AN ENQUIRY INTO THE ISSUE OF YOUNG PEOPLE WHO ARE NOT IN EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT OR TRAINING IN WEST NORFOLK

Report Commissioned by

Opportunities West Norfolk

and written by

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1   Introduction

1.1   The context of the research

UEA was approached by Opportunities West Norfolk to see if the University could undertake research which would increase understanding of why students withdraw from post 16 courses of education and training in West Norfolk, to develop further insight into the factors which influence the numbers of young people entering the "NEET" pool, and to explore elements of good practice and effective strategies and interventions which might serve to reduce the number of young people becoming "NEET".

1.2.   Research design

In the light of his recent research into NEET issues in Cambridgeshire (Gartshore, 2009), Mr Ian Gartshore was asked to play a leading role in the research.

One of the overarching aims of the project was to obtain information from a wide range of professionals whose work involves working with young people in West Norfolk, and in other parts of the county.

Data collection included the following elements:

- Analysis of data from the Connexions-Norfolk Database
- Visits by Ian Gartshore to the College of West Anglia (COWA), and high schools, special schools and Pupil Referral Units (PRUs) in West Norfolk. This entailed interviews with senior staff (headteachers/heads of inclusion/heads of sixth form) in 11-18 schools, and focus group interviews with sixth form pupils and year 11 pupils.
- Interviews with young people who were currently NEET in West Norfolk.
- Interviews with Connexions Personal Advisors who work in West Norfolk.
- Interviews with Norfolk LEA advisors.
- Interviews with Connexions-Norfolk managers.
- Interviews with senior staff in schools outside West Norfolk where there was thought to be good or innovative practice in relation to NEET issues.
- A literature review of recent and relevant research relating to the issue of post 16 withdrawals from education and training courses and NEET issues more generally, including a study of counties which might be termed 'statistical neighbours' to West Norfolk in terms of demography, and some comparisons with NEET issues outside the UK.

1.3   Ethical issues

The research design was approved by the Research Ethics Committee of the School of Education at UEA. Informed consent was sought from research participants before involvement in the study. Data collected in the course of the project is securely stored and all references to individuals in this report and any other published works arising from the study have been and will be anonymised.

1.4   Appreciative Enquiry

There was a conscious attempt to undertake the enquiry in a spirit of "appreciative enquiry" (Cooperrider and Whitney, 2005) and to look for good practice which might be disseminated, explored and developed across the county, whilst at the same time identifying "key variables" which appear to influence the numbers of young people entering the NEET "churn" (Gartshore, 2009).

1.5   Acknowledgements

We would like to thank all the people who were kind enough to give up their time to help us with this enquiry.

2 NEET November 2008

2a NEET classification

2.1 This section uses the Client Caseload Information System (CCIS) held by Connexions as its data source. Engagement with Connexions by young people is a voluntary activity so the data are subject to a small error. Nationally, NEET figures published by the government are obtained from the Labour Force Survey. This usually shows a slight underestimate of NEET by CCIS. However, CCIS is a very full dataset which is regularly updated and is the key management information for Connexions and Children's Services.   The data relating to NEET in the 16-18 cohort is presented in three categories:

1   **NEET available for training and employment.**

2   **NEET not available.**

3   **"Other".**

These categories are subdivided as follows:

Table 1 NEET Categories on CCIS

NEET available	NEET not available	Other
Waged PDOs*	Young carers	Refugee/asylum seekers
Other PDOs*	Teenage parents	Cannot be contacted
Not yet ready for work or learning	Illness	Refuse to disclose activity
Awaiting E2E place	Pregnancy	Custody
Awaiting sub level 2 place	Religious grounds	
Awaiting level 2 place	Unlikely to be economically active	
Awaiting level 3 place	Other reason	
Start date agreed		
Seeking employment/education training		

*PDO = Personal development Opportunity e.g gap year

2.2 The data used for this snapshot picture is November 2008. The local authority reports in November each year to government on numbers of young people aged 16 to 18 who are NEET. These data are used to measure performance against targets. As a result, Connexions have attempted to make contact with all young people for the November return. Numbers of young people within NEET and the NEET categories fluctuate on a daily basis so any picture is a snapshot. A later section looks at trends in NEET over a year.

2.3   In November 2008, the total number of young people in Norfolk in the 16-18 age group and who were not in compulsory education was 27787. Of these 6159 (22.2%) were in the western area.

Fig 1
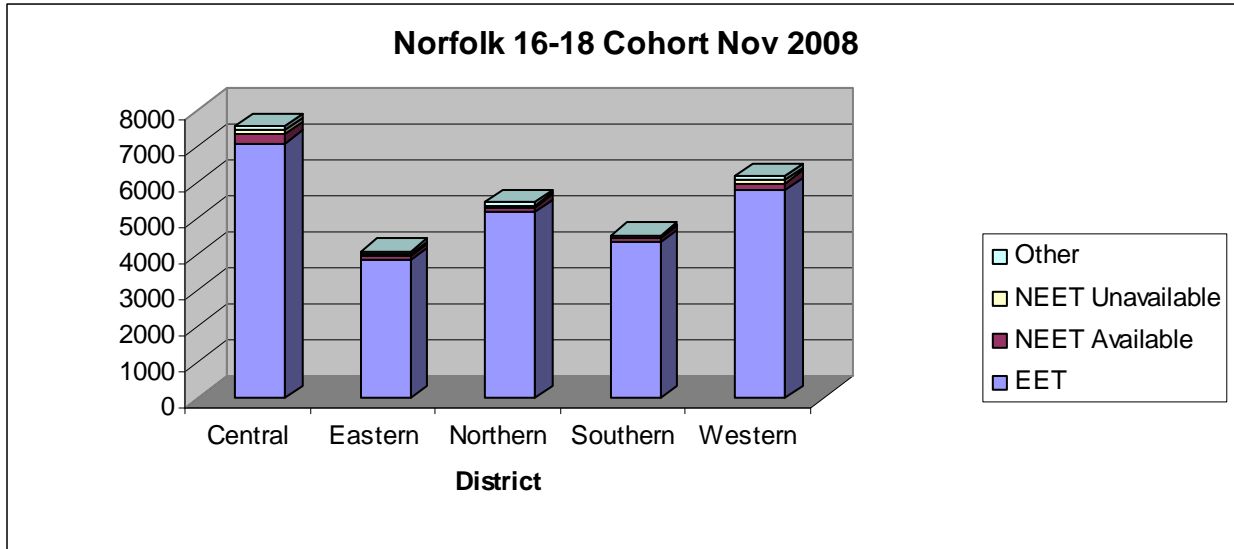
2.4   Of these 6159 young people, 280 (4.6%) were NEET. This figure is the joint highest of the five areas of Norfolk. Figures for other areas are Central 4.6%, East 4.3%, North 4.0% and South 3.6%. The figure for West Norfolk compares favourably with national figures where in 2007, the national figure for NEET was 9.5%. However, this figure still represents 280 young people. In addition to this figure, there were also 87 "Other" young people who could not be contacted or who refused to engage with Connexions.

Fig 2
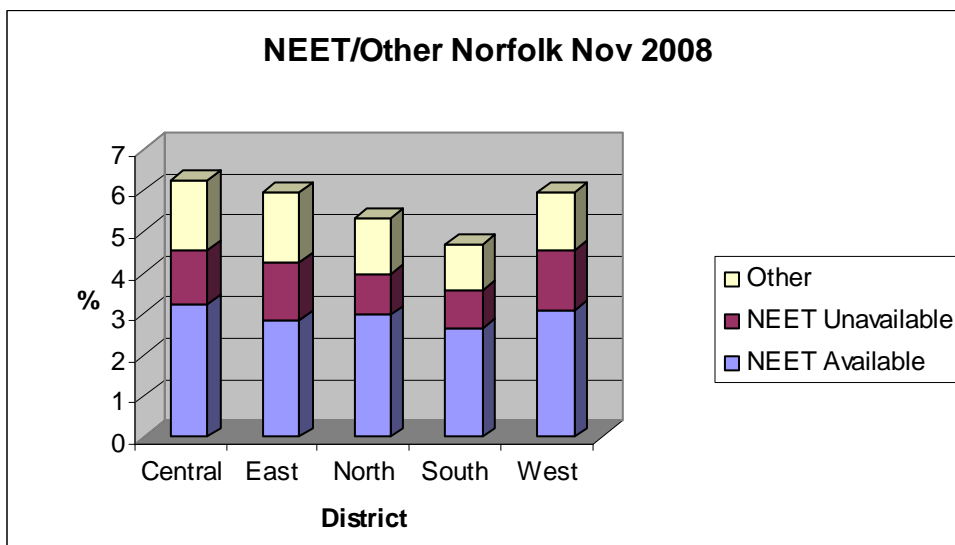
2b   NEET Available

2.5   The largest category in the NEET Available data in all areas is that of young people seeking employment, education or training. Ten young people in the West are awaiting a place at E2E or Level 2.

Table 2   NEET Available Norfolk Nov 2008

NEET Available	Central	Eastern	Northern	Southern	Western
Awaiting an E2E place	1	3	1		6
Level 2 training required but place not available	2	2			4
Level 3+ training required but place not available					1
Not yet ready for work or learning	2	2	1	2	1
Personal Development Opportunities	5	1	2	3	2
Seeking employment, education or training	230	104	157	115	175
Start date agreed for employment, education or training	3	4		1	
Sub level 2 training required but place not available	1				
Grand Total	244	116	161	121	189

2c   NEET Unavailable

2.6   The data for unavailability emphasizes across the County the significance of teenage pregnancy/parenthood. This is the single most significant reason for being NEET across all areas of Norfolk and represents 22% of all young people who are NEET. West Norfolk also has the highest number of young people who are unavailable owing to illness (25 or 9% of the total NEET figure).

Table 3   NEET Unavailable Norfolk 2008

NEET Unavailable	Central	Eastern	Northern	Southern	Western
Illness	22	14	10	15	25
Other reason not available	5	5	2	2	5
Pregnant	17	14	11	6	15
Supporting family - teenage parent	55	23	31	19	46
Supporting family - young carer	2	1	1		
Grand Total	101	57	55	42	91

2d   The November 2008 cohort in West Norfolk

2.7   Connexions Norfolk made available the database at the level of the individual student. In order to meet requirements of data protection, names were removed but details of all NEET by gender, age, ward, statutory school and reason for being NEET were provided. The non availability of individual names meant that it was not possible to discuss individuals with a senior member of staff of their statutory school. The issue of data confidentiality significantly reduces the ability of statutory providers to look at reasons why individuals known to the school become NEET and subsequently, where necessary, take action to amend school IAG processes. The NEET Toolkit, issued by the DCSF, takes the view that "Information about young people needs to be shared between partners" (DCSF, 2008b: 6). The DCSF guidance goes on to say "Schools have an important role to play by……using the findings from the annual activity survey conducted by Connexions to….identify the characteristics of young people who do not make a successful transition (and) evaluate the effectiveness of the support given to young people to make an effective transition to post-16 learning" (DCSF, 2008b: 8). It is difficult to see how schools can effectively engage in sharing responsibility for reducing NEET post 16 if they do not have access to data at an individual level. Connexions shares aggregated data with schools but access to individual data would be far more effective.

2.8   The individual data provided by Connexions includes all young people aged 16 to 19 in November 2008. The small number aged 16 is of course only approximately 75% of those young people who were 16 on September 1st 2008.   Likewise, the 19 year olds section contains only those whose 19th birthday was between the same September and November. The clear trend is for female NEET to exceed male NEET at age 17 and for this gap to widen for 18 and 19 year olds.

Fig 3
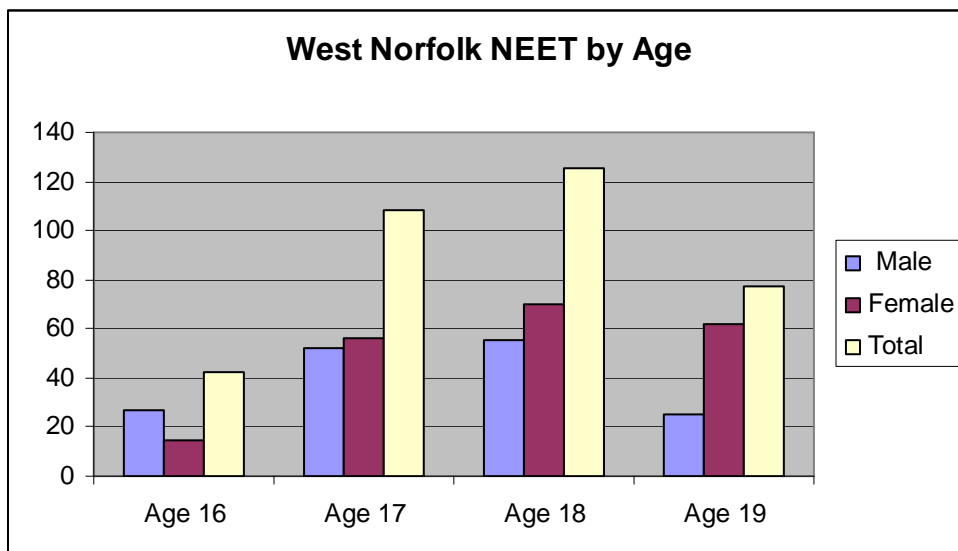
If we focus on 16 to 18 year olds but adjust the data for 16 year olds to represent twelve months, then the data shows a narrower gap between the total number of 16 and 17 year olds who are NEET. Unadjusted data shows a gap of over 60 more 17 year olds. This falls to just over 40 when adjusted.

Fig 4

NEET by Age (16 Year Olds Adjusted)
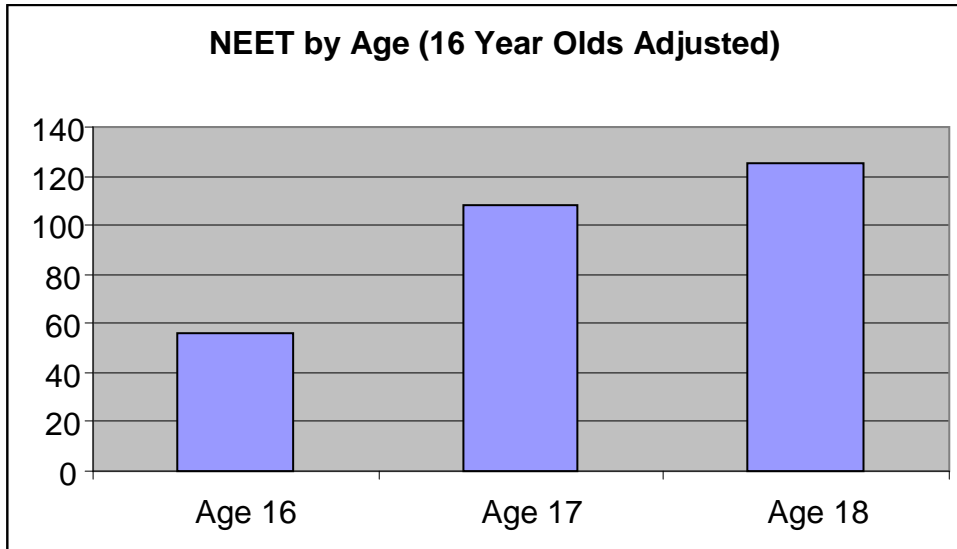
2.9　　There is still a larger number of 17 year olds than 16 year olds who are NEET. In paragraph 6, above, teenage pregnancy and parenthood was identified as the single most common cause for NEET. Only a very small number of 16 year olds are NEET as a result of pregnancy. There are however twenty two 17 year olds and thirty seven 18 year olds. The data for 19 year olds covers only September to November.

