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**UWIC Post Graduate Certificate in
Leadership for Collaboration**

Strategic Research Project

**The Development of Strategies to Reduce
the Number of Young People Not In
Employment, Education or Training (NEET)**

Contents	Pages
1.0 Introduction	3 - 4
2.0 Literature Review	4 - 17
3.0 Methodology	18 - 19
4.0 Findings	20 - 23
5.0 Recommendations for Welsh Local Authorities	24 - 28
6.0 References	29 – 31
Appendix 1 – Carmarthenshire NEET Strategy Flowchart	32

1.0 Introduction

The need for young people to be involved in productive learning or economic activity is seen as a barometer of a healthy society. This perception is reflected in the belief, common across all main political parties in the United Kingdom, that young people should be actively involved in employment, education or training at the end of post compulsory schooling.

However, at least one in ten young people in the UK were not in employment, education or training (NEET) throughout the last decade, despite numerous government strategies and local initiatives that have sought to address this issue. Since the financial crisis of 2008 and resulting economic recession, the numbers of NEET young people have increased considerably. This upturn coincides with reducing public sector budgets and the need for local authority partnerships and organisations working with young people to find collective, joined-up solutions to tackle the factors that cause young people to become NEET.

Toynbee (2009) notes that the failure of young people to gain jobs following the 1980's recession is one of the factors that has contributed to the concept of "broken" Britain.

John Seddon (2008) has written extensively about how the public sector can become more efficient at tackling the complex problems that society now faces. Seddon's work highlights how Taiichi Ono's Toyota Production System (TPS) identified how a manufacturing system works, the ability to "design against demand", innovate and remove those parts of production deemed wasteful. Fundamental to these approaches are the knowledge that those people making the product or delivering the service are best placed to improve it. This ethos is contrary to current government approaches, described by Seddon as "command and control", where a combination of targets set by politicians and

inspection/audit bodies drive public sector delivery in education, health and wider public services.

While Seddon's approaches do not always transfer easily to public sector, this study will examine, through both literature and analysis of existing partnership systems and practice, how collaborative working, leadership, shared governance and innovation and at a local level can reduce the numbers of young people who become NEET. Following this analysis, recommendations are made as to how local authorities and related partnerships can work together to lower the number of NEET young people in their area.

2.0 Literature Review

The term "NEET" ("Not in Employment, Education, or Training") was first used following the publication of the Social Exclusion Unit's 1999 report, *Bridging the Gap: New opportunities for 16-18 year olds not in education, employment and training*.

The Welsh Assembly Government (WAG) define NEET as "a statistical category relating to a group of young people aged 16-24 who are not engaged in any form of education, employment or training." (2009)

The WAG identifies three broad groups within the NEET cohort:

- Young people aged 16-18 who are NEET;
- Young people aged 19-24 who are NEET;

- Young people who are in employment but are not receiving any training (also known as Jobs Without Training) and including individuals who are NEET at times.

Latterly NEET has become a convenient catch-all term widely used by politicians, bureaucrats, academics and the media but is a word that fails to reflect the range of circumstances that affect some young people. The use of the term is made more problematic by language based on negativity and failure (Hayward et al 2008). Media coverage of “NEETs” is almost always accompanied by a picture of a young person in a hooded sweatshirt loitering on a street corner.

Consequently, the term NEET has become synonymous with what young people are not doing, rather than being used by a range of agencies to address the range of complex “wicked issues” faced by some young people and identification of ways to support them.

This issue is of increasing political significance and a study by the Improvement and Development Agency in 2008 found that 117 councils in England considered reducing the number of NEET young people as their top priority (de Castella, 2008).

