives.

Recently government has put in place changes designed to raise participation including:

- the September guarantee for school leavers which offers all 16 and 17 years olds who want

- a guaranteed place in education or training;
- from spring 2010, the Young Persons Guarantee which guarantees a young person age 18 to 24 who has been on Job Seekers Allowance for 12 months either a job, work-focused training or work experience training on the community task force;
- increasing the number of apprenticeships to 400,000 by 2020, with a guaranteed entitlement to an apprenticeship place for each suitably qualified young person from 2013;
- raising the learning leaving age to 17 years-old in 2013 and 18 years- old in 2015.

The 14 to 19 reforms, enacted through the Education and Skills Act 2008 and the Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning bill will bring about further change. The measures include:

- provisions for supporting young adults with learning difficulties to participate in education or training;
- the transfer of the responsibility for delivering the Connexions service to local authorities;
- a duty on the Learning and Skills Council to secure the provision of proper facilities for apprenticeships for 16 to 18 year-olds and reasonable provision for those age 19 or over;
- a requirement on local education authorities to co-operate with partners who are responsible for 14 to 19 education and training;
- the transfer of funding for 16 to 19 education and training to local authorities;
- the creation of the Young People's Learning Agency (YPLA) for England to fund local authorities to fulfil their new duties for 16 to 19 year-olds;
- the creation of a new Skills Funding Agency as the funding body for post-19 skills;
- the provision for a statutory framework for apprenticeships and a right to an apprenticeship for suitably qualified 16 to 18 year-olds by local authorities.

The REACT Programme

The REACT Programme is local government's support programme to councils in implementing the current government policy for the transfer of responsibility for the commissioning and funding of 16 to 19 education and training to local authorities in April 2010. Full details of the work it is doing can be found at www.lga.gov.uk/react

React is supporting councils through the transfer, working closely with government and national agencies to make sure the local government voice is heard as the transfer develops and builds relationships with all types of 16 to 19 year old learning providers.

Local councils welcome the new responsibility that these changes bring. They build on the work of Children's Trusts in joining-up local services. Under the auspices of children's boards, some areas are aligning funding from different sources, commissioning services jointly and pooling local knowledge and data.

Questions remain however about whether these reforms will fully engage young people under 19, with a high risk that they will not reach the most disadvantaged. Since they focus primarily on the 16 to 18 year-olds, they will do nothing to change the position of disengaged young people who are aged 19 years and over.

The reforms do not reduce the fragmentation of duties between organisations. Indeed, they increase the number of bodies responsible for funding training and do not give sufficient weight to the wide range of interlocking actions necessary to engage a young person and place too much emphasis on national plans and rules.

If young people are not provided with the right financial support, housing, advice or other forms of support, raising the participation age could merely result in churning, increased drop-out

or at worse mass truanting (which through the use of civil sanctions would be criminalised). Nor has the government addressed the relationship that councils and learning providers will need to develop with employers in order to deliver on a higher participation age for young people who are currently in jobs without training.

*"The collective evidence from both the Learning Agreement pilots and the Activity Agreement pilots which help young people not in employment, education and training to access jobs with accredited training or re-enter full-time education – signals that **something more** is needed to help the most disadvantaged young people participate under the RPA."* **CfBT Education Trust**³⁵

Secondly, there is a risk of 'warehousing'. It is of course better that young people are engaged in education or training rather than disengaged. But it is important that the engagement is purposeful and that they acquire the skills that enable successful progression into the labour market in early adulthood.

Thirdly, the delivery of the places requires a number of public, private and voluntary sector organisations to play their part in assembling an attractive and flexible curriculum and work-based learning opportunities. But the current arrangements do not give councils the lead responsibility or accountability for co-ordinating all this activity at a local level.

Fourthly, the policies were designed in a buoyant economy with different labour market dynamics. There is a particular risk around work-based learning and training. For example the demand in some places for 16 to 17 year-old apprentices, which was weak before the recession, is likely to be even weaker now³⁶.