Fig 5

NEET Pregnant/Parent
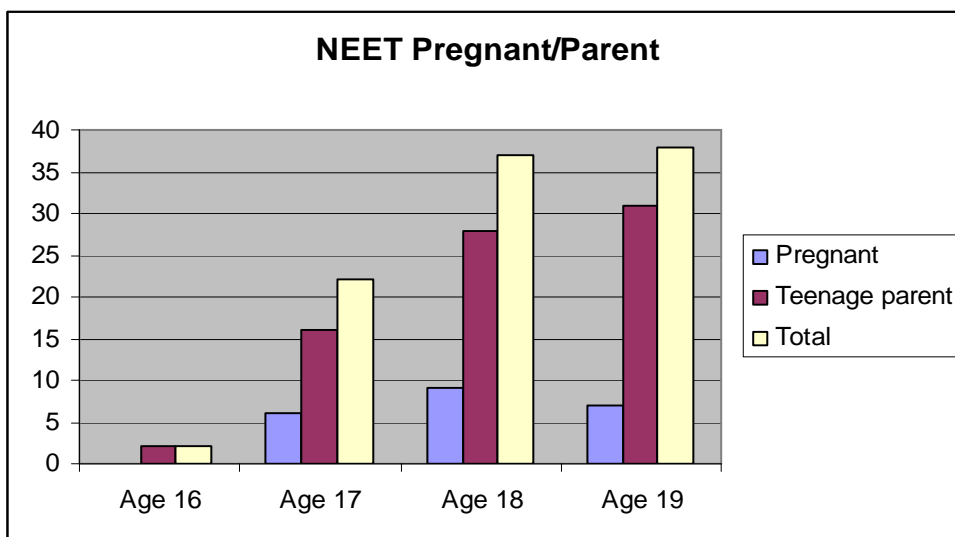
The relatively high number of young people who are NEET as a result of illness increases the number of NEET who are unavailable. If we then look at the number of NEET by age but exclude the numbers who are NEET as a result of pregnancy/parenthood/illness, then the graph is different. The totals for the three age groups are 57, 72 and 84 respectively. Young males are the larger group at all ages. There is, therefore, an increase between ages 16 and 17 of fifteen in a cohort of approximately 2000 per year in West Norfolk. There will be more detailed discussion of trends over a year in the section below.

Fig 6
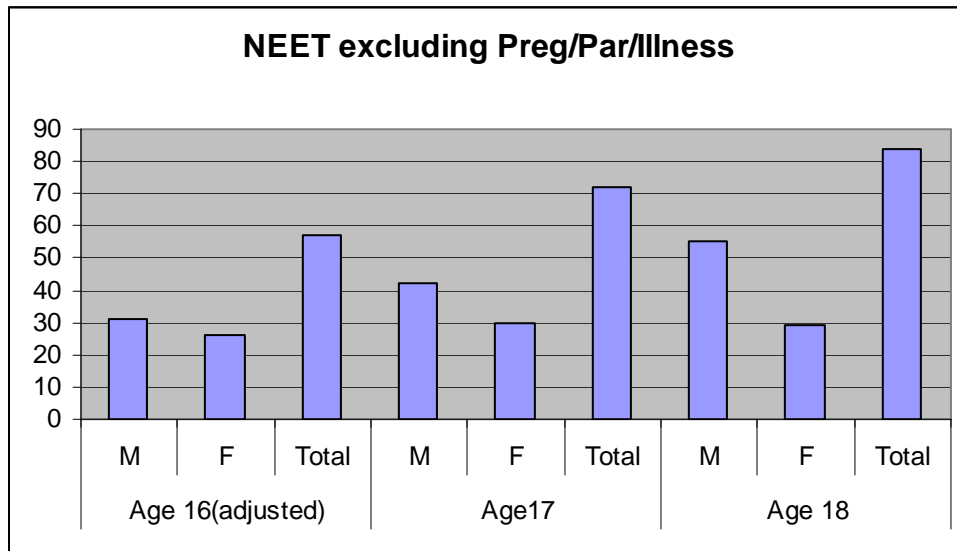
2.10 A second source of data was provided by Connexions West. This is an analysis of NEET in West Norfolk as of April 3rd 2009 and which has already been circulated to schools (Appendix 1). The numbers of NEET available by age in April 2009 is shown in the table below. However, the 16 year olds are those with birthdays between April and August, i.e. the final five months of the school year. In the second column, this figure is adjusted to 12 months. The "adjusted" column shows the average number of NEET per month, assuming an even distribution of NEET birthdates across the year.

Table 4 NEET Available April 03 2009		
Age as of Apr 09	**Number**	**Adjusted**
16	45	108
17	117	117
18	136	135

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2e   NEET by origin

2.11   The individual data shows the statutory school attended when the student entered the Connexions database. "Educated otherwise" includes attendance at a pupil referral unit. The proportion of young people "educated otherwise" who become NEET is worth more detailed consideration. If we look at the two full years, 17 and 18, there are respectively 24 and 14 who were "educated otherwise". The total number of NEET aged 17 and 18 is 229 so 15% of NEET were "educated otherwise". This far exceeds the proportion of young people from mainstream schools who become NEET. There is less chance of becoming NEET if a young person continues to be educated in a mainstream school.

Table 5 Number of NEET by Age, Gender and Statutory Institution								
Age	Age 16		Age 17		Age 18		Age 19	
Gender	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
West Norfolk Schools	20	12	30	37	38	54	15	39
Other Schools	1	1	7	6	9	10	4	9
Educated Otherwise	6	1	13	11	8	6	5	11

In addition, the data shows the increasing contribution to the NEET figure of young people who were not educated in West Norfolk schools. 9% of 16 year olds fall into this category rising to 12% of 17 year olds and 24% of 18 year olds, so by age 18 nearly one in four NEET in West Norfolk were not educated in the west.

2f   NEET and statutory school

2.12   The number of NEET and statutory school shows considerable variation, reflecting school "catchment" and school size. The data are shown not for inferences to be drawn as to the actions taken in school to reduce NEET but to allow consideration for targeted action. Whilst most schools are willing to accept that for the majority of young people, placement and retention on their learning route post 16 will be in part a reflection of the information, advice and guidance processes in Year 11, it is difficult to link a young person becoming NEET at age 18, two years after leaving a school, to processes within that school. Again, these data are based on age as of November 30th 2008, so 25% of the 16 year old cohort has moved to age 17. Schools were unable to comment on these data as names were not provided. Without having access to names, schools are unable to discuss actions taken pre 16 to ensure continuity of learning post 16, to have the opportunity to amend their IAG or, indeed, to comment on the degree to which names of NEET were unexpected.

Table 6   NEET by Age, Gender and Statutory School

School	16M	16 F	16 Tot	17 M	17 F	17Tot	18M	18F	18 Tot	19M	19F	19Tot	TOT
Downham Market	6	2	**8**	4	3	**7**	1	5	**6**	2	2	**4**	**25**
Hamonds	5	1	**6**	1	3	**4**	2	5	**7**	0	2	**2**	**19**
King Edward	0	0	**0**	8	9	**17**	4	11	**15**	0	3	**3**	**35**
Marshland	0	0	**0**	1	0	**1**	2	0	**2**	0	0	**0**	**3**
Methwold	1	2	**3**	2	2	**4**	5	3	**8**	1	3	**4**	**19**
Smithdon	1	2	**3**	5	7	**12**	2	7	**9**	3	5	**8**	**32**
Springwood	3	3	**6**	1	6	**7**	7	8	**15**	3	9	**12**	**40**
St Clements	1	0	**1**	1	0	**1**	4	5	**9**	0	1	**1**	**12**
Park High	1	0	**1**	5	6	**11**	11	8	**19**	4	8	**12**	**43**
Wayland	2	2	**4**	2	1	**3**	0	1	**1**	1	6	**7**	**15**
Schools Totals	**20**	**12**	**32**	**30**	**37**	**67**	**38**	**53**	**91**	**14**	**39**	**53**	**243**

2.13   It was possible to look at the data and see the degree to which the balance between "available" and "unavailable" varies between statutory institution. These data are presented to illustrate the variation between statutory school, but not as commentary on IAG processes within those schools. They should at least be the start of discussion involving all agencies responsible for young people, including schools.

Fig 7

15
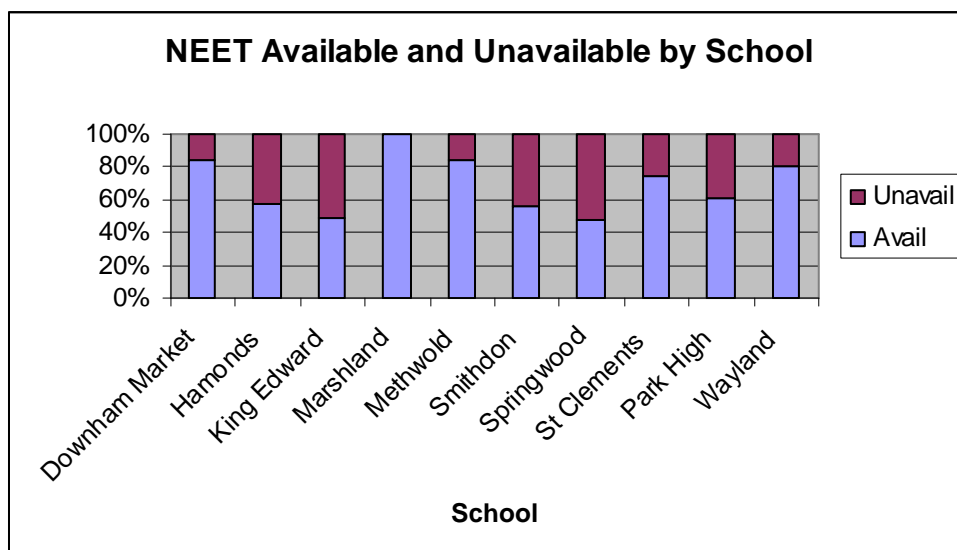
Not surprisingly, the dominant reason for being unavailable for education, employment or training is that of pregnancy/parenthood. It is interesting to look at the data of NEET by age and statutory school. There are variations in the number of young people who are NEET within the first year of leaving statutory education. Some young people whose 17th birthday was between September and November 2008 will of course appear as 17 year olds. However, these are small numbers relative to the total cohort, but that is the nature of NEET. Such data must be analysed on an individual basis looking at each young person who is NEET and the reason for being NEET.

Table 7 NEET by Age and Statutory School

School	Age 16	Age 17	Age 18	Age 19	Total
Downham Market	8	7	6	4	**25**
Hamonds	6	4	7	2	**19**
King Edward	0	17	15	3	**35**
Marshland	0	1	2	0	**3**
Methwold	3	4	8	4	**19**
Smithdon	3	12	9	8	**32**
Springwood	6	7	15	12	**40**
St Clements	1	1	9	1	**12**
Park High	1	11	19	12	**43**
Wayland	4	3	1	7	**15**

2g   NEET and Ward/parish

2.14   Connexions note the ward/parish of all young people on CCIS. There is a total of 96 wards and parishes with at least one young person who is NEET (Table 8). Twenty have five or more NEET and ten have ten or more young people who are NEET.   It will come as no surprise to see the large numbers in and around Kings Lynn. St Margaret's/St Nicholas and Gaywood North Bank differ from the others in that their peak age group for NEET are the 19 year olds, in contrast to 18 for the other areas.

Table 8 NEET in Kings Lynn Wards

Ward/Parish	16	17	18	19	Total
Fairstead	5	7	13	7	32
Gaywood Chase	3	6	10	7	26
Gaywood North Bank	0	2	6	8	16
N Lynn	1	10	13	9	33
S &W Lynn	2	12	13	4	31
Spellowfields	0	0	12	1	13
St Margaret/St Nich	2	12	6	10	30

Whilst the western area NEET numbers are dominated by Lynn, there are other wards with significant NEET numbers, with 17 in the Downham wards, 12 in Denton, 11 in Swaffham and 17 in Watton. When the NEET numbers in these wards/parishes are analysed by gender, the impact of pregnancy/parenthood is clear.

Table 9 NEET by Gender in Kings Lynn

Ward/Parish	M	F	Total
Fairstead	20	12	32
Gaywood Chase	13	13	26
Gaywood North Bank	7	9	16
N Lynn	15	18	33
S &W Lynn	9	22	31
Spellowfields	5	8	13
St Margaret/St Nich	7	23	30

Of the 180 NEET in these seven wards, 104 (58%) are female with 76 (42%) male. This differential is greatest in St Margaret's/St Nicholas and South and West Lynn where the proportions of female NEET are 77% and 71% respectively.

Fig 8

NEET by Ward and Age
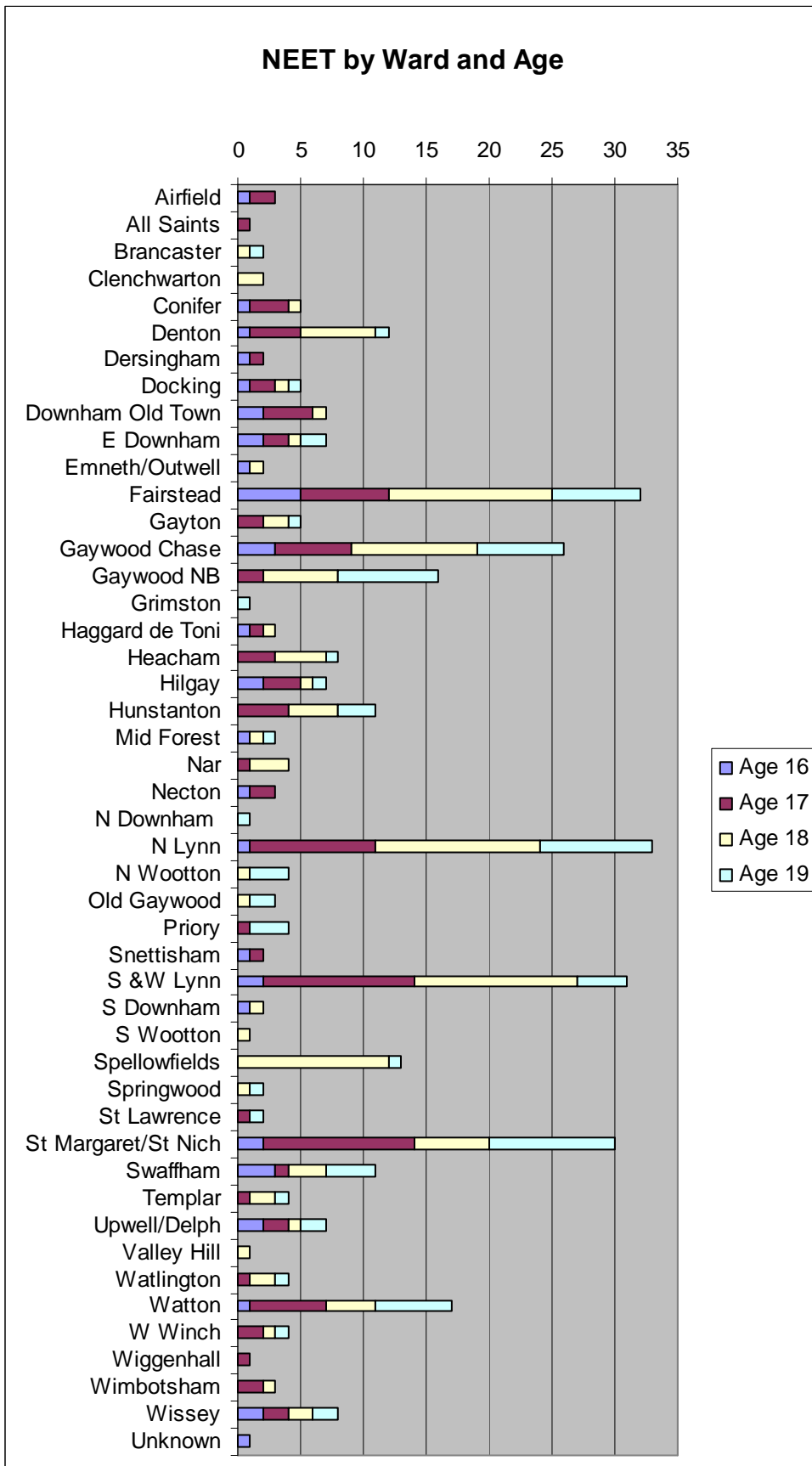
2h   **Teenage Pregnancy/Teenage Parents**

2.15   Reference has already been made to the impact on NEET numbers of the increasing number of young people, mostly female, who are NEET as a result of being pregnant/parent. The number of NEET and their statutory school is shown. This graph is not shown to suggest a causal connection but does again emphasise the concentration in Kings Lynn with smaller concentrations in other urban areas. The disproportionate numbers from the Pupil Referral Unit is repeated.