Over the past 10 years, the average UK NEET rate at 16 has remained at around 9-10% of the cohort, with percentages of over 35% recorded for 18 year olds (Luck 2008). In Wales, at least 11% of 16-19 cohort are NEET, though accurate statistics are difficult to obtain (Boxwell 2007). A further 250,000 18 year olds are in jobs that offer no training (Dartington 2009). This is despite successive policy initiatives in England, Scotland and Wales to encourage participation and achievement in post compulsory education and training (DCSF 2008). In 2005, only 4 other OECD countries had higher percentages of 15-19 NEET young

people than Britain. Action for Children (AfC -2009) data from 2006 compares the UK proportion of NEETs within a sample set of EU countries and identifies 10.9% of young people being in this cohort. The current financial downturn will increase these numbers further with the 14,000 NEET young people aged 16-18 in Wales in 2007 (a 2% rise on the previous year) now very likely to have increased significantly (Times Educational Supplement, 2009).

Winnell (2005) and the Confederation of British Industry (CBI 2008) highlight studies by the Department of Education and Skills (DfES) estimating that each NEET young person dropping out of education at 16 costs the public purse an average of £97,000 during their lifetime. Some of these young people will cost society more than £300,000 each and their impact on crime, public health and antisocial behaviour is so marked that the 157,000 cohort of 16 to 18 year old NEET young people (in 2005) was deemed likely to cost the country a total of £15 billion by the time they died around 2060.

What simplistic definitions fail to recognise is that young people classified as NEET are a diverse group. They could include young people taking gap years, musicians, artists or those with long term debilitating illness. Evans et al (2009) identify the significant and multiple barriers to young people's participation in employment, education or training. These factors include child, domestic or other caring responsibilities, physical or mental health problems, school exclusion, truanting, low achievement at GCSE, living in workless homes, being looked after, substance misuse and a history of offending behavior. School exclusion and truanting pre 16 are particularly important factors in young people subsequently becoming NEET.

The DCSF (2008) and Estyn (2007) have reviewed why pupils disengage from mainstream schooling, both noting that there is a clear link between being excluded from school and becoming NEET later in life. Upon being expelled, it is a local authority's responsibility to ensure that an expelled pupil is placed in appropriate provision within six days, but evidence shows that expelled pupils often disengage completely from the education system. Truancy is another indicator of future NEET status. The Longitudinal Study of Young People in England (2008) showed that young people who were persistent truants were more than twice as likely not to be in full time education Post 16 compared to those who had never played truant. This level of truancy means some pupils have entirely disengaged from education by the time they have left compulsory education and consequently, it is harder to engage with this group post 16.

The DCSF (2008) defined the ethnic groups of those most at risk of becoming NEET as being young people from African-Caribbean, Pakistani, Bangladeshi and African-Caribbean mixed backgrounds who are likely to have lower attendance and achievement rates at school than Indian, Chinese or white young people. However, Pakistani and Bangladeshi young people are more likely to be in employment, and so these NEET figures are lower than for white youths. In the years after formal education, these young people find it harder to access training, and are more likely to be unemployed.

The diversity of personal circumstances and socio-economic factors means that policy responses at a national, regional or local level need to take account of the diverse needs of the individuals that are grouped together under the collective term NEET.

Research focusing on young people not in employment, education or training and the

organisations working with them has identified a range of factors behind effective local initiatives. Spielhofer et al (2009) identify sub groups within the NEET cohort, highlighting that more than two-fifths of young people within this group are positive about learning and wish to participate. A further two-fifths face significant personal and structural barriers to participation in education and training and the final fifth are undecided and dissatisfied with the opportunities available to them.

The Learning and Skills Network (2006) research in South East England and Yorkshire areas attempted to explain these variations and the range of practice and policy initiatives implemented at national, regional and local levels to determine what works in NEET prevention and reduction.

The LSN research found that much of the variation in NEET numbers within and between the two regions was caused by the influence of the local context on four common factors.

Young people are much more likely to become NEET if living in communities affected by deprivation and multi-generational unemployment. Those living in these settings are more likely to have a poor sense of mobility, suffer discrimination in the labour market, lack role models and lack access to suitable jobs in their local area.

Areas with poor transport infrastructure and inadequate housing are more likely to have larger number of NEETs, as young people in these areas find it more difficult to access further education and job opportunities.