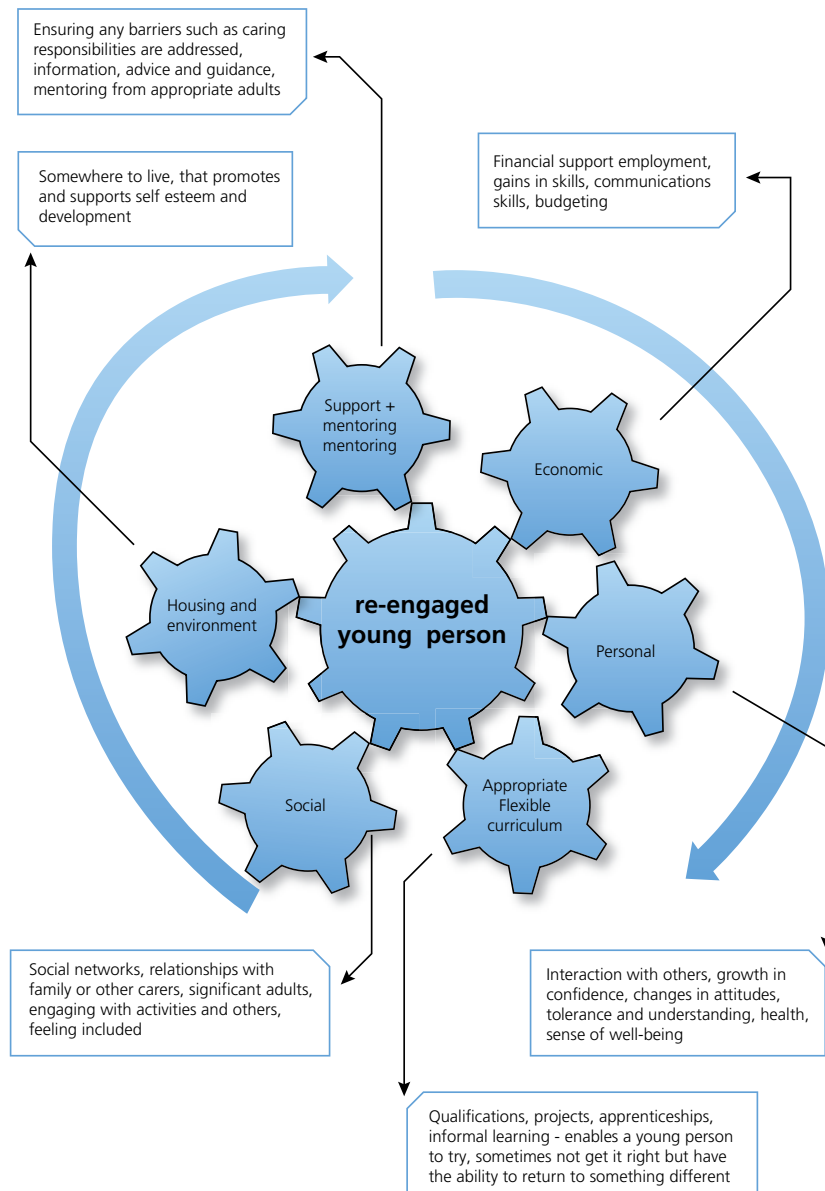
There is a particular need to ensure a coherent, world class apprenticeship offer to young people.

a re-engagement model

Our model below is one that puts the young person at the heart of engagement. It is a practical view of their needs:

- housing and environment – somewhere to live that offers security, belonging and culture promoting personal development and self esteem;
- the personal element includes the young person's interaction with their peers and other people, their confidence, attitudes, tolerance, self-reliance, health and wellbeing;
- support and mentoring including addressing key barriers such as caring responsibilities through information advice and guidance and mentoring.
- the social includes networks, relationships with family and carers, significant adults, engaging in activity and feeling included;
- an appropriate flexible curriculum that gives people options that they can try out and recognises individuals' ongoing learning styles;
- the economic element includes financial support whether through benefits or allowances such as education maintenance allowance;

A re-engagement model viewed from the young person's perspective



Our principal insight is that a series of inter-connecting actions are needed to re-engage a young person who has dropped out. Under current arrangements, their delivery is the responsibility of a number of different agencies who are operating under different performance management, funding and accountability regimes.

Their arrangements carry a systemic risk – that there is a lack of institutional coherence. Local partners have grown accustomed to managing this risk. Frontline practitioners see it as part of the landscape and accept the overheads and challenges that joining up necessitates.