Fig 9
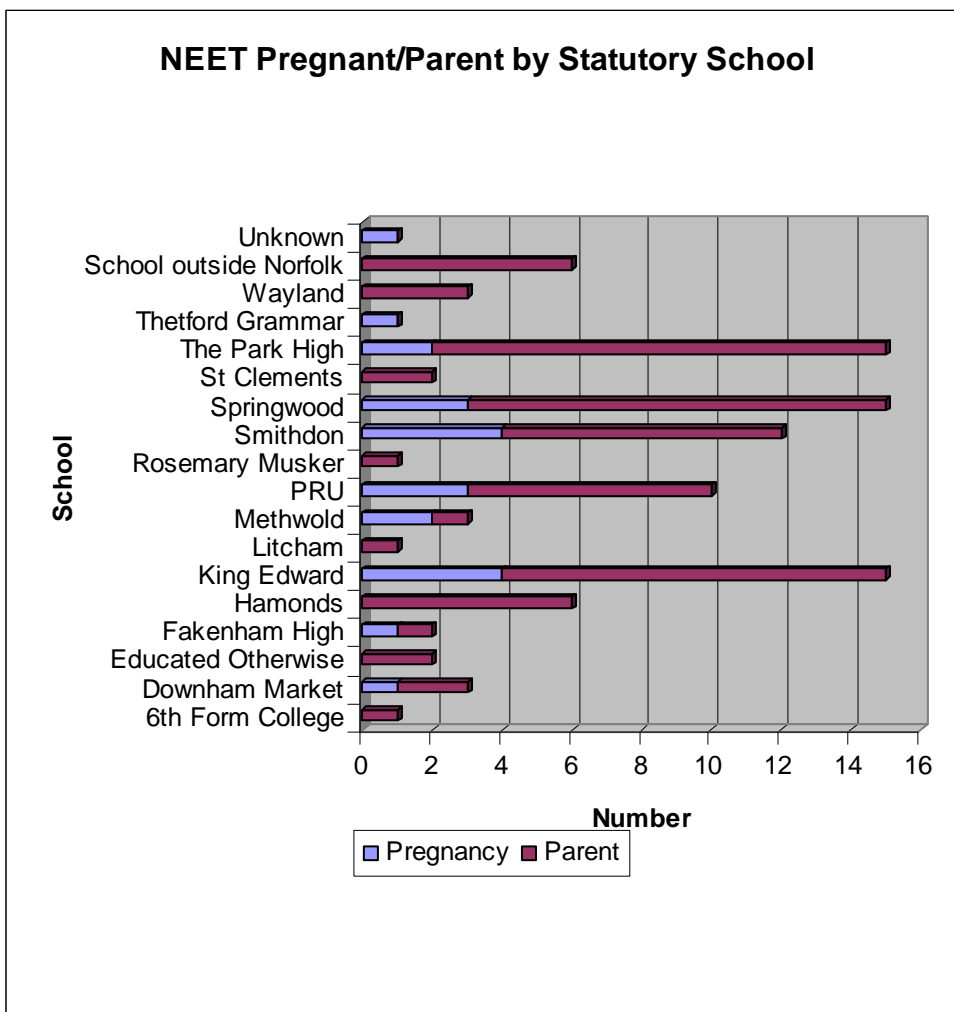
2.16   Not surprisingly, the analysis of pregnancy by ward shows the same distribution as the NEET unavailable analysis.

Fig 10

NEET Pregnant/Parent by Ward
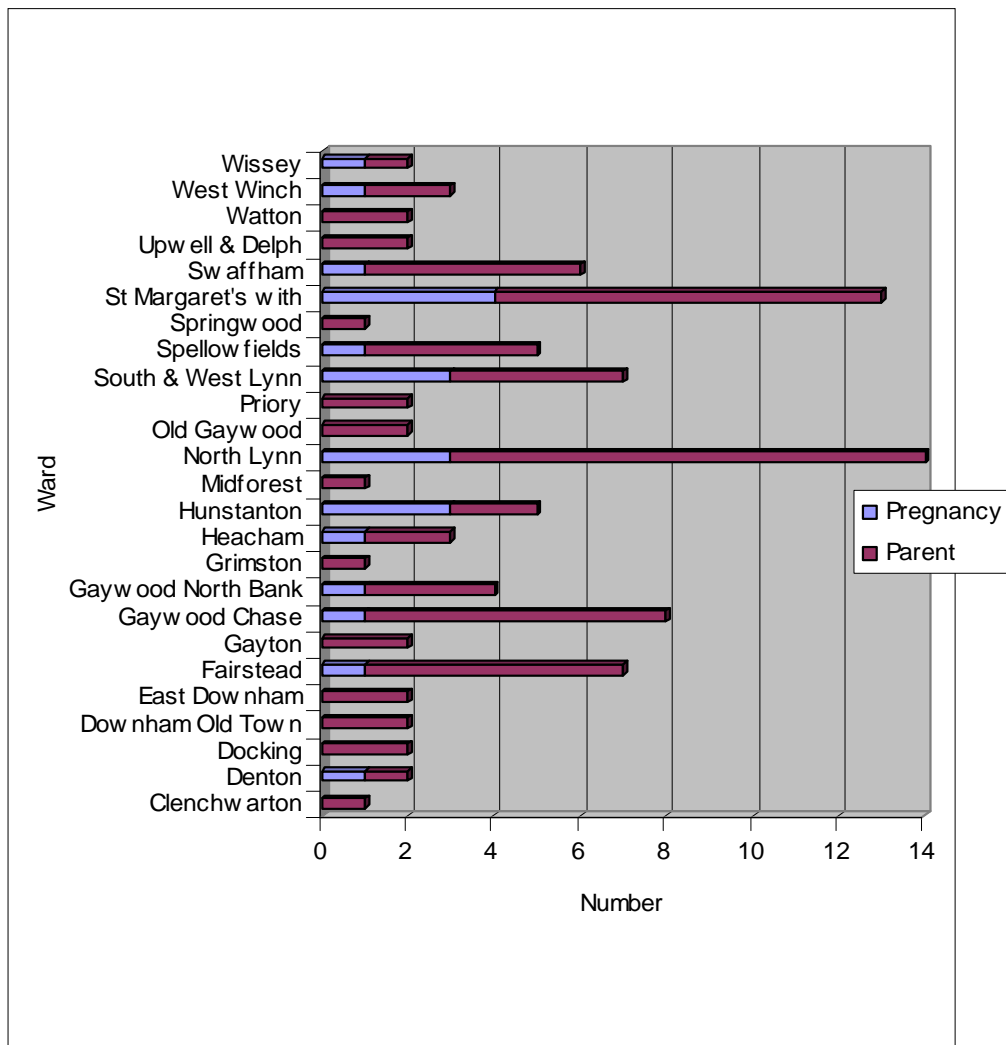
3.   NEET from November 2007 to April 2009

3a   The Data

3.1   The Norfolk Client Caseload Information System contains a monthly analysis of all young people aged 16 to 19 across the County classified as shown below.

Table 10 CCIS Data categories – all young people

Nov 2007

status	sub status
In Employment Education or Training	Employment no training
	Employment with training
	Full time further education
	Full time higher education
	Gap Year
	Government / LSC Supported Training
	Part time employment
	Part time learning
	Pre E2E
	School Sixth Form
	Sixth Form College
	Temporary employment
	Work based learning - employed status
NEET - Available to the labour market	Awaiting an E2E Place
	Level 2 training required but place not available
	Level 3+ training required but place not available
	Not yet ready for work or learning
	Personal Development Opportunities
	Seeking employment, education or training
	Start date agreed for employment, education or training
NEET - Not available to the labour market	Illness
	Other reason not available
	Pregnant
	Supporting family - teenage parent
	Supporting family - young carer
Other	Current situation not known
	Custodial sentence

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In order to allow a review of trends over a year Connexions made this data available at approximately quarterly intervals from Nov 2007 to Nov 2008, plus the April 2009 data to show movements since the November count. The inclusion of the categories into which young people in education, employment or training are placed allows an analysis of movements within that overall category. However, at the moment a detailed analysis from this section is not possible as there has been some miscoding of students in sixth forms into the category of full time education. Connexions are aware of this and acting upon it. The miscoding is within the EET category and does not affect the quantum in the two categories, EET and NEET respectively. A further difference between these data and data looked at earlier is that the classification here is into Year 12, 13 and 14, so that we do not see a decreasing number in one category as the year progresses.

3.2 Across West Norfolk, the number of young people who are in education, employment and training still dominates the picture relative to those who are NEET (Fig 11). The increase in the numbers in Year 12 who are counted in November 2008 compared with the Year 12 of 2007 is apparent. Whilst the numbers of young people who are NEET is a small percentage of the total cohort, this percentage still represents a figure fluctuating between 280 and 465 young people who are not benefitting from education and training, or who are on the economic fringes of society.

Fig 11
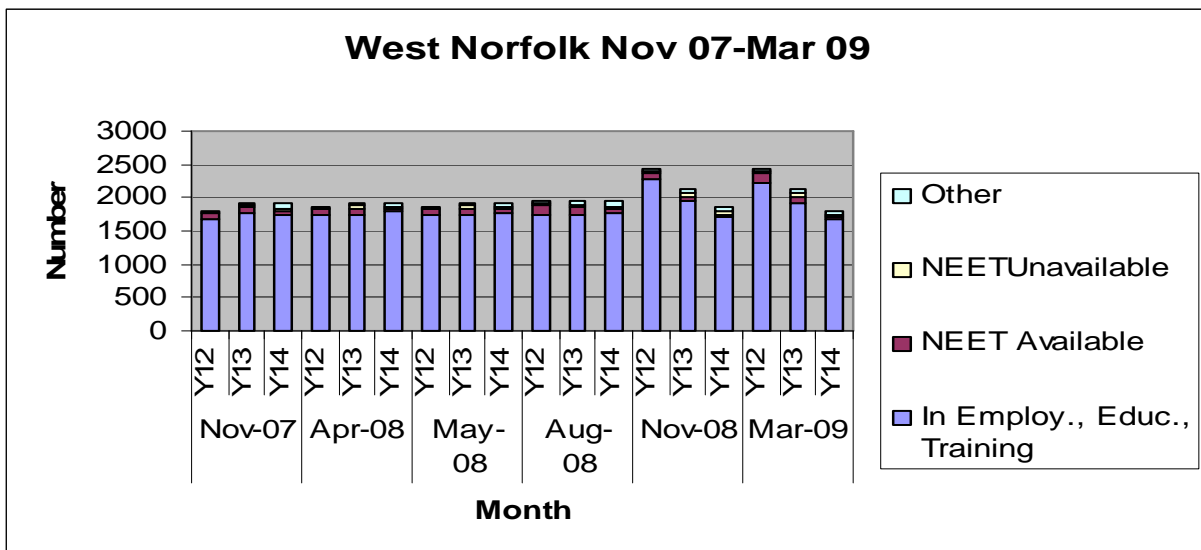
3b   Analysis of NEET trends

3.3 **Year 12**

The data below allows an analysis of the NEET percentages over the period described. Throughout most of the year from November to May, the **NEET available** remained little changed hovering between 5.1% and 5.5%. It does not show any significant rise

over the course of the year. The rise in August is linked to the number of young people who will have reached the end of a one year course and are looking to their next step. Connexions staff made a significant effort to contact and ensure as many young people as possible were placed in education, employment and training in November, so the 3.3% NEET available is a considerable improvement on the 5.1% of the previous year. However, the figure was rising again by March 2009 to a figure close to the figure of the previous year.

Table 11   Trends in NEET Available and Unavailable. Nov 07 – Mar 09

	Year 12					
	N-07	A-08	My-08	Au-08	N-08	M-09
NEET Available	5.1%	5.3%	5.5%	7.8%	3.3%	5.6%
NEET Unavailable	0.7%	0.9%	0.9%	2.0%	1.3%	1.5%
Other	1.2%	1.1%	1.1%	1.1%	0.8%	0.8%
NEET Total	5.8%	6.2%	6.4%	9.8%	4.6%	7.1%
	Year 13					
	N-07	A-08	My-08	Au-08	N-08	M-09
NEET Available	4.6%	4.8%	4.6%	5.8%	3.6%	4.3%
NEET Unavailable	1.7%	2.0%	1.9%	2.5%	2.4%	2.7%
Other	1.7%	2.4%	2.4%	2.8%	3.1%	3.0%
NEET Total	6.3%	6.8%	6.5%	8.3%	6.0%	7.0%
	Year 14					
	N-07	A-08	My-08	Au-08	N- 08	M-09
NEET Available	2.9%	2.5%	2.1%	3.2%	1.7%	1.8%
NEET Unavailable	1.8%	1.8%	2.3%	2.6%	2.0%	1.6%
Other	4.8%	2.5%	2.7%	3.8%	4.2%	3.8%
NEET Total	4.7%	5.3%	4.4%	5.8%	3.7%	3.4%

The **NEET Unavailable** figure rises during the year to August 2008. In Nov 2009, the number of NEET Unavailable was, at 1.3%, 0.6% higher than the unavailable figure for the previous year, although below the August figure for the previous Year 12 cohort. The **Other** figure remains at 1.1% throughout the year. However, as a result of the Connexions work in November, this figure fell to 0.8% of the cohort, below the level of the previous year. The 0.8% was sustained into March.

Fig 12

Year 12 NEET Nov 07-Mar 09 by %
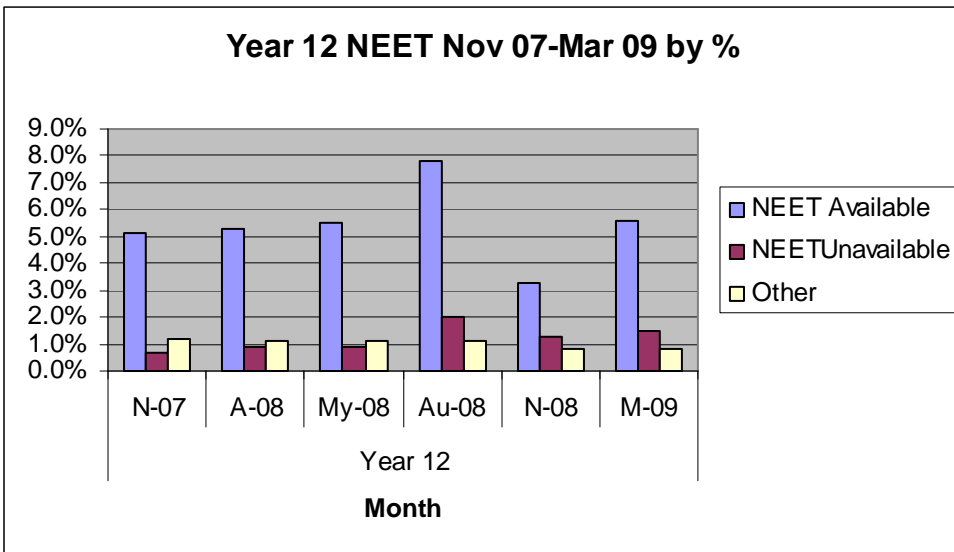
3.4   **Year 13**

The percentage of Year 13 who were **NEET Available** was below that of Year 12 from November 2007 to August 2008, and the percentage of Year 13 in this category in November 2008 was 1% lower than the figure for the previous Year 13 cohort, in 2007. Whilst there has been a rise of 0.7% in NEET available in Year 13 between November 2008 and March 2009, this is below the rise of 2.3% for Year 12 over the corresponding period. The **NEET Unavailable** figure for Year 13 is noticeably higher than the figure for Year 12, in general one per cent higher, although widening to 1.2% in March 2009. The **Other** category rose gradually throughout Year 13 from 1.7% in November to 2.8% in August. The Year 13 "Other" starting figure for the 2008-2009 cohort was 3.1%, 1.4% higher than the November 2007 figure although falling slightly to 3.0% in April 2009.