There are more NEET young people in areas where there are large numbers of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) or where specialist employers and where learning providers do not understand the needs of the local labour market. (LSN 2006)

Monetary incentives to encourage the take-up of learning and training are less effective in economically deprived areas, where benefit take-up or the need to work is high. This is evidenced by the research of Maguire et al (2009) into Activity Agreements. In these pilots young people contract to take part in education and training in return for financial allowance of between £20 and £40 per week and they commit to a plan to re-enter education or training.

In some areas this is also aimed at 16 and 17 year olds in Jobs Without Training (JWT). The LSN found that these arrangements improved links and innovation between Careers staff and JobCentre Plus. While take up rates were lower than expected in some areas, the schemes increased progression to Employment, Education and Training (EET) after 12 weeks. Most successful was a discretionary fund that gave agencies the flexibility design personalized services to tackle the individual barriers faced by young people.

The LSN researchers also explored what factors contribute to reducing the numbers of NEET young people. Common themes were identified within a diverse range of successful initiatives. A number of studies (NFER 2005, NFER 2008, WAG 2008) highlight the importance of recognising that young people who are NEET have different characteristics and complex needs. These studies also recognise that the local context and characteristics of particular NEET groups are central to identifying the key ingredients for appropriate levels and types of support. The role of key staff (such as school, outreach or detached youth workers) in identifying young people and informing local partnership initiatives are important factors in reducing local numbers in the NEET cohort.

Early identification (before the transition to secondary school) and support interventions based on a “team around the child” type approach are likely to have a positive impact on young people at risk of becoming NEET (Estyn 2007). Thus intervention at school before disengagement and disaffection set in is an essential part of any local NEET reduction strategy.

Leadbeater (2009) argues that children identified at risk of becoming NEET in Years 9, 10 and 11 should be offered individual budgets and advisors so that they can commission their own services to overcome the barriers that they face to successful achievement in education. Central to Leadbeater’s arguments are the concepts that conventional secondary schools are too big to meet individual needs, development of non-cognitive skills are important for children to be able to cope with the education and employment and that “mass-produced public services have the most to learn from innovation that allows more personalised approaches.”

In many local authority areas, NEET prevention initiatives are aimed at primarily at those 14-16 year olds who are still at school and have been identified as at risk of disengaging from education. CBI (2008) and LSN (2008) research identified several factors that make these NEET prevention initiatives more effective:

- “joined-up” support at school from a range of agencies, particularly where multiple interventions are required;
- delivery of an alternative or wider curriculum at Key Stage 4;
- transitional support between primary and secondary school and Key Stage 3 and 4;
- involving the learner and their family.

The September Guarantee Initiative in some areas in England aims to ensure that by the

time young people leave school in July, young people already have a guaranteed place on a course for September. (DCSF 2008). Some areas have simplified the application process by introducing a common form for all courses and providing a helpline when results come out.

Boxford (2007), Lake (2008), Evans (2009) and others highlight the importance of involving young people in decisions made about services provided for them. Typically, young people in the NEET group are rarely involved in decisions or given an opportunity to voice their concerns. By involving young people in their own development planning, they can be enabled to own their problems and encouraged to be proactive in identifying their support needs and in recognising the distance traveled.

In addition, involving the young person's family or community was seen as particularly important where working with intergenerational NEETs. This ensures that an unsupportive home environment does not undermine motivation gained as a result of the initiative.

In England, Connexions partnerships were set up in 2001 to support 13-19 year olds in career choices. In 2002 they were set a target to reduce NEET numbers by 10%, with the main objective of supporting those who had dropped out of EET or were disengaged from learning. The work of Connexions partnership combined with the Education Maintenance Allowance (means tested financial support for 16-19 year olds) have been identified by the Social Exclusion Unit (2004) as having a significant positive contribution on the numbers of young people disengaging. and community-based youth projects encourage young people to be actively involved in planning service delivery and their own personal development programmes. While no similar service to Connexions exists in Wales, the Careers

Companies are working closely with many Children and Young People's Partnerships to plan and deliver information, advice and guidance for 11-19's.