At a local level, frontline practitioners have to overcome:

- multiple funding streams from Communities and Local Government (Working Neighbourhoods Fund), Department of Work and Pensions (Future Jobs Fund), Home Office (youth crime/ young offender budgets), Business, Innovation and Skills (Regional Development Agency) and Department of Children, Schools and Families (see table at www.lga.gov.uk/hiddentalents);
- organisational boundaries where young people can get lost in transition. For example, information, advice and guidance is provided by the Connexions service up to age 19, at which time Job Centre Plus become the principal advisory service. This transition can create a back-to-square-one effect. The collective organisational memory of dealing with a young person is lost even if there is an effective transfer of records. It is not yet clear how the Adult Advancement and Careers Service will help with this problem;
- a shifting institutional landscape. Once the Learning and Skills Council is dissolved in April 2010 there will be two funding channels for learning – the Young People's Learning Agency for pre-19s and the Skills Funding Agency for post-19s, supplemented by RDA-led regional skills plans, council-led sub-regional arrangements for

14 to 19 year-olds, and the separate remit of the National Apprenticeship Service;

- competing national priorities that do not always serve the local interest. The Flexible New Deal provides back-to-work support for unemployed young people. It is delivered by mainly private sector providers who are paid a flat rate regardless of the needs of the young person or the local area. They have little incentive to work with young people with the highest levels of need or in the toughest areas, where the economic and social case for doing so is greatest (see the quotes below from NACRO and Priority Management Ltd).

“Resources should be targeted at those who are genuinely and persistently disengaged. From this group it is likely that a high number will be at risk of involvement in the criminal justice system and...investment at this stage [in improved services for NEETs] will reduce the risk of later demands on the criminal justice purse.” NACRO

“There is a strong incentive not to work with the most in need/at risk, as they provide a high chance of non-achievement or at best take longer. Perversely providers are forced to take the low hanging fruit, in order to ensure that Minimum Levels of Performance are achieved, or risk losing contracts.”

Priority Management Ltd

At a local level, councils and their partners need to be able to remove the obstacles that individuals experience so that it is easier for them to progress in work and learning.

There is early evidence that the transfer of the Connexions service to local authority control is helping to produce a more joined-up approach with Connexions staff placed with teams who have key roles to play. In Liverpool, for example, the 'route 17 Retention and Progression Project' is a collaborative progression worker team working across Liverpool's

14 to 19 partnership Learning Collaboratives including Liverpool City Council working with LSC, Liverpool Community College, Work Based Learning Federation and Liverpool Secondary Schools. Where Connexions is successful, it has been able to move away from a prescriptive national business model and deliver genuinely independent guidance that suits the needs of young people. The challenge now for local government and local partners is to ensure that all young people receive high quality advice on their choices about learning and work.

Local partners should be able to replace rules with flexibility, for example:

- varying the eligibility rules set nationally to ration access to services so that where local and personal circumstances require it, young people can be fast-tracked onto support;
- providing financial support in a way that gives targeted incentives to those young people more likely to drop out of work and training, for example those with a record of offending or care leavers, and encourage them to secure the skills needed by local employers and help close local skills gaps;
- flexing benefit payments locally to increase the financial returns for young people taking up a low-paid job, especially when they live away from the family home.

They should also be able to adjust the system locally to ensure that opportunities become more attractive by:

- offering unemployed young people high-quality informal learning opportunities, that provide a stepping stone to formal qualifications, and sustainable employment (see the Bath Education Trust case study);
- enabling a whole-family approach dealing with entrenched intergenerational issues of worklessness and poor educational attainment where it is required;
- placing more weight on volunteering and

- community service as a route into work and formal training, developing local incentives for young people who give their time to the community;
- offering young people vocational programmes, working with local employers to provide apprenticeships, as a number of councils are doing in programmes such as the Knowsley Apprentice³⁷ and Kent Success³⁸. These could take place in schools that focus on developing technical skills;
- closing the gap in support for young people over 19 years-old when they move beyond the age range of the connexions service³⁹ or between home and university careers services.

case study: Bath Education Trust

In a rapidly changing world of work, it becomes increasingly important for students to be equipped with a portfolio of skills and experience which helps them to stand out from the crowd. Evidence shows that it is the combination of academic study, work experience and leisure interests, which helps to develop the broad range of skills and competencies that employers seek. The Bath Education Trust Award offers students a framework to help them realise their potential in these areas.