Fig 13

Year 13 NEET Nov 07-Mar 09 by %
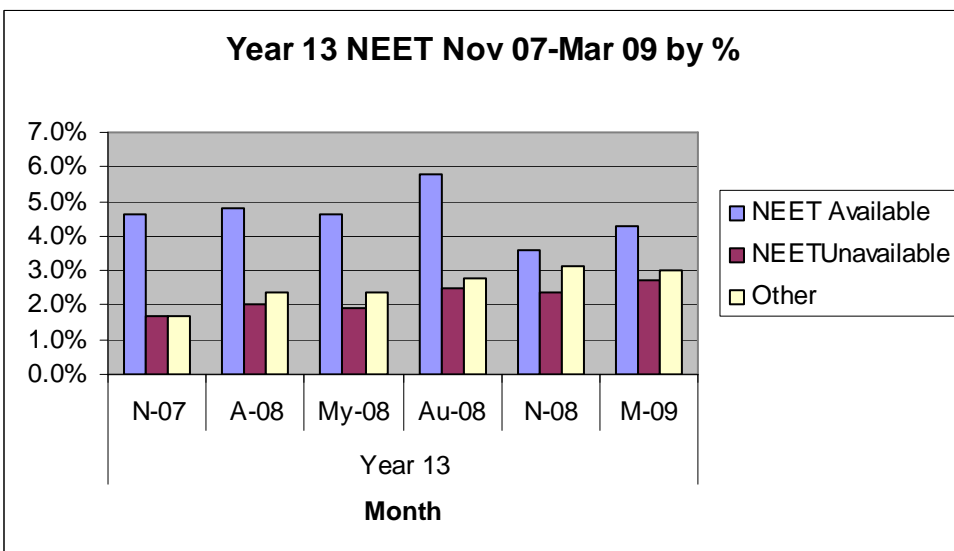
3.5   **Year 14**

Throughout Year 14, the **NEET Available** figure is the lowest for all three years. The figures for Year 14 2008-2009 are lower than corresponding figures for 2007-2008. The **NEET Unavailable** figures are very similar to those for Year 13 over the same period. However, when we look at the **Other** figures, they are the highest of any year for that category with the November 2007 figure for Year 14 being four times than the Year 12 figure. Engagement with Connexions is a voluntary activity and there is increasing mobility as the young people get older. Many will move away from the area, others will simply not engage with Connexions. As a result, the sub category of **Other - Current situation not known** shows a rise from an average of 1.1% in Year 12 (Nov 2007-August 2008) to 2.3% in Year 13 to 3.5% in Year 14.

Fig 14
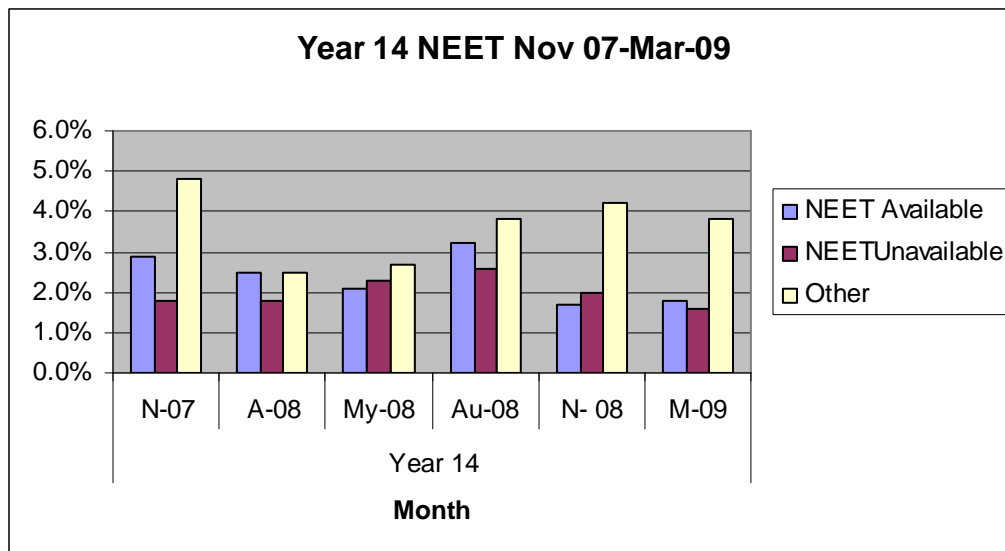
3c   NEET Available

Table 12 NEET Available Year 12 Nov 07-Mar 09

NEET Available Year 12	Nov-07	Apr-08	May-08	Aug-08	Nov-08	Mar-09
Awaiting an E2E Place	4	4	5	5	3	2
Level 2 Training required		1	2	5	2	2
Level 3+ Training required					1	2
Not yet ready	2	2	3	3		
Personal Dev Opps				1	2	2
Seeking EET	86	92	91	113	72	127
Start Date Agreed	1	1	3	25		

3.6   In **Year 12** as for all years, this category is dominated by the numbers who are seeking employment, education and training. It is not surprising to see the start date category increase in August. There is a very clear increase in those seeking employment etc. in March 2009. These would appear to be young people who have left full time education down from 1393 in Nov 2008 to 1346 in April 2009. There is a fall in school Year 12 Sixth Form numbers from 376 to 371 over the same period. However, reference has been made earlier to issues of the miscoding of students in the EET category and evidence is presented later that there appears to be weaknesses in the process of informing Connexions of sixth formers who leave, with not all schools informing Connexions as a matter of course. This pattern in Year 12 does not appear between Nov 2007 and April 2008 where the increase in NEET is only 6, but the numbers in full time education actually increase from 993 to 1018 and for school sixth forms falls by 7 from 399 to 392.

For **Year 13** there are really no significant trends within the categories. The number of start date again rises in August, as is to be expected. Again, the positive impact in reducing the numbers seeking EET in Nov has not been sustained into April.

Table 13 NEET Available Year 13 Nov 07-Mar 09

NEET Available Year 13	Nov-07	Apr-08	May-08	Aug-08	Nov-08	Mar-09
Awaiting an E2E Place	5	1		1	1	
Level 2 Training required	1	1	3	3	1	
Level 3+ Training Required			1	1		
Not yet ready				1	1	
Personal Dev Opps			1			1
Seeking EET	80	89	81	93	73	91
Start Date Agreed	3	1	2	15		

For Year 14, the only data of any substance is the Seeking EET category. The lower figures for 2008-2009, sustained to March 09, are positive.

Table 14 NEET Available Year 14 Nov 07-Mar 09

NEET Available Year 14	Nov-07	Apr-08	May-08	Aug-08	Nov-08	Mar-09
Awaiting an E2E Place						
Level 2 Training required			1	1		
Level 3+ Training Required	1			1	1	
Not yet ready						
Personal Dev Opps	1	2	1	1		
Seeking EET	53	47	39	57	30	32
Start Date Agreed						

3d   NEET Unavailable

3.7   There are no significant trends throughout 2007 to 2008 for Year 12 other than the illness which swept through West Norfolk in August 2008, tripling the number of NEET who were unavailable owing to illness. The "snapshot" data of NEET in November 2008 identified two teenage parents who were 16 and NEET. The data for November 2008 based on the whole of Year 12 shows 16 teenage parents and seven pregnancies who are NEET. The year data will also include 17 year olds in Year 12. This a stark illustration of the rapid impact of pregnancy and parenthood on NEET figures at 16 and 17. The pregnancies increase towards the end of the year although remaining in single figures across West Norfolk.

Table 15 NEET Unavailable Year 12 Nov 07-Mar 09

NEET Unavailable Y12	Nov-07	Apr-08	May-08	Aug-08	Nov-08	Mar-09
Illness	2	7	7	19	8	12
Other Reason	4	1	1	3	1	2
Pregnant		3	5	8	7	4
Teenage Parent	7	5	4	8	16	19

For Year 13, we begin to see the significant developments which have already been described.

Table 16 NEET Unavailable Year 13 Nov 07-Mar 09

NEET Unavailable Y13	No-07	Apr-08	My-08	Au-08	No-08	Mar-09
Illness	5	6	6	9	7	7
Other Reason		2	1	1	1	1
Pregnant	10	6	6	9	9	7
Teenage Parent	18	24	23	28	34	42
Young carer						

Whilst illness remains in single figures at all six recording points, as does the number of pregnancies, the cumulative effect of these pregnancies now begins to be reflected in the numbers of teenage parents in the Year 13 2007-2008. The Year 13 2008-2009 starts with a significantly higher figure of teenage parents than the previous year. The figures for November 2008 and March 2009 show a doubling of the number of teenage parents over the previous year.

The Year 14 cohort has a number of teenage parents exceeding 20 for the whole of 2007-2008.

Table 17 NEET Unavailable Year 14 Nov 07-Mar 09

NEET Unavailable Y14	Nv-07	Apr-08	My-08	Au-08	No-08	Mr-09
Illness	4	4	6	7	6	5
Other Reason	1	2	1	2	1	1
Pregnant	4	4	11	10	6	5
Teenage Parent	23	22	23	30	25	18
Young carer	3	2	3	1		

3e   Other

3.8   There are two categories in this section, current situation not known and custodial sentence. The maximum number of young people reported as being in custody during the period under review is 4 for Year 14 in Nov 2008 and March 2009. Whilst "NEET unknown" are not strictly part of the NEET analysis, they are included here as the data demonstrate the difficulties faced by Connexions as young people become older.

Fig 15
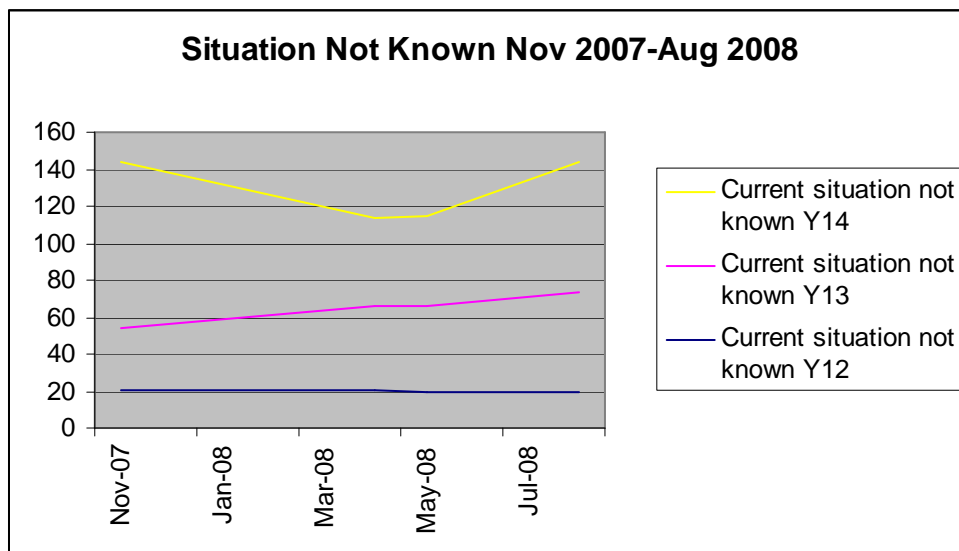
Connexions manage to sustain a "not known" figure of twenty or so throughout Year 12 and although these data only cover one year, there are also only 20 unknown in the Year 12 in 2008-2009. This number triples as young people move into year 13 where there is a rising trend throughout the year. Nov 2008 and March 2009 have 66 and 63 "unknowns" respectively. The figure then more than doubles for Year 14 and although there is a reduction during the year, the numbers rise again by July.

4   Managing NEET

Summary

- *Some schools have a specific strategy/policy for addressing NEET, others incorporate it into a wider approach to support.*
- *Some schools target potential NEET before Key Stage 4 and follow this up with specific interventions.*
- *Curriculum flexibility involving College of West Anglia has a very positive impact on student attitudes to learning, achievement and retention.*
- *There are small numbers on the Not School programme and its future is in doubt.*
- *Additional support for potential NEET comes through 1:1 counselling in some schools achieved through the use of mentors from within the school community as well as members of the business community.*
- *Alternative provision is provided in some schools through in house support units.*
- *Persistent absence increases the chances of becoming NEET. In West Norfolk 24% of Year 11 leavers in 2008 had been persistent absentees at some point in their school life.*
- *Partnership with Children's Services in delivering wrap around care is seen to be at an early stage.*
- *Permanent exclusion from school significantly increases the risk of becoming NEET. Schools are developing in school provision to reduce permanent exclusion but there is a variety in pace and provision.*
- *There is little evidence of effective management of the transition process from May of Year 11 other than the support of Connexions PAs.*
- *Staff recognise a wide variety of reasons why young people become NEET.*
- *70% of NEET in West Norfolk have not reached Level 2 by November of Year 12.*
- *Schools recognise the need to tackle lack of ambition and parental support.*

4.1   All involved in education know that engagement in learning and training are essential if young people are to be successful in life. However, a significant number of young people who pass through our schools and colleges do not recognise this and, for a variety of reasons, disengage from education. Evidence shows that NEET is a major predictor of later unemployment, low income, depression and poor mental health. This

is why reducing NEET numbers is a critical ambition in 14-19 education and Every Child Matters reforms. Nationally, the strategy for reducing NEET contains three elements:

- careful tracking: to identify early those young people who are NEET, or who are at risk of becoming NEET.

- personalised guidance and support: to make sure young people know how to access education, training or employment, and to enable them to overcome barriers to participation.

- provision of a full range of courses to meet demand: to engage young people through sufficient provision at every level and in every style of learning (DCSF, 2008a: 8).

4.2   Given the significance of early identification highlighted by the DCSF strategy (DCSF, 2008a) and confirmed by other NEET Research (Blunt, 2008, DCSF, 2008b, DCSF, 2008c, Gartshore, 2009, LSC Cambridge, 2008, Tunnard *et al.,* 2008), all schools in the West Norfolk area were asked if they had a strategy or policy in place to target early identification. In a small number of schools, no specific policy or strategy was in place. However, this does not mean a great deal of action was not being taken to support young people; it was not seen as part of a NEET strategy but as part of the school's commitment to supporting all young people. Interviewees in three of these schools recognized the need for the school to develop such a policy and were actively working with the leadership team in policy development. In one school, the need for a policy as such was rejected as the school felt it knew its students and that needs were being met through the normal processes of support and guidance. In the other schools, there was a very clear recognition of the need for a NEET policy and proactive work with young people who were potentially NEET.

4.3   In the schools where there was clear and targeted activity to identify and personalize support for potential NEET, colleagues interviewed spoke with real feeling that there are young people for whom the normal processes of support and guidance are insufficient and that the school needs to personalize support and, where necessary, commit additional resources. In all of these schools, senior staff were very actively engaged in overseeing and supporting the development of a strategy to reduce NEET. All saw it as a responsibility of the school to provide the best support for all young people, recognizing that this provision needed to be intensive for some young people. One interviewee also commented that reducing disengagement also had a positive impact on the school's Contextual Value Added data! The firm support of leadership in addressing NEET is an essential component of a NEET strategy.