Sachdev's research for the LSN (2008) found that an emphasis on hard outcomes over soft outcomes due to funding rules undermined the impact of initiatives focusing on NEET reduction. Young people who failed to achieve at school and who lacked adequate support in the home tended to have low aspirations and / or low motivation and self-esteem (Spielhofer et al 2009). Agencies with considerable experience of working with NEETs (notably training providers and the voluntary sector) see their first priority as tackling these issues before they address the longer term challenge enabling young people to enter employment, education or training. In addition as Seddon's work (2008) reiterates at length, the constant government focus on targets risks focusing resources on those young people who easier to work with and most likely to achieve the hard outcomes required by funding bodies.

Soft outcomes are often best supported through innovative projects using sport, art or media to engage young people in project activities and learning opportunities (LSN 2008). In particular, such informal learning techniques were effective at encouraging and motivating individuals with low aspiration and a limited sense of achievement. Much of the literature reviewed here emphasises that the diversity of the NEET group, the importance of local context and the challenges of working with some young people do not fit with generic strategic approach. In particular, Spielhofer (2009), Boxwell (2008), the CBI (2008), DCSF (2008) and the WAG (2008) all highlight the importance of flexible provision that allows young people to access full time, mainstream courses at different entry points throughout the year.

Education Maintenance Allowances (EMAs) are a payment made to young people from low-income families in years 12, 13 and 14, in England and Wales. DCSF evaluations of the pilot showed that participation in year 12 increased by around 4% and in year 13 by over 6%, though the effects of this initiative on NEET young people are less clear.

While Modern Apprenticeships (MA) and Foundation Modern Apprenticeships (FMA) at level 2 are seen as a means to attract NEET young people into work-based learning, Boxwell (2007) found that in Cardiff, the lack of preparatory training meant that there was a low take up of this provision by young people in the cohort. While the WAG have attempted to remedy this by the development of a pre Skillbuild programme to prepare young people better for training, this provision has yet to be delivered.

Entry to Employment (E2E) schemes were introduced in some parts of the UK in 2003. These programmes are aimed at those young people not ready to go onto an apprenticeship and combine classroom and work based learning. Young people on these programmes are given an individual learning plan that is intended to give them the positive experiences and confidence to move on to an apprenticeship or other form of further education. However, the Adult Learning Inspectorate (England) found only 6% moved into MAs, but 34% did move into a job or some other form of education. Sachdev et al (2008) notes that due to an over-subscription to E2E programmes, stricter entry requirements were put in place leading to criticism that this is excluding some young people who are NEET. The lack of availability of training programme places coupled with the pressures from the WAG to achieve completion targets are common reasons given by Welsh work-based learning providers to questions about low take up of these programmes by NEET young people.

In England, the DCSF published an integrated NEET strategy in 2007. This strategy aims to ensure that the system provides a universal offer for all young people to prevent them from disengaging, an efficient service for getting back into learning for those without barriers and more targeted and intensive support for those young people with particular barriers to engaging with the system.

The DCSF approach involves ensuring that the provision of courses is flexible enough to meet the demand to enable more young people to start programmes during the course of the academic year. WAG research (2009) identifies the most common reasons for dropping out of courses were dissatisfaction with course choice, illness, caring responsibilities and lack of time to study. Studies by the DCSF (2008), and the WAG (2009) identify two main types of this offer. January start dates are seen as important as they offer young people an opportunity to re-engage if they have dropped out following September enrolment. Truly flexible courses operate on a roll on, roll off basis depending on demand throughout the year. These courses need to be well marketed (often in person by key staff) and require a range of agencies to support them. The DCSF best practice identifies the need for a more personalised approach to planning this provision, which could be varying numbers of contracted hours and/or intensive short transition programmes over 10 week periods, typically the summer months. The research also highlights the need for use of Careers databases, a range of agencies referring and regular advice evenings as being key features of successful programmes.

While greater flexibility in provision has been regularly identified by UK based research and consultations the difficulty with offering more responsive courses is that funding bodies are

not set up to resource learning programmes outside of September to July provision. Even work-based learning providers, more able to offer roll on roll off courses face difficulties in offering flexible provision when many of the NEET cohort require initial guidance and additional personal support in order to overcome the multiple barriers that they face. In Wales, some flexibility exists within 14-19 funding streams, through European Union funding and via other external funding sources. However, the projects funded by these means do not always fit into a wider NEET strategy within the local area.