The BET Award is a certificated programme of transferable skills training and practical learning. In this rapidly changing world it is increasingly important that students acquire the skills and experience challenges which will help to improve their employability. Whilst the Bath Education Trust Award focuses on a six key skills the core skill they hope to develop is enterprise.

This programme also offers a framework to accredit the skills and achievements of students not formally recognised through the current qualification framework. Its focus is to provide students with access to the skills which will enhance their future employability.

Therefore to re-engage young people means demolishing the institutional barriers that split key responsibilities between different agencies, national, regional and local to deliver personalised services.

For example at present, young people have to look to the local council for housing benefit, post-19 to the national Job Centre Plus for other benefits and employment support, to the adult careers and enhancement service for careers advice and to the voluntary sector or Connexions for advice and mentoring. If they are a young offender or have health, care or other needs, they will interact with yet more agencies.

Total Place

We believe that there is an emerging model that enables transformational change to take place, with each part of the public sector pooling their resources and putting them at the direction of the local partnerships. This whole public sector approach, under local democratic control and accountability is at the heart of the Total Place pilots.

This approach to public sector efficiency also offers the right context for more effective joined up policy. The journey we have described requires closer working with health workers, local government officers and the voluntary sector.

These pilots are at an early stage of making explicit the resources dedicated to particular local needs (for example, alcohol and drug dependency). The intention is to find more value from the totality of public spending in an area.

We need to apply this approach to re-engaging young people. At present, the total place pilots are based on voluntary co-operation and confined to 13 areas. As a next step we need to apply this approach to engaging young people, use it to catalyse urgent change and if it works, mandate it

to the national and regional agencies. The Worcestershire Total Place pilot is looking at exactly this issue, and we look forward to the results of its study.

Alongside this we need to inject flexibility and discretion into the way we support young people into meaningful activity.

Education Maintenance Allowance reform

One way of doing this is to create local discretion to vary the financial support by localising Education Maintenance Allowance.

Education Maintenance Allowance is paid directly to 16 to 19 year-olds in full-time education at £10, £20 or £30 per week depending on household income.⁴⁰ It costs the taxpayer £545 million a year.

EMA has had mixed results:

- staying-on rates are at a historical high 92.7 per cent of 16 year-olds are in education and training in 2008, compared to 87.3 per cent when EMA was introduced in 2004;
- there is a significant drop in staying-on rates at both age 17 and 18 to 83.5 per cent and 63.4 per cent respectively, although the rates are higher compared to the levels in 2004 (see graph overleaf);
- the number of 16 year-olds classified as NEET fell between 2004 to 2008 from 7.3 per cent to 5.2 per cent, stayed more or less the same for 17 year-olds (9.2 per cent to 9.1 per cent), and increased for 18 year-olds from 12.4 per cent to 16.6 per cent;
- from a population of 2 million young people age 16 to 18 years, 546,000 received EMA.

Our assessment is that EMA:

- carries very significant deadweight costs at age 16 – the vast majority of young people would stay on at 16 years-old without EMA;
- has not significantly influenced the staying-on rates on 17 and 18 year-olds;
- has not impacted on the headline number of 16-18 year-olds who are disengaged.