4.4   Several schools felt they had to intervene early, usually in Year 9. However, colleagues in these schools also spoke of their recognition of NEET before then.   In such schools,

recognition involves a fast track process to the Connexions PA. In one school, this is achieved by a programme where every Year 9 is interviewed by a member of the pastoral team about aspirations and learning pathways. Interventions also involved a dogged persistence by the school's own careers/IAG coordinator to ensure that interviews had taken place and, where further interviews were needed, giving support to Connexions to ensure attendance at the interviews. One senior member of staff spoke of how his involvement with one young person had led to six interviews with Connexions. In two of the schools there is a recognition of the pressures and time constraints faced by Connexions, and the school provides enhanced support. One school employs a trained professional counsellor for one and a half days per week to work with young people at greatest risk of disengagement. In another school, there is a full time non teaching Connexions coordinator who ensures pupil engagement with Connexions. One of the senior staff interviewed showed how the school's own processes of monitoring pupil progress were linked into IAG. When performance against target grades is being discussed students are also asked about future aspirations. Those who state they are unsure are referred to a senior member of staff who ensures they are fast tracked to Connexions.

4.5   In all West Norfolk schools there is a recognition of the value of curriculum flexibility and making use of the vocational provision at the College of West Anglia in reducing disengagement from learning. This is supported by very close links with the College involving a teacher or PA from the school visiting College teaching staff on a regular basis, discussing individuals and taking supporting action where needed back in the school. In one school, a member of the County Youth Team and a teaching assistant work with the young people on a flexible learning programme for a further day each week. Both had developed very effective relations with the young people who were very positive about the support they had received. Interviews with students across several schools emphasized the value of involvement with COWA in Years 10 and 11 through the support of the College in helping them complete their application to COWA. Without exception, schools commented that without the provision of courses at COWA, the exclusion rate would be higher. As one senior colleague said "our experience is that students feel more positive about their future as a result of attending COWA. It gives them hope and they can see the progression." In more than one school, reference was made to the importance of programmes which allowed students to experience COWA, get to know the layout of the college, college routines and staff in advance of moving there on a full time basis in Year 12. All the students who were interviewed in schools who were on the programme were very supportive. Data provided from the College illustrates the positive impact of the programme.

Table 18 14-16 Norfolk Schools at COWA   Completion Year 2007-2008

	Foundation	Level 1	Level 2
Number of Starts	17	122	17
% Retention	100	76	89
% Pass rate	100	98	63

4.6   The programme is also effective in leading to effective transition to learning/employment post 16. 111 or 71% of the young people who completed the programme progressed into FE/training with a further 6 (4%) progressing to work. The small number who started on this programme and whose future is unknown must be a priority sub group as being potentially NEET. Initially, this programme was funded by the LSC. The funding has been reduced, and sending students on the course is stretching school budgets. Numbers have fallen from a high of 200 in the completion year 2005-2006 to 156 in 2007-2008, although there has been a rise to 187 in the current year. There is no doubt that this programme has had a significant impact on retaining many students in education.

4.7   18 students are currently on the Notschool programme. This programme has, as its target group, students who are capable of working independently from home. They are provided with a laptop, printer, camera and broadband access from home. They are linked to a mentor, a qualified teacher, and their learning is on line. Mentors keep folders of a range of certificates that a young person could gain. A young person could gain accreditation without realizing s/he was working towards such an award. It is claimed that 75% move on into further education. Of the three young people in West Norfolk who completed last year, progression has been to an apprenticeship, an NVQ Level 1 in Hair and Beauty and E2E. In West Norfolk, the scheme is overseen by a manger in COWA. Of the eleven Year 11 leavers this year, all but one have applied for a college course. Three applicants have been successful, the remainder are awaiting an interview. However, the cost is £5000 per student and the future of the programme is in doubt as the cost to schools is likely increase and there is no additional support from Children's Services.

4.8   Several schools emphasise the importance of the involvement of the resources of the learning support department in working with young people who are potentially NEET. In one school, the SEN coordinator takes all the referrals of those young people who are at highest risk of becoming NEET as well as those who are lacking in confidence. Individual mentoring is provided as well as the opportunity to join a life skills course. In the same

school, those who present a significant challenge because of poor behaviour are assigned a member of senior or middle management as a personal mentor. No mentor has to manage more than one student. In another school, teaching assistants are used flexibly "to take the sting out of situations". This involves withdrawing a student from certain lessons to work with the TA on strategies to improve behaviour when returned to lessons.

4.9   In some schools additional resourcing is put in for mentoring and counselling. The students who were interviewed during this research who happened to be part of a mentoring scheme were all very supportive of mentoring. In addition, some schools are developing in house learning units. In one school, students with long absences are placed in a learning unit where they catch up with work missed until they are ready to resume normal lessons. In the same school this unit is also used for students who have failed to deliver coursework on time. In another school the unit is designed so students work in isolation in booths with work brought to them. However, the person in charge has a wider support brief and uses the time for in depth discussion with students. At least two schools use youth workers to support students. In another school a lunch time club, run by a non teaching member of staff, is helpful in enhancing personalized support. The provision of a more structured in house learning support unit is seen by one school as the final piece of the structure they need to move to a point where they have virtually no permanent exclusions. Lack of funding and appropriate physical space are restricting this school's efforts.

4.10   Nationally, a characteristic of many NEET is attendance well below the average. All schools reported working closely with their attendance officer and all schools recognized the importance of attendance. Absence not only results in failure to achieve formal qualifications, it also disengages a young person from learning routines. Students who have a poor record of attendance at school also struggle to attend College on a regular basis.

4.11   Absence is a significant issue for West Norfolk schools. Most West Norfolk schools do not meet the threshold of no more than 7% of students as persistent absentees. If this threshold is lowered even further to 6%, then the number of schools failing to meet this target will increase. Data from the County attendance team shows the scale of the problem. In the Year 11 leavers of summer 2008, 575 students in the West had been categorized as "persistent absentees" during their school life i.e with 20% absence in a period of four weeks. The Year 12 cohort known to Connexions is 2422, so 24% had been persistent absentees during the school career, although this is a small overestimate because of the voluntary nature of engagement with Connexions. Of the 2136 leavers in 2007 known to Connexions, 577 (27%) had been persistently absent at

some point in their school year. With such a strong link between absence and NEET, improving attendance by a variety of strategies is an essential element in reducing NEET numbers. A summary of best practice is included as **Appendix 2.** The Fast Track approach to formal procedures leading to a prosecution in twelve weeks was piloted in West Norfolk with a success rate in improving attendance of 80-90%. Above all, the message must be that there will be a consequence for absence without sound and valid reasons.

4.12 Some young people need support and resourcing beyond the ability of an individual school. The type of support varies considerably from young person to young person. It was recognised by the Social Exclusion Unit that the challenge to ensure all young people progress through adolescence fully equipped to play an active role in society and gain the skills they need to enter the labour market would require a collective response. It would require "…*agencies working together to provide services in partnership, demonstrated by a strategic vision, shared responsibility and solutions agreed by senior officers across local authorities and primary care trusts – and with local areas having clear lines of accountability, through their Children's Trust and Local Strategic Partnership to ensure that the contribution of all partners is monitored effectively.*" (Tunnard *et al.,* 2008: 18). Effective partnership with Children's Services with links to families right back to ante-natal and post-natal support, through children's centres, parental support advisers, and work in primary schools, provides a longitudinal perspective which the secondary school alone does not have. In Norfolk schools, there was concern over the Common Assessment Form. It was described as being "too bureaucratic" by more than one interviewee. Some schools spoke of the value of multi agency meetings to discuss those young people with complex needs, in one case, with the frequency linked to the exclusion record of young people. There is evidence of the very positive impact of regular meetings amongst professionals discussing individuals, but these meetings need to be as frequent as fortnightly (Blunt, 2008, Gartshore, 2009). Some were very negative in their assessment of the support they received from Children's Services, and a feeling that the onus is too much on the school to lead in working with other professions and agencies. One interviewee stated "Norfolk is slow to develop round table discussions which focus on individuals. As a result, processes are too reactive." There is variation in the degree to which the resources of the youth service are used by schools. In two examples in the research it is used effectively to work with targeted groups. The general feeling was that partnership with Children's Services in ensuring high quality, coordinated "wrap around care", as outlined in both Every Child Matters and Extended Schools, is still at an early stage.

4.13 Permanent exclusion from school significantly increases a young person's chances of becoming NEET. Many of the young people with whom the Youth Offending Team are

working are also out of mainstream learning. Of the 27 young people being supported by YOT and who reached the end of statutory education in 2008, eleven are NEET, seven are in training, five are on an E2E programme and four are employed. The Behaviour Partnership, with its commitment to the reduction of permanent exclusion is developing in West Norfolk but some schools commented negatively on its working. These comments related to a perceived lack of transparency in the system; that some schools exclude more readily than others and some schools receive very few students excluded from other schools. The Rosebery Centre is managing 140 young people (April 2009). It has to take a flexible approach to reflect individual needs. There is a core curriculum of English, mathematics, science, and ICT. Provision is bought in off-site with organizations specializing in areas such as music, performing arts, motor vehicle maintenance and sport. Most of the young people now have a curriculum mix of nearly 25 hours. The Centre ensures there is a worker in COWA for two days a week to liaise with the College.

4.14   The Head of the PRU was very much in favour of a post 16 role for the PRU for those young people for whom continued links with the PRU would help prevent their becoming NEET post 16. The involvement of a PRU in post 16 education would be limited but could provide a degree of support through providing access to on line learning, distance learning and mentoring. This is a view which was expressed by another head in West Norfolk. Given that a school has a central role at the heart of its community and also provides some adult learning, it is a natural development of extended schools that, where appropriate, some on going support post 16 would give continued contact with staff and resources for some vulnerable young people.

4.15   The cost of providing education at the PRU is conservatively estimated at £15000 per year per student. One school referred to its wish to develop in house provision which would reduce almost to zero its permanent exclusions. Schools are committed to increased inclusion through the behaviour partnership. Significant resources would be released to schools if numbers in the PRU are reduced. This requires schools to be able to develop learning provision in a suitable physical location as well as ensuring they have appropriately trained and committed staff in place to work with those young people who present the greatest challenge. Across the country, many schools are developing innovative and effective responses to the challenge of increased inclusion. Given that the likelihood of a young person becoming NEET increases with absence and exclusion from school, there is a strong case for the further development of in school provision not only as part of a wider inclusion strategy but also as part of a strategy to reduce NEET numbers.

4.16   All schools take a great deal of care over transition processes from Year 6 to Year 7 but for some young people, planned and supportive action is needed throughout the process of transition at the end of Year 11. Most young people will have made some application before the examination phase in Year 11 but by September of Year 12, Connexions have a great deal of work to ensure that the requirements of the September Guarantee have been met. This work involves young people who have not achieved their anticipated grades but also those who have applied and failed to take up a place. For some young people this transition is not easy either because of concerns about the new environment, or because of lack of personal motivation and drive to sustain engagement in learning after compulsory education. Borderline students are encouraged to make a reserve application should they be unsuccessful in their first choice. Connexions support young people over the period from May of Year 11 to September of Year 12. For some young people other support could be considered. Connexions staff have limited capacity. Other, more appropriate staff such as teaching assistants, youth workers or school counsellors may have already formed close links with young people and could maintain contact over the transition period. Such an approach is a characteristic of the approach of the Youth Offending Team (YOT). Recognising that the young people it works with, most of whom are not within mainstream education, it delivers a personalised programme of support. A member of the team helps a young person on a one to one basis choose a course. Many feel lost in what they see as a maze of courses. It supports them in writing applications, coaches them in interview techniques, and travels with them to interviews. Where a young person has a statutory order extending over the summer at the end of Year 11, YOT keeps in touch, ensures they have started at the College and checks on attendance. For some young people, Entry to Employment (E2E) is an option. E2E is a flexible programme which is not tied to September starts. Young people can start an E2E programme in the transition summer. The Youth Service is also a valuable source of personnel available over this period. In one school, the youth service is employed to provide group activities in the summer holidays through a one day off-site programme. The school recognizes the value of this and is planning to have a weekly event through the summer for targeted students. There could also be consideration of a larger summer transition activity such as the U Programme which is run in Cambridgeshire. This is a multi agency programme targeted at young people who are potentially NEET. It begins during Year 11 but the centrepiece is a residential period for three days in the summer at the end of Year 11. Youth workers retain contact and use the opportunities provided by the residential programme to ensure young people are still on track to start their Year 12 route. In 2008 175 young people were referred into the programme, 66 took part in the residential element and of these 76, 62 were in employment, education or training at the end of October 2008. Such a programme might well be a useful collaborative activity for OWN and Children's Services to develop.

4.17   Strong support for improved transition processes comes from the College. Most young people who are potentially NEET are not skilled at form filling, understanding bureaucracy or the availability of funding to support them post 16. The College quotes the example of a student who made a chance remark to a tutor that she would have to withdraw from a course because her family could no longer afford transport and equipment costs. The family circumstances were such that the student in question was entitled to several grants and additional financial support and she was retained on her course. Schools are in the best position to know which students are likely to be in this position. Stronger red flag identification of such students would greatly help the College in identifying those in need of support. Equally, early identification of students with poor organizational skills would help in transfer. Such students should be prioritized in terms of ensuring application forms are completed early in the transfer cycle (see section on IAG) and prioritized with an adult, whether it be Connexions or a school employee to ensure the young person has sorted travel arrangements, knows the start times and which days to attend College, and so on. This contact is important not just for ensuring the processes of transfer in place, it is also valuable at a personal level giving support and encouragement for students who are unsure, dilatory or nervous about transition.

4.18   Many interviewees spoke with passion about wishing to reduce NEET numbers, and recognized that to do so would require actions and support in statutory education to ensure that there was an effective transition to Year 12. Such an approach will not provide all the answers, but if the numbers who begin Year 12 as NEET are reduced, then that could free capacity within the Connexions, and other services, to work with those who start a new programme in Year 12 but subsequently struggle.

4.19   Staff were asked their views about why young people become NEET. Views of staff covered:
   •   the local economy, either too many easily accessible but unskilled jobs or just a general lack of employment opportunities.
   •   parents who also lacked ambition so school receives no parental support.
   •   too many young people in the area with a lack of ambition and with poor attitudes to learning.
   •   the transition from GCSE sees a significant jump in the academic rigour of courses linked to a change in learning style which requires greater independence and self-motivation.
   •   students make what they feel is the right choice and for the best of reasons but it turns out subsequently to have been an inappropriate choice.
   •   an institution is chosen because it is close-by and convenient although it may not offer the best provision to meet the needs of some students.

- the west of the county is seen as a poor relation in comparison to the rest of the County.

The majority of responses revolved around lack of ambition, lack of job opportunities, size of transition to A level. Interestingly, no one mentioned the single most significant reason, pregnancy and parenting.

4.20 The responses from schools are interesting in the light of data held by Connexions on the learning qualifications achieved by students who are NEET and available in March 2009.

Table 19 Learning Qualifications of NEET Available March 2009

Qualification	Number	%
Entry Level	10	3
GCSE A-C or Equivalent	68	23
Level 2 NVQ	6	2
No qualifications	76	25
GCSE D-G or equiv	121	40
Level 1 NVQ	5	2
A/AS levels or equivalent	12	4
	298	

The table clearly shows that the variety of NEET by attainment, 25% have no qualifications, 42% have achieved a Level 1 qualification, and 25% a level 2 qualification. No data has been collected on how many have achieved a qualification in mathematics or English. However, 70% of NEET in West Norfolk have not reached Level 2, and it is clearly the failure of this group to progress effectively beyond statutory school that is the greatest contributor to NEET in West Norfolk. That is why there is a need for emphasis on processes to reduce NEET in schools. One priority is the improvement of levels of literacy and numeracy through curriculum flexibility. Nationally many schools are taking the opportunity of increased curriculum flexibility at Key Stage 3 to enhance literacy and numeracy. How this happens is a decision for individual schools to take according to need. However, given the below average ability, literacy

and numeracy skills of the majority of NEET, there is a strong argument that reduction of NEET from secondary schools begins by enhancing literacy and numeracy skills from Year 7, and for secondary schools to work with primary colleagues to improve further numeracy and literacy before Year 7.