Positive partnerships between a range of agencies that work with young people are a key feature of effective NEET initiatives (CBI 2008, Evans 2009). The complexity of the NEET group means that a wide variety organisations and agencies often need to be involved, through a shared approach to the problem that moves beyond organisational self interest. Although working in partnership can be challenging, partners can share specialised expertise and knowledge, take collective responsibility for NEET young people and issues affecting them, and share data and knowledge about the destinations of young people. Partnership approaches to tackling NEET issues are based developed within an identified governance framework, in Wales typically overseen by the local Children and Young Partnership (WAG 2009). The LSC (2008) identify the importance of identifying the individual and collective responsibility for NEET young people through local partnerships, highlighting good practice in English examples. In Wales, the Welsh Assembly Government has supported a “Kafka Brigade” pilot study bring together a range of organisations in the City and County of Swansea.

The best of these partnerships are proactive about including provision from voluntary and community sector organisations, which appears to be valued by young people and has the

added advantage of being perceived as independent from statutory services. Both Evans and the CBI stress the importance of an open and transparent commissioning process to ensure that those voluntary sector organisations have the opportunity to offer provision for young people. The Scottish Social Enterprise Coalition (2006) and the CBI (2008) identify the advantages of voluntary sector approaches for NEET young people as the credibility of community based provision and the real work environments offered. The CBI see significant benefits in promoting enterprise based activities, since business can appeal to young people more than agency led approaches and that generation of income through trade social enterprises can offer longer-term sustainability to projects. However these approaches are often outcomes focused rather than outputs based and this delivery less well received by those agencies encouraged by government to be target focused.

As this literature review demonstrates, there is no shortage of current research and information on the reasons for and ways to overcome the NEET issue. While there are many examples of individual good practice, there are relatively few examples of where innovative partnership approaches and leadership have brought down significantly the percentage of NEET young people in an area.

The Centre for Social Justice (2009) has drawn together a range of local government approaches to addressing the NEET issue. Some of the key themes that emerge from this research are common to many of the points already identified here. These include working across area boundaries, early intervention strategies, flexible curriculum, apprenticeships and voluntary sector involvement. Two major roles also emerge. In England, Local Area Agreements (or the work of Local Service Boards in Wales) enable high level commitment and political support for NEET activity. When coupled with a NEET strategy group, this

focus enables the high profile needed to bring together the second component, multi agency teams that are essential to tackle the NEET issue.

De Castella (2008) describes work undertaken in Barnsley, South Yorkshire an area that has traditionally had low levels of educational achievement. Through a range of targeted interventions overseen by a partnership management team, Barnsley has been able to reduce the numbers of 16-18's who are NEET from 12.3% in 2006 to 8.1% in 2007. This success has been based around all relevant agencies working together and key lessons have been identified for other areas.

Based on the Barnsley experience, bringing all key agencies (youth service, health, community safety and teachers) together is essential so that intelligence can be shared with careers staff charged with "keeping in touch" with young people. Analysis of data about Year 10 and 11 pupils enables professionals to identify and overcome the barriers they face. Working with the whole family is a key part of the Barnsley approach, as is working with head teachers to ensure that careers staff and education welfare officers understand their responsibilities in preparing young people for their next step. Finally, taking preventative action for those young people most likely to become NEET via the types of flexible provision identified above will reduce numbers in the cohort. The combination of these measures is also likely to reduce NEET numbers, though as Connexions Manager in this community identifies "there is always going to be a degree of 'Neetness' in Barnsley". The same can be said of many communities in Wales.

3.0 Methodology - An Analysis of Carmarthenshire Approaches to the NEET Issue

While Carmarthenshire does not currently have a formal NEET strategy, a sub-group of the Children and Young People's Partnership (CYPP) has been working to reduce the numbers of young people in this cohort since 2006. These measures are contained in an action plan that is overseen by the NEET sub-group of the Young People's Partnership and reports to the CYP.