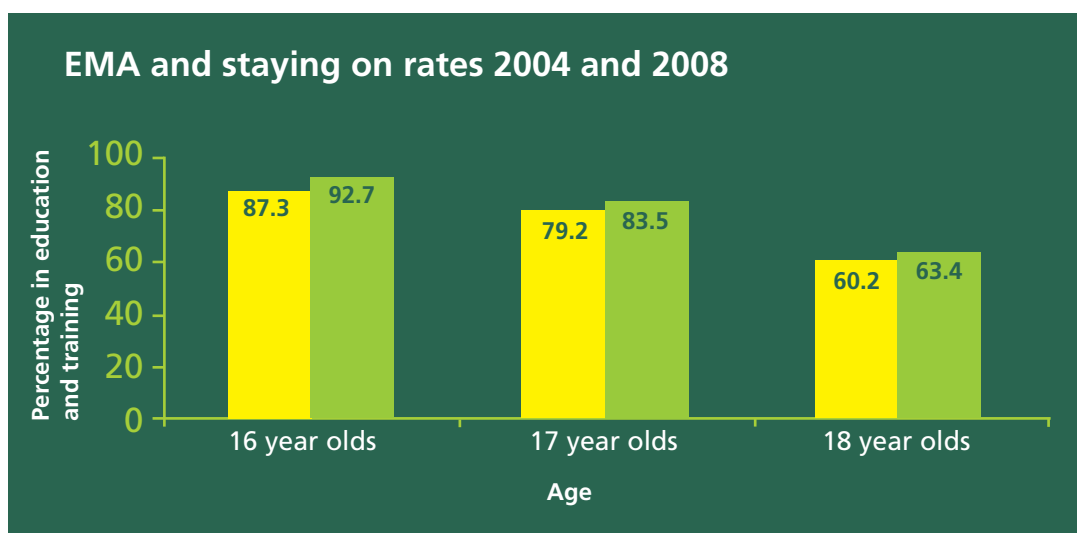
To make it more effective at a local level, local partnerships should be able to direct the level of EMA payment to different age groups and vary payments to incentivise young people to undertake courses that meet particular skills gaps. For example, in a local area the money might be used more effectively to pay a higher rate at 17 years old and a lower rate at 16 years-old; or to fund only bursaries for key subject areas such as science, technology, engineering and maths.

Employment support and benefits

One of the barriers to young people engaging in productive activity is the benefits system and the rate at which benefits are withdrawn. This can remove the incentive to young people to take up employment. There is also an issue about the effectiveness of the employment support they receive.

We also need to localise the financial support and help young people receive to enable them to move back into work. 650,000 young people between the age of 16 and 24 years-old in England receive benefits:

- 268,000 receive Job Seekers Allowance, 253,000 receive Income Support and 129,000 receive Incapacity Benefit;
- within these groups there are 142,000 people with caring responsibilities, most of whom are lone parents.



Source: DCSF Participation of 16-18 year olds in education and training, England

The main programme to help young people on JSA into work has been the New Deal for Young People which is being replaced by the Flexible New Deal. For those on Incapacity Benefit (or Employment Support Allowance), it is Pathways to Work. Attendance on employment support programmes is a condition for the receipt of benefits at various stages of a benefit claim.

The total benefits and employment support bill for young people aged 16 to 24 is around £5bn per annum which includes JSA, IS and IB of £1.8bn, Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit estimated at £2bn and employment support programmes including Employment Zones at £115m.

Doubts have been raised about the value for money of some of the programmes. For example 16 per cent of people who joined the Pathways to Work programme voluntarily took a job at the end of it. The job entry rate for people referred to the programme by a public agency is just five per cent.⁴¹

The benefits and employment support system is not tailored to young people which means that:

- young people without children experience particular financial disincentives to taking up low-paid employment. Under 25 year-olds are not eligible for working tax credit and as a result they may be only marginally better off in work;
- a move into employment may not always be the best move for a young person. But the providers of Flexible New Deal and Pathways to Work are rewarded for job outcomes, with increased payments for jobs that are sustained for 26 weeks. The payment level agreed by the DWP for Flexible New Deal is a maximum of £1,500, although average payments will be a lot less. But for some under-25 year-olds, a job, especially one without training, may be a sub-optimal result for them and for the economy in the long run. Their real need may instead be to improve their skills set and acquire formal qualifications;

- this is particularly true where the ratio of workless people to vacancies is high. Ratios vary from nearly 20 to one in Yorkshire and the Humber to around ten to one in the South East⁴²;
- they may be discouraged from working if they live at home. 38 per cent of disengaged young people aged 18 to 24 years, and 26 per cent of 16 and 17 year-olds, live in workless households. If one person decides to work it can have a knock on effect through the loss of housing benefit. Engaging them will require a whole family approach – from exploring family attitudes to work to addressing financial disincentives to work that occur at the household level;
- benefit rules are set nationally, particularly the eligibility for support programmes, including the Young Person's Guarantee which applies at 12 months, plus unemployment. There is limited adviser discretion to fast track young people into particular opportunities, although it is often possible to predict those young people who will find it hardest to get back into work.

Despite a long history of benefit reform, the debate about its effectiveness continues. The Centre for Social Justice recently suggested reforms to address the high benefit withdrawal rates that trap people into welfare dependency, poverty and social exclusion.