4.21   Several interviewees raised lack of ambition and lack of parental support as a reason for NEET. It is exactly for these reasons that any strategy for the reduction of NEET cannot be achieved simply by actions between ages 16 and 19. This is increasingly being recognized nationally and is described in great depth in Tunnard *et al's* book (2008) "One in Ten". In one West Norfolk school, there is a Sixth Form induction evening for parents and the College has a parents guide to post 16 as part of its prospectus. The need to win over parents and to raise ambition of young people cannot be achieved alone by the secondary and post 16 sector. Involvement of Children's Services with its resources, especially parental support advisers, and work with colleagues in primary level on raising young people's ambitions are as integral a part of NEET reduction as are the tactical actions for 16 and 17 olds (Blunt, 2008, Gartshore, 2008, Tunnard *et al.,* 2008).

4.22   Throughout this section, there has been a recurring theme of the importance of the partnership between Connexions and schools, especially in relation to the sharing of data. Schools were very keen to know what had happened to ex-students and equally willing to amend IAG in the light of feedback on individuals. Connexions currently ask students if they are willing for information to be shared with other agencies by ticking a box. Many young people fail to tick this box so Connexions are faced with the difficulty of further follow up work if they want to share. If the default position is changed to one which assumes the data can be shared with the statutory school unless the young person declines, then Connexions Norfolk can move to a position where, in the overwhelming majority of cases, the names of young people who have become NEET can be discussed.

4.23   Providers also have a responsibility to ensure they do all they can to support Connexions in maintaining an accurate database. Post 16, in many centres there was no embedded awareness of the need to inform Connexions immediately a young person leaves the centre, although one centre repots monthly. Connexions needs to know immediately a young person disengages. Persistence and doggedness are key themes in the management of NEET and all centres should inform Connexions immediately so action can be taken. This should not be an onerous process but is of great importance to Connexions. Evidence collected during the research confirms that even in the largest centre, COWA, the total number leaving the centre in any one year did not exceed 50.

5   Information, Advice and Guidance Processes (IAG)

Summary

- *Early identification will not catch all potential NEET emphasizing the need for high quality IAG for all students.*
- *In some schools, IAG is concentrated in a small and carefully managed core team. This appears to be effective in reducing NEET.*
- *There are concerns over the effectiveness of form tutors in the IAG process.*
- *Connexions PAs are strongly supported and seen to be effective.*
- *Those few concerns over Connexions relate to workload of Conexions PAs and communication with the school.*
- *In only a very small number of schools is there a process to quality assure applications, especially through matching aspiration to predicted grades. This is reflected in a heavy workload at the College in addressing this issue.*
- *There is little evidence of a strategy in schools to target potential NEET with activities which will ensure applications meet all deadlines.*

5.1   Several of the schools in West Norfolk are very clear about the need to try to identify young people who are potentially NEET at an early stage and to give enhanced support. However, some colleagues also mentioned that they felt that there was also a group of young people who did not appear to be in need of intensive support but were passively disengaging from education. They did not present issues relating to behaviour or attendance, but were not actively looking ahead. These colleagues raised the need to look at names of those who were NEET so that they could look back at the support they had received in school. One colleague who had seen the names unofficially commented that half the names had been worked with intensively at school but the other half had not. If we accept that there will be a proportion of young people who become NEET but who were not identified as requiring intensive support in school, then the importance of robust IAG processes for all students becomes paramount.

5.2   The DCSF Strategy emphasises the need for an excellent universal offer of support for all young people (DCSF, 2008a: 6). This "universal offer" is access to high quality, comprehensive and impartial information, advice and guidance to help young people make informed choices about their future. Tunnard *et al*. (2008: 25) claim that nationally, inadequate knowledge about available options beyond school leaving age is one reason for some young people becoming NEET. Given also the increasing options with the development of Diplomas, the need for the highest quality IAG has never been greater. It is therefore seen as an important strand of this research to look at the

nature of the general IAG provision in Norfolk schools and to hear students' responses to this provision as part of a full strategy to reduce NEET.

5.3   There is a wide variation in the organization of IAG in West Norfolk. Schools were asked how students first of all receive information about the possible routes they could follow in Year 12 and which providers were available. Responses included use of assemblies, PSHE teaching, form tutors, lessons taught by a careers teacher, information evenings for students and parents, extracurricular activities, collapsed timetable days, Connexions interviews, careers convention at Lynnsport, IMPACT Theatre, RealGame and the interactive software package KUDOS. These were discussed at length with careers coordinators.

5.4   Several coordinators raised concerns about the role of tutors. A common concern raised was that of tutor commitment to involvement in IAG resulting in a highly variable experience for young people related to tutor commitment. One careers coordinator was deeply concerned about a lack of wider knowledge from tutors who had become teachers by following one particular pathway. Most had followed an A level route and had limited knowledge of NVQ/BTEC/Apprenticeships. "They can talk the language of A Level but never talk in terms of Levels 1, 2 and 3". In some schools, structured guidance was given to tutors, in another packs were prepared for tutors but they were given autonomy to use them as they wished. One coordinator raised concerns about quality assurance in a system of vertical tutoring where Years 10 and 11 would be shared between a far greater number of tutors. Nowhere was there any comment volunteered about how the work of tutors in their delivery of IAG was monitored and evaluated.

5.5   Similarly, concerns were raised especially by students about the teaching of elements of careers in PSHE/Citizenship courses. In some schools, coordinators felt comfortable where there was a small core team of committed PSHE teachers. However, there were concerns raised where teachers were asked to teach PSHE in order to complete their teaching load. Implicit in these concerns were questions about commitment. This had been recognized in one school where there was a senior management decision to reduce the PSHE team to a small core. In one school, however, a qualified careers teacher sees all Years 10 and 11 as part of a PSHE programme where staff specialise in key areas. In this school, work experience is seen as an integral part of careers education and is used as a trial run for the real applications in Year 11. All students take part in a two lesson debrief on the lessons from Work Experience. Whilst other schools use work experience in a similar way, this school saw work experience as an integral element of IAG and developed lessons around it.

5.6   Some schools recognized the need to begin talking explicitly about the post 16 world in Years 7 to 9. In one school, RealGame was used for a full day in each of the three years. Other schools commented that elements of IAG were now beginning to appear as part of Citizenship programmes in Years 7 to 9.

5.7   Schools recognized the importance of developing elements of IAG as part of an extra curricular programme. In some cases, these programmes were targeted at individuals, elsewhere they were more general. All schools would hold an evening in Year 11 for parents and students involving FE, Connexions and employers. In one school, all of Year 10 have an "interview day". On this day, they look at applications, cvs, personal statements, but then all students have an individual interview with one of a group of local employers who have been brought in for the day. In Year 11, the school has also developed series of lunchtime sessions where an employer representing a particular area comes to schools and students attend on a voluntary basis. However, interest was waning by the time of the eighth employer!

5.8   An important strand of IAG in West Norfolk is the careers convention held at Lynnsport. All schools send students to the event and student responses are described later. However, one interviewee did raise the concern that it needed to be broadened out with more representation from companies and organizations which had a national perspective. In one school, there was an unusual teaching link involving the Lynnsport convention. Preparation for the convention and subsequent follow up of activities are integrated into the core ICT lessons.

5.9   Across all schools, there was generally strong support and praise for the work of Connexions. Where there were any negative feelings, they tend to relate to the effectiveness of an individual PA rather than to the service as a whole. The variety of response from schools to how they engage with Connexions is interesting:

- We identify early those who are at risk of being NEET. They are fast tracked to Connexions. We also link referrals to our monitoring processes. If a student is unsure of his/her future route the school refers to Connexions.
- Pupils are told through their tutor about the Connexions service and the tutor asks them if they want an interview. Our pupils are not slow to ask for help if they need it.
- All our pupils get a 1:1 interview with Connexions. If we receive an application that is unrealistic we immediately involve Connexions.
- All students at Action or Action Plus receive an interview. Some students self refer, others are directed. We put together groups with a specific vocational interest for group interviews with Connexions. Connexions interviews are confidential so I have no idea what the outcome of an interview is.

- Some students self refer, some are directed.

- We ask all students to complete the proforma at the beginning of Year 11. The careers coordinator will then look at all forms and identify those who need to be fast tracked. Most of our students will have an interview with Connexions either on a 1:1 basis or as part of a group.

- We work very closely with Connexions. They see all our students in Year 9 in pairs to discuss futures. Connexions also attend all parents evenings and options evenings so they are known to parents.

- Referrals to Connexions can be made by staff students and also by parents. We inform parents at a meeting that they can also refer to Connexions. We worry that we do not have sufficient capacity to meet the needs of middle ability students.

- We identify those who need with personal needs for Connexions interviews at the end of Year 10. We then use the Year 11 questionnaire to prioritise those whose aspirations are unrealistic, those who are unsure, and those who are on the borderline between Sixth Form and College and will therefore have to submit two applications. We use target grades to match aspiration and potential and we share them between our own IAG adviser and the Connexions PA.

The comments do not necessarily reflect all aspects of the work of Connexions in schools. They were the immediate responses of interviewees so represented those aspects of work with Connexions which featured most strongly in the partnership. Some schools are more proactive than others in seeking the engagement of Connexions at an early stage. Secondly, some schools appear to have very rigorous internal monitoring processes allowing them to prioritise those students with the greatest need of Connexions expertise. The result is that Connexions engagement is seen to be an integral part of a wider partnership incorporating resources provided by the school. Thirdly, the value of Connexions having a higher profile with parents is important to at least two schools. Almost all schools felt their students would benefit if there were more time for Connexions' PAs.

5.10 The negative comments involving Connexions were few and related to communications between the school and Connexions. In one case, the school felt that the Connexions PA was suggesting courses which required a Level 1 entry qualification where the school was working closely with the students, to ensure he achieved a Level 2 at the end of Year 11. In another school, the school was willing to consider a student for the Sixth Form as the predicted grades represented the impact of personal circumstances. At a subsequent Connexions interview, the student was told his grades were too low for the Sixth Form and he needed to consider an alternative route. These instances of communication breakdown were rare but do highlight the need for good

communications between Connexions and school. There is, however, the wider issue of how Connexions can communicate with the school over the outcomes of a confidential interview. In one other instance a head of sixth form felt strongly that Connexions should identify those not brave enough to consider elsewhere. This is an interesting comment, in the light of information presented later, that very few students interviewed who had progressed to sixth form had in fact had a Connexions interview. This contrasts with another school where, if there was a concern that a student was "borderline" for that sixth form, they were actively encouraged by the school to have a reserve application for a second course.

5.11   Schools were also asked about the way in which they managed student applications for their post 16 pathway. Whilst the careers coordinator "has an oversight" in all the schools, this process of overseeing varied. It was not possible to interview the careers coordinator in all schools so the detail of the process obtained by research did vary from school to school. In one school, the management of applications was a very rigorous process. It began with preparation in lessons taught by a specialist careers teacher. Support was given to groups and individuals on the completion of the application form, with targeting of individuals who were most likely to struggle on the completion of the form, or likely to miss the December/January deadline for completion. All students then produced a draft application which was discussed with the students and a best application completed. The careers coordinator quality controlled the applications, not only for presentation but also to ensure the application was appropriate for the ability and target grades for the student. The school kept a copy of all applications as a means of ensuring all students had applied, and for tracking post application action. A similar process was outlined in one other school. In another school, the preparation of a curriculum vitae and personal statement was part of the English scheme of work. In two other schools collapsed timetable days were used to focus on the application process. However, the process of the management of applications does not appear as rigorous across all schools in terms of a reading of the applications for quality assurance, rigorous follow up with students on the progress of their application once submitted, and retention of a copy of the application. This was confirmed by students who were also asked about the application process. Colleagues in COWA have to get back to a very large number of applicants to clarify and complete sections on the form. The College also has to contact a large number of students over unrealistic applications where course's thresholds exceed the target grades of the student. This inevitably leads to disappointment and disillusion and will impact most on those whose commitment to post 16 learning is most fragile.

5.12   The application process in the area involves separate applications to different providers. Whilst some schools were encouraging use of the on-line process, it was seen as flawed

and the system was clearly not robust with comment made about it crashing. The involvement of COWA staff working with students at Key Stage 4 in preparation of applications was certainly helpful and appreciated by students. Whilst the number of on line applications to the College has increased this year, students frequently gave as their reason for not applying on line that they wanted to make sure that the application was sent "properly", hence the preference for hard copy! With the move to increasing applications electronically (staff at COWA have to upload 4000 plus applications a year from hard copy), there is a danger of losing the ability for a school to quality control an application before it is sent. Potential NEET are the most likely to produce weak or unrealistic applications. It is essential that on line applications can be accessed by schools and reviewed for quality and appropriateness.

5.13 A further aspect of the application process which has an impact on NEET is meeting deadlines. Potential NEET are usually slow to start an application and often miss deadlines. At COWA, some courses such as plumbing and motor vehicle maintenance are oversubscribed. The earlier applicants are more likely to obtain the places. Whilst it is natural to give credit to those students who do apply by deadline and make it on to a course of limited availability, such an approach is not likely to help the reduction of NEET. Schools do work hard to encourage students to meet deadlines. However, if an approach, such as that used on the PLO course for Year 11 in COWA where on a particular day all students on this course complete an application, were adopted more widely then those who are not good at completing forms will not be as disadvantaged.

6   Post 16 Learning

Summary

- *Most centres have qualification entry thresholds. These vary between centres and are applied flexibly.*

- *There is a wide variety of approaches to induction activities, usually reflecting local circumstances.*

- *Centres vary in the degree to which they establish expectations in the first term and how they monitor all students in this period.*

- *All centres stated that for a number of students, the transition between GCSE and Level 3 was very demanding, both academically and in expectations it placed on personal organization. A number of centres are seeking to deal with this in a very structured way.*

- *The role of Connexions post 16 is limited. Involvement usually involves a referral of those students who are struggling.*

- *There is considerable variation in the retention rate in different centres.*

- *Frequently Connexions report that they are not made aware when a young person has left a course.*

- *A total of 139 young people were identified as leaving full time learning before completion of course in 2007-2008 and 2008-2009, 92 from A level courses and 47 from other courses. Of these, only 8 became NEET.*

- *The fact that so few NEET emerge from uncompleted courses of study emphasizes the importance of ensuring as many young people as possible transfer into full time education and training at age 16.*

6.1   The heads of all sixth forms in the area were interviewed:
- to develop an understanding of the nature and ethos of each sixth form and the curriculum offer.
- to look at the processes of transfer and induction.
- to look at how IAG post 16 was structured.
- to discuss retention and reasons why students left the Sixth.

In addition, there were meetings in the College with the manager responsible for A level provision at the College, the foundation learning manager, the head of 14-19 partnerships and the student support manager. The purpose of this approach was to look for any reasons within provision which might lead to disengagement and young people becoming NEET.

6.2   For most centres the Head of Sixth is heavily involved in the majority of interviews, supported variously by assistant heads of sixth and/or senior tutors. An interesting variation on this process came from one centre where all applicants are asked to

complete an "aspirations" questionnaire. This deliberately looks beyond the immediate for long term ambitions. Two examples where it had been effective was with one young person with an ambition to study veterinary sciences but was predicted C/B grades for science; another example was an aspiring primary teacher with a predicted C grade for English.

6.3   Centres were asked about their entry thresholds for Level 3 courses. In most, 5 A-C grades were required, in two, there was a requirement for either two or three B grades, in one there was a requirement for a GCSE B in an A level subject studied at GCSE. In most centres there were specific grades for certain subjects, in all but one, a B at GCSE was required for A level maths. Four centres required a B in science at GCSE. One centre has now taken the view that although a distinction on a BTEC course equates to 4 As, they will only count it as one grade A. Another centre differentiates between level 3 programmes. A programme that has primarily vocational A levels has 5 A-Cs as its threshold. If the programme is 75% AS level, then threshold is 2Bs/3Cs. Only one school explicitly stated it expected at least a C in English whilst another stated "some subjects require C in both maths and English". In all cases, centres agreed there is flexibility around these thresholds. One Head of Sixth felt that historically, the centre had been too flexible. In another, the threshold had recently been changed for science with the requirement that all AS level applicants for science must have studied science to a higher level at GCSE.

