

Cabinet

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Young People Not in Employment, Education, or Training [NEET]

Report of David Williams, Corporate Director, Children and Young People's Services

**[Cabinet Portfolio Member for Children's Services, Councillor C
Vasey]**

Purpose of the Report

1. This report is a response to the recent Overview and Scrutiny Report on Young People Known Not to be in Employment, Education, or Training (NEET). These are young people aged 16-18 who are in contact with Connexions, now part of Extended Services. There is a separate group of young people whose current activity is not known. Calculation of the percentage of young people who are in the NEET group is done by a sophisticated formula which takes into account the size of the cohort each month, the NEET group, those in the 'Not Known' category, and those known to be in learning.

This response sets out the areas which the Children's Trust has taken forward, those that are planned as well as activities which require other County Council services and/or Partnerships to consider.

Background

2. The Overview and Scrutiny activity on the 'NEETs' fulfilled two distinct purposes: to test out a model which might be applicable to the scrutiny of partnerships, in this case the Children's Trust, through a focus on one of the priorities of the Trust; and to undertake a scrutiny of the NEETs.
3. Under the auspices of the Lifelong Learning Overview and Scrutiny, a Committee comprising County and District Councillors received evidence from a range of sources including young people. A report was presented to CMT in August 2008 and to the Children's Executive Board in September 2008. A report on the Scrutiny process using the 'NEETs' work as an example was considered by the County Durham Partnership in October 2008.

Statutory Position

4. Achieving the target of 8.8% of 16-18 year olds NEET by November 2010 to January 2011 is a statutory target on the Local Authority, a PSA target and one of the 35 priority targets within the Local Area Agreement 2008-11. In

respect of the LAA, the target is shared with the Economic Partnership to whom reports on progress are made.

5. Achieving the NEETs target is a key improvement priority for the Children's Trust and, as such, is driven forward by a county Delivery Champion (Executive Director, Connexions) and 5 local champions nominated by the Local Children's Boards (LCB). The local champions are supported by local Increasing Participation Groups, established to support both the LCB and the 14-19 Partnership Area Planning Group at local level and involving a range of partners to address specific local issues in line with the county Increasing Participation Action Plan and Commissioning Strategy.

Current Position

6. Although data is collected monthly as required by the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF), progress is measured annually and relates to an average of November to January. The latest data is for November 2007 to January 2008 when the achievement was 10.4% 16-18 year old NEETs against a target of 10.5%, exceeding the target for the first time. When compared against 2006-7, where the achievement was 12.0%, this demonstrates a reduction of 1.6%. Progress has been maintained with each quarter of 2008 showing a lower percentage of NEETs than the same period in previous years when applying the same counting rule and formula (DCSF changed the management information requirements during for the summer months in 2008).
7. The rate of improvement in Durham is over 2 times the national average rate of improvement and the Local Authority has been congratulated by Beverley Hughes, Minister for Children, Schools and Families on the improvements achieved.

Strategic Actions

8. Throughout the Scrutiny Process and prior to the publication of the report, the 14-19 Partnership and its Increasing Participation sub-group incorporated some of the key messages into a revised Increasing Participation Action Plan and the accompanying Strategic Commissioning Strategy. This enabled activities such as the Learning and Skills Council European Social Fund Co-financing opportunity in mid 2008 to be based on the Plan and Commissioning Strategy, thus aligning a major funding opportunity with other existing funding.
9. Other funding opportunities such as the Working Neighbourhood Fund are being accessed to address specific local issues principally linked to employability and employment. While different models have been adopted to suit local circumstances and opportunities, they have the same aim of helping more young people to enter employment.
10. Since the publication of the report, DCSF has issued various toolkits to enable partnerships to assess their actions against national guidance about 'what works'. We have undertaken this self assessment and incorporated key actions within a revised and more strategic action plan to drive activities during 2008-10.

Conclusions and Recommendations

11. The Scrutiny exercise met both of the stated purposes. The new Scrutiny arrangements that are proposed nationally, and which were shared at a recent workshop attended by many Elected Members, Officers and partners, focus on scrutiny of partnerships. The Overview and Scrutiny of the NEET group exercise was a good pilot of the new approach.
12. Recommendations of the Committee have been reviewed, an Action Plan prepared and actions initiated and implemented. Where the actions do not lie solely within CYPS or the Children's Trust, other Durham County Council services and/or the County Durham Partnership should consider actions and contribute to the overall action plan.
13. Championing these actions could provide a major new initiative activity of the Unitary Council, and demonstrate its determination to address significant issues affecting young people, as well as the future economic development of County Durham. The new County Council, as the largest employer in the county, would be leading by example, and could encourage other public sector partners to follow that lead.
14. Both Ed Balls, Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families and John Denham, Secretary of State for Skills have urged the public sector to recruit more young people. In a joint statement on 27 October 2008 they stated that 'Public Sector apprenticeships are going to be even more important in the current economic climate, and they offer a key opportunities to enable young people and adults to reach their potential and help see us through the current difficulties'.
15. Cabinet is invited to:
 - receive the action plan;
 - endorse the actions identified and
 - Consider the opportunities that could exist or be created within the new Council and ask for an appropriate policy to be developed that will encourage employment young people, with a particular focus on 'vulnerable' group's e.g. young people in care, young people with learning difficulties and disabilities, young people known not to be in education, employment or training.

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Local Government Reorganisation

Actions taken could provide a major new initiative activity of the Unitary Council, and demonstrate its determination to address significant issues affecting young people, as well as the future economic development of County Durham. The new County Council, as the most significant employer in the county, would be leading by example, and could encourage other public sector partners to follow that lead.

Finance

Funding for increased number of apprentices: if DCC acted as an employer placement providing placements linked to existing providers e.g. FE Colleges/members of work based learning provider network, the minimum cost would be £80 per week per apprentice paid as a salary. Additional costs would relate to co-ordination, management and support of the apprentices through NVQ frameworks.

Staffing

Possible staffing costs related to co-ordination, management and support of apprentices

Equality and Diversity

Opportunity for DCC to recruit from a non traditional route for the council and encourage more young people from a range of backgrounds to consider non stereotypical careers e.g. within Service Direct, and other departments.

Accommodation

Crime and disorder

Sustainability

Recruitment of apprentices would underpin a process of succession planning for future employment requirements. An opportunity to 'grow our own' workforce to meet new challenges, which might also encourage young people to remain in County Durham.

Human rights

Localities and Rurality

Links to Area Action Partnerships would address rurality issues as well as service delivery areas.

Young people

Of considerable benefit to young people by increasing the number of apprenticeships available; enabling more young people to gain higher level qualifications.

Consultation

Health

Would support the local and national worklessness agenda; there are clear links between higher qualifications and good health/life expectancy so would contribute to long term health issues.