“Successive governments have tweaked and patched the benefits system in the hope of improving it. But the unintended consequence has been a system of 51 different benefits of bewildering scope and complexity.” Centre for Social Justice

Our proposals are that:

- whatever the system, **there should be local discretion – if local people and their elected representatives want it** – to flex the rules and levels of benefit payments where the costs are contained locally so that the system can respond to local need;
- **local partners should be able to use the redirected future savings from benefit payments to invest resources in either early intervention or helping young people now.**⁴³ For example, there are 129,000 young people in receipt of Incapacity Benefit. The cost of incapacity benefit alone to the taxpayer of these young people, over the average seven year lifetime of a claim, is nearly £8bn.⁴⁴ This means that programmes with even moderate success rates have the potential to generate savings over the medium term that ensure that the taxpayer would be better off over the whole period.

informal learning and volunteering

Some young people who are disengaged will not be ready for formal education, training or work. They may face complex barriers to engagement.

Informal learning, voluntary activity and community service:

- provide a valuable way of improving skills, building confidence and gaining work experience;
- act as a stepping stone into work and training, in some cases they may be an alternative to employment or training;

- allow young people to contribute to the local economy;
- help tackle social problems, build social cohesion and provide local culture and sport.

A recent OFSTED review recognised the value of youth services in engaging some young people:

“The most effective practitioners respond to young person’s needs and interests in an unobtrusive manner. Their non-stigmatising approach, together with the often voluntary nature of the relationship with young people, had the potential to engage some of the most resistant and hardest to help.”

However the barriers are:

- young people involved in informal learning and volunteering are still classified as NEET, removing the incentive to the public sector to develop and help young people into informal learning and volunteering programmes – Volunteering England said to us *“a young person who is engaged in full-time volunteering may be making a significant contribution to their community, but are still labelled as NEET according to official measures and considered to be disengaged.”* Connexions Somerset made the same point;
- the benefit rules require young people to be available for work. And whilst the current rules do allow volunteering with no time restriction, the rules are not well understood by young people and sometimes by Job Centre Plus staff. This prevents young people committing to a time bounded programme of full-time volunteering.

Our proposals are that:

- locally accredited programmes of informal learning and volunteering are included within any definition of meaningful activity used by the public sector and treated as a worthwhile outcome;
- local partners should be encouraged to expand these programmes including community service programmes;
- there is local discretion to vary the benefit rules to enable young people to continue receiving benefits whilst they undertake a programme of activity of this kind.

Care leavers

- There are around 60,000 children in care at any one time, which is around 0.5% of all children.
- As many as 85,000 children pass through the care system each year and around 8,000 young people (aged 16 or over) leave care at any one time.
- Only 13% of children in care gained five good GCSEs at the end of 2007, compared to 62% of all children.
- Aged 19, only 26% of care leavers are in further education and 6% are in higher education, compared to 44% of all young people.

We recognise that councils, partners and communities have a special responsibility to this group of young people. Our proposals for flexible local funding will enable effective targeted support for care leavers as they move into further and higher education. Our evidence from the consultation shows the need for better links between training providers and support workers to support their achievement and move into employment.

section 7 – a vision for getting the best out of young people

One more proposal is needed to complete this document: a statement of the scale of our ambition.

Because we want to abolish both the phenomenon of 'NEET', and the concept. Instead of the failed central targetry of the last decade and the overcentralised, ineffectual, delivery that has gone with it, we propose a new national objective: **that all our young people between 16 and 24 who can be, should be actively engaged in building Britain's social and economic capital.**

We do not pretend that this is the same as aspiring to 'reduce the NEET rate to zero'. As we have argued in this paper, one of the failings of the current national policy settings is that they do not recognise that caring in a family context, and volunteering in the community, are both valuable activities in their own right that help to make our society stronger, and can be part of a young person's journey to develop themselves and eventually find work. We want national policy to recognise that.

At the moment, about 84.1 per cent of young people aged 16 to 24 are in work, education or training. Another 2.5 per cent are full-time carers, and a small number are either taking a gap year, have an agreed start date for a course, or are already volunteering. Raising the participation age will put a legal obligation on a further 4 per cent, although there remain many questions about how that would actually translate into higher participation in learning: it is an illusion to believe that the legislation will by itself fill classrooms, let alone ensure young people learn the skills they need.