6.4   There is a wide range of approaches to induction and support over the first term. Several centres host events in July with taster lessons and a barbecue with outgoing Year 12. In one centre, AS level teaching actually starts in the summer term. One centre explicitly mentions the very great care it takes in building its tutor groups. In another centre, the first week, attendance is restricted to new students. A whole week is then used for students to learn the geography of the centre, work with their group tutor and new members of their group and experience sample lessons. The time is also used to check all GCSE certificates and ensure the student is on the appropriate course. In another, there is a very structured transition process. It begins with two days being set aside in September for intensive interviews in the light of GCSE results and student aspiration to confirm that the student is on the appropriate course. The first half term is a probationary period for all students in Year 12. Progress is monitored closely and attendance at tutorial sessions every day is compulsory. This process is supported by an induction evening for parents. The head of sixth is convinced that this process is instrumental in the centre's high retention rate. In another centre where progress is rigorously scrutinized, students who are not meeting the expectations in terms of attendance and work ethic are placed on a programme where they are required to report to a study area in non contact time and their progress is checked weekly. In

several other schools the onus is placed on subject teachers to report to the head of sixth any concerns about students, or students are put on probation only if a subject department requests it. There was no evidence in these centres that there are agreed thresholds which trigger such actions. With its varied programmes, the College is in a very strong position to make alternative provision, such as switching a student from a level 3 course in a particular area to level 2, or facilitate a student moving to an entirely different course within the first few weeks of the autumn term, although this flexibility decreases as the term progresses.

6.5   When asked about why students leave Level 3 courses without completing, the strong view was that it was related to student difficulty in making the transition from GCSE to AS level, both in terms of the greater academic rigour but also the greater independence of learning. There was no doubt that heads of sixth did spend a great deal of time supporting young people who were struggling. There was also a willingness on the part of centres to be flexible on their entry policy. In the case of students for whom English is a second language and they are relatively new to the country, there is a good case for flexibility. However, there is the question to be asked whether flexibility works in the longer term interests of other young people, especially in the case of the implications for students on some A level courses who have failed to achieve a C in GCSE English. Centres should look at the retention and success rates of students who have failed to achieve a grade C in English at GCSE. This was recognized by one school where the psychology department insisted on at least a C in English.

6.6   Schools were asked about the structure of IAG post 16. Not surprisingly, there is a very strong emphasis on UCAS and application to higher education. Around this core offer, there were several examples of good practice. These include
   • a student support centre available to all students from 11-18. Qualified staff can arrange referral to a variety of support services.
   • in another school the school's learning support actively supports young people who are struggling in the sixth.
   • a designated member of staff picking up and supporting any students who receives a university rejection. This school also continues to support students during a gap year.
   • timetabled IAG lessons, held fortnightly. These timetabled lessons cover study skills, university applications, non HE routes post sixth form, budgeting, how to care for clothes and so on.

6.7   One post 16 provider developed a structure of very personalized support for students following an A level course. There is a timetabled weekly meeting with the group tutor with whom the student had spent a week on induction. The centre has developed a

programme to be followed by tutors. The programme is currently being developed further as part of a broader initiative on learning how to learn. In addition, the provider employs full time non-teaching personal tutors. The case load of the personal tutors gradually increases as the year progresses. By not having a teaching responsibility, the tutors are available at very short notice to see a student and have a significant amount of time to work individually with students.

6.8   Most centres commented on the difficulties faced by some students in managing the transition from GCSE to the work loads and personal demands of A level courses. In one centre, a very targeted programme is being developed to address this. A proportion of the sixth form budget is withheld so that from the middle of the autumn term, the centre is able to lay-on additional workshops in several subjects. These workshops are taught by the staff teaching that subject and focus strongly on any aspects of the course which students are finding difficult, such as statistical analysis or essay writing. It is also used for additional in-subject support for individuals who are struggling. It is part of a wider centre initiative which is focusing on learning styles and which embraces teaching staff and tutors. As with most other providers, this centre has regular reviews of student progress but insists targets are very specific. Thus, for example, a target such as "Read more widely" is unacceptable. There must be specific instructions as to what to read and when, and that these instructions must permeate all work set so that the student is quite clear about the expectation and how it can be achieved. This centre also uses the personal tutors referred to above. With five hours per subject plus a group tutorial once a week plus additional core skills, the students in this centre have a very full programme, but this is reflected positively in value added results and retention. The students spoke very highly indeed of this personalized system. In the same centre, students on a Level 1 course have a proportion of their time spent with staff who support them in their core course with work on literacy and numeracy. Support is also provided from the same key skills workers in ensuring coursework assignments are completed.

6.9   The role of Connexions in school sixth forms is limited. In most cases, schools will involve Connexions when a young person is struggling. For the most part, support for sixth formers comes from within the school. All schools acknowledged the limited time available to Connexions' PAs but there were also comments about the degree of expertise that Connexions' advisers have in guiding students into higher education. One school referred to negative feedback from students about Connexions in the sixth. Some schools admitted they did not inform Connexions if a student left and this was confirmed by Connexions. The analysis of leavers, below, illustrates the number of young people that Connexions were not aware had left. Clearly a protocol must be established to inform Connexions when a student leaves. Only two schools conduct

formal exit interviews with students who are leaving. The conclusion is that the number of young people who are NEET is quite possibly higher than the published data.

6.10 Heads of sixth form provided data on the students who had left sixth forms at the end of Year 12 in 2008. From a total of 7 centres who made returns, 60 young people left A level courses at the end of Year 12, 35 male, 25 female. Centres were asked to give the reason why the students had left. Where reasons were given, they are shown below.

Table 20 Reasons for Leaving A Level courses at end of June 2008

Reason	Number	Reason	Number
Moved to course at FE	14	Army career	1
Moved to another provider	8	Left Area	1
Poor work ethic	3	Apprenticeship	2
Failed AS level	5	Home education	1
Poor attendance	3	Employment	4
Retake	2	Not known	9

These names were passed to Connexions for information about current status. Connexions were able to identify most students who left A level courses at the end of Year 12. Of these, only one had become NEET. The majority had moved in to FE but in approximately 20% of cases Connexions had not been made aware.

Table 21 Current Status of Year 12 Leavers summer 2008

Current Status	Number	Current Status	Number
Not aware of leaving	11	Private Education	1
Employment	6	NEET	1
Retaking Y12	2	Other provider	3
FE	12	Not matched	6
Non Norfolk Student	1		

Centres were asked to provide details of the AS level courses which students had been following. A total of 34 subjects were covered and the table below shows only those subjects with five or more students.

Table 22 AS subjects studied by students who left at end of Year 12

Subject	Number	Subject	Number
Mathematics	21	English	12
Biology	19	PE/Sports	10
Chemistry	13	Physics	11
Psychology	15	Art	8
Business Studies	12	ICT	6

The predominance of mathematics and science is clear. Most schools had realised this, especially in the case of mathematics, and had raised the threshold grade for entry to the course to a B. Psychology is generally popular and has the value of being a new subject. However, its predominance on this table might justify centres looking at the threshold for starting an AS course in psychology. One school now insists on a C in English for progression to AS level psychology. School sixth forms have a much smaller number of students following Level 2 courses. From the eight names provided who left before completing their course, three had moved into employment and two into FE, one was not identifiable on the Connexions system and Connexions did not know that the other two had left the sixth form.

6.11 Information was also provided on young people who had left Year 12 during the current (2008-2009) academic year. A total of 32 students leaving A level courses were identified from 7 centres, 14 male and 18 female. Three had left because they were not coping with the workload, four moved to other centres but six had left and the centre did not have a reason. Connexions were again asked to check on the current status of these leavers. Connexions were not aware that 14 had left. Of the rest who variously had moved to other providers or into employment, only one was identified as NEET. Of the subjects studied by those who left Level 3 courses, those with five or more mentions were Business (6), English (5), ICT (10), Mathematics (6), Media (9), Physics (6) and Psychology (6). Only eight students were reported as having left Level 2 courses in schools during the current Year 12, one appears as NEET although three had not been reported to Connexions.

6.12 For all other courses covered within OWN, there was a total of 39 withdrawals during 2007-2008 and 27 withdrawals within the current academic year. In neither year has there been any single course from which five or more students have withdrawn. For both years, Connexions were asked for the current status.

Table 23 Withdrawals from non A level programmes 2007-2008 and 2008-2009

2007-2008

Current Status	Number	Current Status	Number
Degree	1	Not on database	5
Other Provider	6	Part time learning	1
Employment	9	Own business	1
NEET	5	Not contactable	1
New Deal	1	Not aware had left	8

2008-2009

Current Status	Number	Current Status	Number
E2E	1	Not on database	2
NEET	5	Not aware had left	15
Other provider	4		

6.13   In the context of this research, it is quite clear that young people who are starting courses and not withdrawing are not a major source of NEET. However, the data is not accurate as Connexions are not aware of all withdrawal from courses. A total of ten NEET were identified, 5 who had dropped from A level courses and 5 from other courses. The fact that so few NEET emerge from full time educational provision further highlights the importance of ensuring young people are 'locked into' education and training post 16.

6.14   In a survey of NEET in Cambridgeshire (LSC Cambridgeshire, 2008) providers asserted that there is insufficient emphasis placed on attendance, punctuality, course completion and qualifications in families which are single parent, those with a history of long term unemployment, and those where the primary home language is not English. Providers also commented that some parents/carers regularly give approval for young people to miss sessions, arrive late and/or leave early. Sometimes, there is a family culture which encourages absence even at post 11, let alone post 16. The reasons quoted above for leaving confirm this work.

7 Student views

Summary

Year 11

- *Students who are potentially NEET know the progression routes in general but are not confident about detail.*
- *Sources of information about post 16 routes were varied but students:*
  - *wanted more visits to providers.*
  - *were positive about the convention at Lynnsport.*
  - *welcomed well structured activities in school integrated into the curriculum.*
- *Students were negative about the role of form tutors.*
- *There was strong support for Connexions Pas.*
- *Students are wary of on line application.*
- *Support and guidance needs to be more personalized, and target Sixth Form.*
- *Students naturally gravitated to their own school where it had a Sixth Form with appropriate provision.*
- *The proportion of students studying A level who had had a Connexions interview in Year 11 was very low.*
- *With one exception, no sixth former had had their application reviewed other than at the stage of interview.*
- *In most centres the Head of Sixth was seen as the main source of support and guidance.*
- *Students are positive about learning which:*
  - *has a variety of learning styles.*
  - *where support is given in how to create notes.*
  - *where lesson plans are available on a learning platform.*
- *Students are negative about learning which:*
  - *relies excessively on note taking.*
  - *relies heavily on Powerpoint presentations.*
  - *fails to give specific guidance on tasks.*

7a Year 11 Students

7.1 Schools were asked to put together a group of Year 11 students for whom the transition was proving to be difficult and who were at risk of becoming NEET. In total, over 60 students in Year 11 were interviewed. In addition, one school provided a group of Year 10 students and a second school provided a group of high ability students. The

responses were those that came first to students and reflect those aspects of the IAG process which they most remember.

7.2   Students were firstly asked about what they saw as the options available to them in Year 12. Almost without exception students were aware of sixth form provision, vocational courses at COWA and apprenticeships. When asked about more course levels or more specific vocational courses, students were less sure.

7.3   When asked about the sources of information, responses were varied. Presentations in school assemblies were mentioned on three occasions; most groups valued the input from Connexions; the internet was referred to by four groups; two groups remembered the impact of DVDs produced by a school and COWA. Almost all prospective sixth formers had visited the Sixth Form Open Evening and many had visited either COWA or City College. Peers, siblings and parents were also mentioned. Several threads were fairly consistent. The first was the value of visits and the opportunity to talk to staff who could talk with experience about a course. Whilst most remembered booklets being given out, few students referred to booklets about institutions as a major source of information. Secondly, almost all students were positive about the careers convention at Lynnsport. On two occasions, students commented about it opening their eyes to possibilities they had not considered. Thirdly, with the exception of one school, students were almost unanimous in their negative feelings about the contribution of tutors and PSHE to the process. Where very targeted actions had been undertaken, e.g writing CVs in English, looking at on-line resources connected with Lynnsport through ICT lessons, these were remembered and commented on positively. In two schools, students remembered positively the work of the Impact Theatre. Finally, in all but one school, students were clear in their own mind about the careers coordinator as being a source of information and someone they could turn to should they be unsure or need support.

7.4   The role of Connexions was strongly supported. Almost without exception, Connexions interviews were seen as useful, either on a 1:1 basis or through group work. Negative comments saying that Connexions did not tell a student what career should be chosen were discounted! There was, however, a very worrying aspect of student perception of Connexions. It was a widespread view that Connexions exist to provide advice for the transfer to a post 16 route. Very few students were aware of Connexions being there to provide support post 16. This would of course be remedied post 16 when students would be aware of the continuing role of Connexions in their new learning centre, but such a perception in Year 11 must be a cause for concern. In several schools, students responded negatively to a question asking if they were aware of a Connexions office in Kings Lynn.

7.5   Students discussed the processes of application. There were mixed responses to questions about the on line applications. Clearly there were issues about the stability of the online system. However, students preferred to complete applications by hand and then send them off themselves. When asked about final checking of the application, responses were mixed. Where the school insisted on all applications coming through the school before being sent off, this was remembered. Tutors at the College were praised by students from several schools about the help they gave to Key Stage 4 students in the completion of the College application forms. Other responses include parents, friends and siblings as people who read the final application. Students rarely spoke positively about the role of form tutors. "Tutors do nothing". "Tutors are a waste of time". "Nothing happens in tutor time". This is disconcerting as in some schools, the application strategy places considerable emphasis on the role of the tutor as the first line of support in helping students with applications.

7.6   Students were asked what could be done to improve IAG for them in Years 10 and 11. The most common response was a request for visits during a school day to post 16 institutions and the chance to experience at first hand what the course entailed, with the opportunity for real "hands on" activities. In three schools, students commented about the limited value of Open Evenings in what they could convey about the reality of studying and learning in an establishment. However, on a few occasions, the value of the Open Evening as a means of gauging the friendliness and openness of staff was recognized. There was a request for better teaching of IAG in schools as well as more support for help in completing applications and writing CVs. (This latter request did not come from students in those schools where there is a structured approach to applications).

7.7   The experience in the school which provided two groups of students was illuminating. The group of able, motivated and self confident students was able to speak in detail about the work of the school in preparing them for transition, referring to assemblies, employer visits, college and Sixth Form visits, and so on, in total contrast to the negative views expressed by the other group of students. This underlines the need for schools to recognise that in dealing with potential NEET, it is not sufficient to hope that the usual school processes are sufficient. They may work for able and motivated students but there is a need for differentiation and personalization. It was also in this school that there was the only reference to Year 11 students having a mentor. They recognized and valued highly the work of a personal mentor.

7.8   Recent work in Cambridgeshire confirmed the Norfolk student views that Connexions' advisers are friendly and supportive. There were some negative comments in Cambridgeshire about Connexions relating to difficulties in relationships, changes of

personnel at short notice, insufficient time for in depth discussion and the view that work with easier to place young people is prioritized. The messages support the views of NEET research elsewhere that young people who are potentially NEET need to be identified early, and establish stable relations with an adult who will provide support and guidance beyond that which is needed for the majority of young people.