The Carmarthenshire CYP Plan 2008-2011 contains an outcome measure to reduce the number of young people who become NEET each year at 16 from 250 in 2008 to 2011. The plan also contains a number of specific measures linked to NEET young people including the development of a strategy to reduce the numbers of NEET young people, the commissioning of a "Keeping in Touch" officer role within the Youth Service, provision of school based youth workers, detached and outreach teams of youth workers and 14-19 Learning Pathways and learning coach roles to support the needs of this group of young people.

The NEET sub-group was established in 2006 and has been chaired by the author since this time. In order to review and inform the progress of the action plan, an audit of existing NEET work was undertaken by the author. This audit consisted of a review of existing NEET work during meetings and individual meetings and discussions with the members of the NEET sub-group and other relevant partners. In order to inform the recommendations of this strategic project, review sessions were held involving staff from the following

organisations:

- Carmarthenshire County Council Youth Service;
- Carmarthenshire Secondary Schools;
- Carmarthenshire County Council School Improvement Service;
- Carmarthenshire County Council Inclusion Service;
- Carmarthenshire County Council Education Welfare Service;
- Carmarthenshire County Council Children's Services;
- Carmarthenshire Extending Entitlement Group (incorporating the 14-19 Network and YPP)
- Carmarthenshire Children and Young People's Partnership Strategy & Evaluation Group;
- Carmarthenshire Youth Offending and Prevention Service;
- Coleg Sir Gâr;
- Careers Wales West;
- Jobforce Wales;
- Llanelli Rural Council;
- Rathbone;
- Foothold/Mid and West Wales Chamber;
- Princes Trust;
- Carmarthenshire Community Safety Partnership;
- Carmarthenshire Local Health Board Youth Health team;
- Carmarthenshire Local Service Board;
- Carmarthenshire Dept of Education and Children Opening Doors Group.

These discussions focused upon current progress towards the target of reducing the numbers of young people in the county, potential for innovative projects and ways in which further partnership working could improve outcomes in this area.

4.0 Findings

At a basic level, statistical evidence from Careers Wales West suggests that Carmarthenshire partnership approaches to reducing the number of NEET young people between 2007 and 2009 have been positive. The simplest, and possibly most valid set of Welsh NEET data is the pupil destination survey undertaken by the regional Careers Companies in October each year. This survey, via individual questionnaires sent to Year 11 and Year 13 leavers is collated and published the following March and records both education destinations, the numbers of NEET young people and the non-respondents to the survey

Of Year 11 leavers in 2006, 123 young people (5.42% of the cohort) were classified as NEET and 61 young people (2.69%) did not respond to the survey. It can be assumed that many of the latter category were NEET.

Of the Year 11 leavers in 2007, 124 young people (5.49% of the cohort) were classified as NEET and 68 young people (3.01%) did not respond to the survey. It can be assumed that many of the latter category were NEET.

During the audit of NEET work undertaken for this report, respondents identified the work done by the partnership between 2007 and 2009 in following up young people identified as

NEET. This work was funded by the 14-19 Network and involved Carmarthenshire Youth Service staff working closely with Careers Wales West. This work focused on the Llanelli travel to work area and involved youth workers following up individual young people and offering information, advice and guidance to encourage 16 and 17 year olds to return to work.

Of the 2008 Year 11 leavers, 102 young people were classified as NEET, with 14 young people not responding to the survey. These statistics rank Carmarthenshire as having the third lowest NEET figure in Wales and second lowest if NEET and no respondent data is combined. This drop can be directly attributed to the “keeping in touch” project funded by the 14-19 Network and is a significant achievement.

While the joint working identified above has been successful, audit respondents noted that there is still much to do, particularly when the number of 16-24's claiming Job Seekers Allowance have risen from 855 to 1234 between September 2008 and September 2009.

While this increase is directly attributable to the current economic downturn, it highlights the challenges faced by the Carmarthenshire partnership in tackling the NEET issue locally. Audit respondents identified the difficulties in engaging some of the 16-19 cohort, noting that some of these young people had been supported by the youth service for a significant period, but without any hard outcomes being achieved. These experiences are reflected in a view that while the NEET young people of 18 and over are not yet a lost cause, they require to great an investment in time to re-engage. This view has to some extent informed an emphasis within the Carmarthenshire NEET action plan on the early intervention strategies identified in the literature review.