This still leaves a significant gap – in the 18 to 24 age group – which the proposals in this document are intended to address. We believe that, over the medium-term, our proposals for a focus on prevention will drive up the rate of voluntary participation and reduce the need for public sector interventions for those who are over 16. But in

the shorter-term, our remaining proposals are intended to change outcomes for those who are already at risk.

Research from the Prince's Trust and others⁴⁵ suggests we should in particular focus on:

- the quarter of young people who are disengaged but have no qualifications;
- the third who live in a household where no-one is working;
- the young people with a record of truancy or exclusion from school, underachievement at primary school, poor housing and low educational achievement in the family.

These young people have multiple and complex needs requiring more intensive, personalised support. The more joined-up, localised approach we have suggested, which puts individual responsibility and community support at the heart of policy, is the only way to provide that effectively and at a sensible cost.

We do not, of course, suggest that this should be enforced through national command-and-control targets. We believe, though, that success would be measurable, both locally and nationally. Scrapping the government's negative and stigmatising statistical bulletins about 'NEETs' and publishing useful figures for young people's positive engagement would be a valuable change that would sum up the reforms we are advocating⁴⁶.

section 8 – conclusion and next steps

Local government exists to address deep-seated and widespread need in society. Its greatest moments have been when it has risen to the mighty challenges of the age. Tackling youth disengagement is one of those challenges in our time.

A call to revolution, not evolution, should not deter local government. This document has, we consider, proposed a fundamental change in philosophy and approach.

Specifically it:

- assumes a shift from spending on cure, to investment in prevention;
- contrasts with the current 'snapshot' provided by the NEET label, and is built instead around the journey that an individual takes, beginning with the early years, and provides a response that focuses on the different challenges that are faced at different stages in that journey;
- recognises the vital role of family along that journey, underpinning all other measures and placing it at the heart of policy solutions;
- identifies the role for local government in leading a community response, securing a greater third sector involvement. This will capitalise on the innovation within the sector, reach the parts and people that statutory agencies cannot, and deliver the necessary personalisation in supporting families and hard to reach individuals.

Every young person who is capable of it, actively engaged in building up the social and economic capital of the nation through earning, learning, caring or volunteering: we believe that is achievable, if central government has the courage to devolve and let go, and local government has the courage to take it on.

We will, over the months to come, be developing, with the Centre for Social Justice and others, a practical roadmap exploring the impact for delivering this transformational change in the way local and central government tackle a defining issue of our generation.

definitions and measures

In this table we summarise the issues of performance management, measurement and age boundaries, our analysis of the current arrangements and proposals for change.

Artificial age boundaries and performance targets should not hamper the effectiveness of targeted support for young people at risk of being disengaged up to age 25 years old.

Definition or measure	The issue	Our proposal
The national target – to reduce the proportion of 16-18 year-olds who are NEET by two per cent by 2010.	<p>Excludes young people age 19 and over.</p> <p>Includes carers, informal learners and volunteers.</p> <p>Stigmatises disengaged young people.</p> <p>Focuses resources narrowly on 16-18 year-olds group.</p> <p>Encourages short termism and simplified solutions.</p>	<p>Base national targets on 16 to 25 year-olds participating.</p> <p>Measure participation in meaningful activity that includes informal learning, caring and volunteering.</p>
The local government indicator 117 to reduce the number of 16-18 year-olds who are NEET.	<p>As above.</p> <p>Targets will need to change as a result of raising the participation age.</p>	<p>Current LAA targets would remain until 2011 (when they expire).</p> <p>Local strategic partnerships encouraged to develop an engagement strategy for 0-24 year-olds ensuring that the system provides equal care and support to people aged 16-18 years old, 19 years old, twenty and so on.</p>
Age ranges.	<p>Page 12 sets out the different age boundaries applying to different age group. These boundaries define the way the system works with a young person rather than taking that person's needs as the starting point.</p> <p>This is especially evident at the transition at age 19 years.</p>	<p>With full responsibility for services and support to under people under 25 into meaningful activity, local councils and their partners will ensure age boundaries fit local need.</p>
Meaningful activity.	<p>Not in education, employment and training excludes volunteering, informal learning and caring.</p>	<p>A new definition based on the numbers participating in meaningful activity.</p>