Consequently, Carmarthenshire County Council's Department of Education and Children has sought to better link education and children's services over the past three years. This work has involved secondments between teams, shared training and a strategic group that brings together senior managers. This work has focused on young people in Years 10 and 11 at risk of leaving school without achieving recognised qualifications, a key performance indicator for the Local Education Authority. The shared focus on this group of young people, involving teachers, education welfare officers, school based youth workers and specialist departments has significantly reduced the numbers of young people within the key category. Much of this work has focused on better information sharing within the Authority and this work in turn has informed the NEET work with external partner organisations. In parallel with the WAG NEET strategy, the Carmarthenshire action plan focuses upon three main strands of work, information advice and guidance, appropriate provision and personal support.

Approaches to advice and guidance have developed through improved procedures within the County Council to share information between departments, though research highlights the need to improve the school based aspects of systems still further. Work with Careers Wales West has significantly improved tracking systems Post 16. However, there is a need for all providers to sign up to the shared Personal Information Sharing Protocol (PISP) to avoid perceived data protection issues hampering attempts to provide impartial advice and guidance.

Diversity of provision for 14-16 year old in Carmarthenshire has progressed considerably since the inception of the 14-19 Network in 2004. Latterly the Network has focused on delivery of collaborative courses to meet the requirements of the WAG Measure or

minimum entitlement requirements for young people at 14 and 16. As of September 2009, approximately 1200 pupils are accessing shared provision funded by the Network and the range of vocational and academic courses available ensures that more young people can study a curriculum of interest and relevance to them. This should help ensure that more young people progress into education and training at 16 and 18.

Flexible delivery for young people aged 14-16 who are disaffected and or at risk of exclusion from school is provided via a range of programmes. The youth service offers wider curriculum programmes for this cohort in Carmarthen, Ammanford and Llanelli (in conjunction with a local training provider) and works with the Further Education College to provide vocational access and taster courses for this age group. The Local Education Authority Inclusion Service provide a unit at Key Stages 3 and 4 for young people excluded from school. This section also offers a range of provision for young people not in school for a range of reasons. Additionally a Llanelli based voluntary sector organisation has received funding for three years from the Big Lottery Fund to offer an alternative curriculum for 14-16 year olds. The combination of this delivery means there are a wide range of options for young people who need to be educated outside schools settings, with staff working to promote these as positive choices rather than places of last resort.

Personal support is the third strand of NEET related support in Carmarthenshire. This work has focused on the development of the 14-19 Learning Coach role, focusing the role of school based youth workers on a cohort of young people at risk of becoming NEET, counseling in school settings and a specialist health team targeting NEET young people. A summary of this work can be seen in Appendix 1.

The findings of the audit highlight that the Carmarthenshire partnership has made good progress in seeking to reduce the numbers of NEET young people. However, there is still much to do and this work is made more difficult by the current economic downturn. Based upon the findings of the literature review it is important that early intervention begins at the transition from primary to secondary school and combines advice, appropriate provision and a range of personal support co-ordinated by a lead officer. While a wide range of partners are now signed up to this agenda, perhaps the largest challenge is to ensure that all the fourteen secondary schools are similarly committed to this agenda and the successful outcomes of all young people on their rolls whatever the history of the particular individuals concerned.

Based upon this analysis and the practice identified in the literature review, a range of recommendations to improve NEET related interventions in Carmarthenshire and other Welsh Local Authorities and partnerships is included below.

5.0 Recommendations for Welsh Local Authorities seeking to reduce the numbers of NEET young people

While much of the literature and research about the NEET issue is English or UK based, there is much within this information that is relevant to Wales. Despite some political differences in the Welsh education system, the 22 local authorities and Children and Young People's Partnerships would benefit from developing their current local knowledge, innovation and governance models informed by the good practice identified in the literature review. While the WAG produced a Wales wide NEET strategy in 2009, this document lacks

specific outcomes to be delivered at a local partnership level.