notes

- 1 Local Area Agreements set the local strategic priorities for the period 2008-09 – 2010-11. They are agreed between all the main public sector agencies working in an area and with central government.
- 2 Lessons from history: increasing the number of 16 and 17 year olds in education and training, James Kewin, Mark Tucker, Sarah Neat and Mark Corney, CfBT Education Trust, 2009. The case studies detail local authorities playing a lead role in programmes such as the Job Creation Programme (1975-77) and the Voluntary Projects Programme (1982-88).
3. Total Place looks at how a whole area approach to public services can lead to better services at less cost. More details can be found at <http://www.localleadership.gov.uk/totalplace/>
4. Hidden talents: re-engaging young people, Local Government Association/The Centre for Social Justice, 2009
- 5 Bridging the gap: new opportunities for 16-18 year-olds not in education, employment or training, The Social Exclusion Unit, 1999
- 6 For a note on calculating the NEETs statistics, see appendix one of Hidden talents: re-engaging young people
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- 8 NEET Quarterly LFS series
- 9 C Godfrey et al, Estimating the cost of being NEET at age 16-18, DFES research report 346 (2002)
- 10 "The UK spends more on children than most OECD countries at just over £90,000 per child from birth up to the age of 18, compared to an OECD average of just under £80,000". From Doing better for children, OECD, 2009
- 11 Quintini G. et al (2007) The changing nature of the school-to-work transition process in OECD countries, IZA discussion paper No 2582, Germany: IZA [available at <<http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/5/32/38187773.pdf>>]
- 12 See the section titled "who are we talking about?" In Hidden Talents: re-engaging young people, LGA/CSJ, 2009
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- 16 Summary report: influences on children's attainment and progress in key stage 2: cognitive outcomes in year 5, Sammons et al, Institute of Education, 2007
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- 20 DfES, Social Mobility: Narrowing Social Class Educational Attainment Gaps, April 2006
- 21 Quoted in Breakthrough Britain, Centre for Social Justice, 2007
- 22 Getting in Early, November 2008
- 23 The Learning Family: a NIACE briefing note, NIACE, 2009
- 24 UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre (2007) Report Card No. 7: Child Poverty in Perspective: An overview of child well-being in rich countries Florence: Innocenti Research Centre
- 25 Quoted in Breakthrough Britain, Centre for Social Justice, 2007
- 26 www.dfes.gov.uk
- 27 Ofsted Annual Report 2005-06
- 28 National Foundation for Educational Research 2004
- 29 Galton M, Gray J and Ruddock J 2003, quoted in Breakthrough Britain: Educational Failure, (2007).
- 30 See, for example, DCSF (2007) The Children's Plan: Building Brighter Futures. London:DCSF; HM Treasury (2004) Choice for Parents, the Best Start for Children: A Ten Year Strategy for Childcare. London: TSO
- 31 See <http://www.bristol.ac.uk/sps/cnrpapersword/children/glass.ppt#1>
- 32 Tsiantis J et al (2005) 'EPPP: Conclusions, Implications and Future Directions' International Journal of Mental Health Promotion 7 pp.103-110
- 33 Quoted in Breakthrough Britain, Centre for Social Justice, 2007
- 34 *Breakthrough Britain Vol 6: third sector*, pp104
- 35 Raising the participation age – keeping it on track, CfBT Education Trust, 2009
- 36 *ibid*
- 37 <http://www.knowsley.gov.uk/jobs-at-the-council/apprenticeships.aspx>
- 38 <http://www.kent.gov.uk/jobs-and-careers/jobs/work-placements/kent-success-apprenticeships.htm>
- 39 Support continues until the age of 21 for young people leaving care and 25 for those with learning difficulties or disabilities
- 40 It is not payable where the household income exceeds £30,810
- 41 Quoted in Regeneration and Renewal, 7 September 2009
- 42 Pre-recession figures from Local labour market analysis, National Audit Office, November 2007
- 43 But there is more work to be done to establish how this can be done in a way that protects the public finances and does not simply boost spending now without capturing the projected future benefits.
- 44 This assumes a lifetime cost of £60,000.
- 45 The cost of exclusion - counting the cost of youth disadvantage in the UK, Princes Trust and Centre for Economic Performance, 2007
- 46 If the statisticians need an acronym for these new numbers we suggest Caring, Learning, Earning - CLEAR



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