In this context, CYP's should develop NEET local strategies that focus at the three levels (strategic, operational and practitioner) and on the three key themes that have been highlighted in the literature review (advice, guidance and tracking, flexible provision and personal support). These levels focus on two perspectives – the top down approach led by organisations and the bottom up approach from the perspective of the services available to the individual young person. Local Authorities and their partners sit at the point of planning, delivery and implementation where these two perspectives meet.

The Centre for Social Justice (2009) have identified four critical stages:

- Forming a positive personal or ambition, possibly from a young age;
- The individual's attitude towards education work and the future, again formed at an early age;
- The experience of any barriers to education or work;
- The achievement of qualifications gaining (and maintaining) employment or gaining new skills and understanding as part of the programme, projects or through informal learning.

This process can be seen as cyclical, with both positive and negative experiences influencing siblings and peers. This research also identifies means to re-engage young people, with the role of wider public sector services such as housing and health and the role played in social networks being crucial.

In this context, the Centre identifies six informing principles that need to underpin specific recommendations. They consider that the family comes first, supported by the community, local authority and other partners to celebrate the positive achievements of young people. Supporting the family allows other interventions to be realized, with local authorities best placed to bring together partnership plans. Local authorities are also best placed to identify young people at risk of disengaging and to target resources accordingly. Interventions should occur at the earliest opportunity and artificial age barriers should not hamper the effectiveness of targeting support for vulnerable young people. The key recommendations around these themes to be implemented by local partnerships are highlighted below.

1. Identify a local champion to lead on partnership responses to reduce the number of NEET young people;
2. Using “team around the child (TAC)” approaches, identify children and young people who are at risk of becoming NEET when leaving Year 11 in year 6, prior to the transition to secondary school;
3. Target support for the identified cohort of 11-16’s via a TAC comprising of teachers, school based youth workers, learning coaches, counselling and educational psychology services, integrated health teams, wider curriculum provision and family programmes;
4. Use Local Education Authority, Careers Wales, youth service and other provider data (via identified information sharing protocols) to develop a clear understanding of

the profile, aspirations and needs of young people (pre and post 16) who are or who may become NEET in the local area;

5. Ensure Learning Pathways options for 14-16 year olds are diverse and meet the requirements of the WAG Learning and Skills measure through provision of both academic and vocational routes;
6. Promote alternative/wider curriculum programmes via local option menus for 14-16 year olds that highlight these programmes as positive choices and 14-19 learning pathways, rather than a place of last resort for young people who do not succeed in school settings;
7. Using 14-19 Network, Cymorth and external funding sources, commission flexible taster, “step-up” and bridging courses for those 16-19 year olds unable to enter learning programmes due to multiple barriers to including individualised budgets where funding permits;
8. Ensure good links (via an identified NEET planning group) between WAG, ESF, Convergence and other externally funded provision aimed at reducing the number of NEET young people in the local area to maximise the benefits of resources available;
9. Work with neighbouring Local Authorities and partnerships on a sub-regional basis so that travel to work and learn areas are taken into account when commissioning learning and related support services;

10. Identify sufficient key staff with appropriate capacity and skills to “do what it takes” (Research in Practice 2009) with both young people who are NEET and those in transition between education and employment;
11. Liaise with Youth Offending Teams and Services (YOS) to integrate support for young offenders who are subject to Intensive Supervision and Surveillance Programmes, including considering issues to do with roles, responsibilities and resources in respect to meeting their needs.
12. Listen and act upon the views of young people when commissioning new services for this cohort;
13. Incorporate means to assess the quality of provision for NEET young people into the internal self evaluation reports being undertaken by 14-19 Networks;
14. Undertake individual tracking studies of young people who are, or at risk of becoming NEET, to learn from their experience and to identify the barriers and issues that they face;
15. Inform wider CYP strategies by review and evaluation of NEET strategy work to ensure that this work is meeting its objectives and building on effective practice highlighted in this report.

While these recommendations are by no means definitive, they represent a set of core actions which if acted upon are likely to reduce the numbers of young people in a local

area who become NEET. We owe it to both our young people and local communities and wider society to see that these actions are realised.

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