7b   Sixth Form Students

7.9   In all schools with sixth forms, a group of students was interviewed. In total, over 40 students were interviewed. Schools were asked to put together a group of students who were finding the sixth form challenging. They were asked

- why they had chosen that particular institution for their post 16 learning.
- what role the IAG in Years 10 and 11 had played in their decision making and what other influences there had been on their decision making.
- whether the sixth form and its provision matched the messages from IAG during statutory education.

7.10   The range of reasons quoted as having influenced choice were

- closeness to home.
- staff having prior knowledge of the students.
- nature of course provision.
- academic reputation.
- provision for student with learning difficulties.
- older sibling.

The first of the reasons was the strongest. Assuming that the courses were available, then students saw no need to travel elsewhere for sixth form based learning. The second strongest reason was that staff knew the student from Key Stage 4. In several cases, a sixth form was chosen because of a very specific course. In four cases, it was a course linked to the school's specialism. In another instance, it was a course rarely offered in school sixth forms. The student found out late in the year that the course would not run owing to lack of demand. By then, the student was emotionally committed to that sixth form and chose another course in that centre.

7.11   Only a small number of students were seen who had come from a different statutory school. For them, the reputation of the Sixth form was the strongest reason for choice but closely followed by the impact that had been made on the Open Evening.

7.12   Sixth formers were asked about the contribution IAG had made to their final decision about the post 16 progression. There was a sense from many students that where there

was a sixth form, if suitably qualified, that would be their natural route. Several suggested that this was "assumed" by their statutory school but in only one occasion did students feel that this "assumption" was underscored by a very strong marketing drive pushing the sixth form. The students in this school were critical of several assemblies where subject heads "blagged" their subject. In one case, students said planned visits to post 16 provision elsewhere had been cancelled owing to a lack of interest and no alternative provision had been made for those who did want to visit. In another school, students commented on the lack of information about provision elsewhere. Interestingly, one Head of Sixth Form reported that although the school had set up a Sixth Form taster day, other schools, including 11-16 schools, did not send students. One can understand a school's reluctance to release students from school during Year 11 as well as the possibility of a taster day clashing with a school event, such as mock examinations or a collapsed timetable day devoted to post 16 applications. However, given the views of students that they would prefer events of this type, there is an issue here to be worked on. In comparison with the Year 11 students, far fewer of the sixth form students had had a Connexions interview. In two schools, none of those interviewed had had a Connexions interview. Only in one school, where four students were interviewed, had all students attended an interview with Connexions. Where students had been interviewed, they were positive about the help from Connexions although in a small minority of cases, there was a feeling that Connexions tended to know more about vocational provision. A further striking contrast with the Year 11 students was that hardly any of the sixth form students interviewed attended the careers convention at Lynnsport. In one school, students were very positive about their Year 11 tutors who had read the post 16 application. In this same school, students described the whole of their IAG in Year 11 as "brilliant". All students from 11-16 schools had attended sixth form open evenings but a surprisingly high number of students had not attended the open evening in their own school. With the one exception of the school with very committed tutors, students commented that there was no discussion about their application until they were interviewed by the Head of Sixth Form.

7.13   Students were asked whether the reality of learning in their chosen establishment matched the information they received in Year 11. In general, students interviewed felt that the sixth form experience matched what they had been told in Year 11. Most commented on the different atmosphere in the sixth form from main school, especially staff who were generally more approachable. Students in all schools commented on the jump from GCSE to sixth form, especially AS courses. All commented on the greatly increased workload and the greater responsibility they had to take for their own learning. In one school, students greatly valued the system whereby they are involved in giving feedback to the head of sixth on work set for them and also how they were

taught. There was general support for sixth form facilities for private study and ICT access.

7.14   Students commented on the teaching styles they experienced in the Sixth. Aspects which were seen very positively were

- the teachers who vary their style so that lessons may include group work/discussion/presentations by students/planning of essays.
- in one centre students commented very favourably on the department where lesson plans are available for students on the learning platform.
- help in note taking, especially where staff provided a framework on to which they could place notes.

7.15   Students were very negative about

- lessons which relied repeatedly on note taking, either copying from textbooks or summarizing what a teacher was saying,
- "death by Powerpoint" especially where they were expected to take notes from the teacher whilst trying to read the Powerpoint display.
- failure to use new technologies. In one school where interactive whiteboards had been installed in most teaching rooms, not one of a group of 10 students had had a lesson using the interactive technology.
- homework instructions requiring students to "read up" on a topic but without guidance as to what to read and in what detail.

7.16   Students in one school spoke at length about the need to personalize support in the sixth. Whereas many students seemed to be coping with the transition, there was a feeling that the support in the lessons was not differentiated. There was huge support and recognition from students in the centre which had developed a system of non-teaching personal tutors and additional core skills/support sessions. Personal support was generally praised. In all schools, there was a strong and positive rapport between the head of sixth and students, who was also seen in most cases as the first point of call if a student was struggling or needed support. In most centres, students commented that most IAG was directed at higher education and there was an assumption that this would be a natural next step. However, in one of the centres, only 2 of the 5 students interviewed were sure about moving on to university. One head of sixth sensed a change in sixth form aspirations and that the usual assumption of progression to university needed to be revisited.

7.17   In 2008 there was a survey of young people who were NEET in Cambridgeshire (LSC Cambridgeshire, 2008). Where engagement was high, students associated this with

- staff who promoted aspirational but realistic targets.
- group and peer mentoring.
- regular contact with parent/carers to support learning.

The negative factors which were encouraging disengagement from learning include

- attendance not being carefully monitored.
- carer responsibilities.
- fatigue linked to part time employment, carer responsibilities and long journeys.
- failure to attend controlled coursework sessions.

There is very close harmony between these comments and those made by Norfolk students.

8 Teenage Pregnancy

Summary

- *Teenage pregnancy is the single most important cause of NEET.*
- *The majority of pregnancies are unplanned but there is variation linked to socio-economic reasons in the levels of termination.*
- *There is limited engagement of schools in the Western Area with the county SRE Partnership.*
- *There are programmes and strategies which can be developed but their effectiveness depends on collaborative working between schools and other Children's Trust partners.*

8.1 Evidence has been presented earlier showing that pregnancy and teenage parenthood is the single most significant reason for young people being NEET. In April 2008, of the 329 young people who are NEET in West Norfolk, 64 (19.5%) are NEET as a result of pregnancy/parenthood. When schools were asked why they think young people are NEET, no school advanced this as the reason.

8.2 One of the issues over pregnancy is to what extent is pregnancy a lifestyle choice and to what extent is it accidental. Data from the Office of National Statistics shows a termination rate for teenage pregnancy in Norfolk of 44%. This rate rises to 60% in the more affluent areas of the county but falls to 30-35% in deprived areas. There has been no robust research into teenage pregnancy in the county but there is national evidence that alcohol is a significant factor. The evidence seems to suggest that the overwhelming majority of pregnancies are unplanned and accidental. However, given the data by area above on termination rates, there is a lifestyle choice over the decision whether or not to terminate.

8.3 The County has developed a clearly defined SRE partnership model. This model
- describes the elements of effective SRE practice.
- offers training and resources to improve the quality of the delivery of SRE.
- identifies which agencies have capacity to support those elements.
- facilitates and coordinates support for schools.
- provides a quality assurance role to ensure that activity is evidence-based, appropriate, effective, and is in line with current LA guidance.

However, the Partnership is concerned about the level of engagement with, and take up of, the Partnership's services. Full details of the support the partnership can provide appears as **Appendix 3.**

8.4   There are clearly areas of West Norfolk where the number of teenage pregnancies is high. The Teenage Pregnancy Strategy Unit offers support in developing targeted work with vulnerable groups. The Team is able to:

- give support to identify vulnerable and at risk groups and individuals.
- provide information of effective practice and interventions.
- identify appropriate agencies to support delivery of targeted programmes.
- highlight relevant training re: addressing the needs of vulnerable groups.

There is a strong need for schools within the areas of highest pregnancy to develop with the Partnership a strategy that covers both the time when young people are in statutory education as well as the 16-19 period. The support for the development of SRE within schools includes:

- provide training for staff in the school environment.
- provide training for staff outside the school environment.
- provide training for governors.
- provide training for agencies who deliver SRE in schools.
- networking between schools to share good practice.
- PSHE CPD Programme.
- provide access to Norfolk Sexual Health Training Programme.
- advice on training relevance and priority.

In addition, the Partnership can:

- provide an examplar scheme of work.
- provide information about local service provision re: training programme and sexual health support programme.
- raise awareness of ineffective practice through consultation and guidance.
- offer continuing advice and support.

Given the relatively limited engagement of the schools in the West with the partnership, this is clearly an area where partnership working with Children's Services is essential if one of the key causes of NEET is to be addressed.

9 The Perspective of Connexions' Personal Advisors

9.1 Data sources

We were able to interview 14 of the Connexions' Personal Advisors who work in West Norfolk and also spoke to four Connexions-Norfolk managers. It was considered important to elicit the views of Connexions personnel in the light of their close and in many cases continuing relationships with NEET young people.

9.2 The importance of early intervention

One of the strongest messages coming out of the study as a whole was the belief that earlier intervention to support students at risk of becoming NEET was thought to be one of the most important priorities in terms of improving NEET outcomes, and this came through very consistently in terms of Connexions' PAs' perspectives on NEET issues:

- "It does actually start in their education probably from primary school… some people lose their motivation quite early so by the time we start working with them they are already in a mindset that thinks 'I'm just going to get a job'… but not realising the difficulties in this".

- "A lot of them have in effect dropped out before 16… we are working with them when they are virtually not working within school… they're being excluded from school a lot".

- "We tend to start with them at year 9 but for some of them, even year 9 is leaving it a bit late. A lot of the lessons and courses relating to jobs and transition don't appear on the curriculum until after year 9".

- "There's a lot of good practice in Special Schools…. I worked at one where anyone who came in was asked to talk about what job they did… it's so important to broaden their understanding of what choices and courses and jobs there are… it gets them thinking about the wider picture… at least starting to think about things… they start thinking about transition at an earlier stage.. because of reviews, it gets embedded. In some schools there are kids who don't really start thinking about it until year 11 and by then it's a bit of a rush…. They haven't done any background research".

- "I feel that more needs to be done in primary schools – the time of transition is crucial and should be targeted… learning habits and attitudes are acquired early… it's too late if you start to address these in secondary schools or post 16".

- "I'm supposed to work with 16 to 19 but unless I get them earlier than that I can't do anything… at 16 they're just… it sets people up to fail".

9.3   Course provision

Several respondents felt that in terms of course provision, there were still "gaps and shortages" for students who were not "straightforward level 3" learners. In particular, it was felt that there were not enough apprenticeships available, and that there were many young people who might be particularly well suited to this progression route rather than college based courses. It was also felt that there was not always as much appropriate provision in terms of foundation courses. Some respondents intimated that they thought that there were still some students who were going for level 3 courses which they were not well equipped for, sometimes because of self-esteem factors, and sometimes because of parental pressure. One respondent suggested that a stronger "steer" would be helpful in terms of IAG. It was felt that there were some good E2E and work based learning courses, but often these were oversubscribed, and those laying on the provision would simply choose from the strongest youngsters available, leaving many young people disappointed.

- "You still seem to be getting pupils who are going on to do A level just because their mates are doing it… or because they sort of drift into it because it's the main route and it's still the high status route… there's still a perception that the other stuff is for the thickies…."

- "There still aren't the courses at foundation level that will help the ones that are really struggling…"

- "The college courses aren't there at the lowest entry level".

- "I've got one young man at the moment who wants to do horticulture and there is no entry level, you can only go and do NVQ Level 2 in horticulture, which means they do need GCSEs in order to get on to a horticulture course".

- "You can sometimes get them on E2E but often they come out of that and just go back into being NEET again…. Good course but…."

- "The biggest problem is the kids with D to G grades, this is where the problem is, things like plumbing…. A lot of the boys want to do it but they can't because they didn't get the grades, so what courses are there for these pupils?"

- "There are some good work based learning programmes…. MTS do a very good one on carpentry and there are others which are OK but there aren't enough places for all of them so they can be very selective… they pick the best ones and the others are left disappointed".

- "Youngsters who have been in the PRU are even worse off often in terms of qualifications but they are quite positive when they leave at 16…. School has not been great for them but they think this is going to be a turning point… things will be different… they want to get a job but then there is nothing for them… it's difficult and by Christmas they are starting to lose motivation".

Several PAs commented on the very high levels of motivation of the young people who had recently come over to Norfolk from Eastern Europe (and contrasted this with the sometimes anti-education attitudes of the indigenous students). They wondered whether more might be done in terms of providing intensive out of hours/weekend English courses for these students, many of whom were desperately keen to do well but were held back by being limited in terms of their written and spoken English:

- "A lot of the EAL kids are some of the nicest I've ever worked with… they follow instructions to the bottom line… they are so keen and committed… not like the 'why do we have do this?' that you get from some of the other kids. Once they get going in English they are away, but if they don't get going and struggle, some of them end up going back".

Several PAs made the point that there were some young people who were very difficult to find courses or work placements for because of the very severe nature of their problems:

- "Some won't go out of the house… they are recluses… there are one or two the health services seem to have given up on… Some of them have big problems with health and housing that are more important than jobs and courses… if people are homeless… It can be very difficult to get somewhere to live in the Kings Lynn area and often when they do get fixed up with somewhere they end up getting kicked out… it's hard to keep track of them and they go back into the cycle once again".

- "Another big group is the kids who pretty much stopped going to school in year 9 or year 10. They lose a lot of their social skills because of that. It's very difficult to get them engaged in anything. It's not true of all of them… some of them come in here (the Connexions Centre) and end up going off to college".

Another difficult issue with what were termed 'core' as opposed to 'transient' NEET was the influence they sometimes had on other members of a group. Their inclusion would sometimes deter other at risk youngsters from attending courses or sessions:

- "There are very difficult decisions to be made sometimes in terms of inclusion…. When Barry joined the group he started messing around with one of the other lads he knew and the whole atmosphere of the sessions changed. In the end I had to tell him not to come in for the good of the rest of the group".

Another important point for consideration arising out of our interviews with PAs and some of the experienced tutors working with at risk youngsters was the importance of course pedagogy. There was a widely articulated feeling that it was not just a question of course content and specification, but of devising courses which were different in terms of learning approaches to "traditional" classroom based approaches. The majority

of respondents did seem to feel that the development of diplomas would improve educational opportunities for potential NEET youngsters, but only if they provided a more active, "learning by doing" approach. PAs who worked with traveller pupils mentioned a very good college course which had the potential to be very successful with traveller pupils, but which lost some students because the first two weeks of the course were very much classroom based and traditional in approach: "As soon as they get in to the actual brick laying, or whatever it is, you know, the practical stuff then they stick to that".

There was also thought to be an issue in terms of the timing of courses and (perhaps unsurprisingly), the inability to provide "roll-on, roll-off" provision for transient NEET youngsters. Together with the absence of ideal progression routes, the hiatus between courses and projects was felt to be a major problem in sustaining the momentum in keeping youngsters "on track", and not giving them the excuse or opportunity to lapse back into "bad habits". This again brings up the point about how important effective transition support is to these young people:

- "With a lot of E2E courses, there's a big gap…. often months… before anything is available in terms of college courses… they lose interest. E2E needs to be extended or some bridging activity put in place so that they are within sight of the starting line at the college. If they finish in April… that leaves a gap of several months".

In addition to timing of courses, it was felt that there were wide variations in terms of the quality of E2E courses. Agencies which were mentioned as being "high quality" or which at least elicited positive comments from PAs included Education and Youth Services, The Prince's Trust, Deerpark House, MTS, The Foyer and Claxton House. Some thought might be given to exploring exactly what it is that these providers do which makes them examples of good practice, so that this good practice can be made more transparent.

9.4   The effect of targets

Several respondents felt that the higher profile accorded to NEET issues and the targets set for NEET reduction had been helpful in focusing more attention on helping pupils who were not as likely to progress straightforwardly to level 3 courses, although it was also felt that some schools had responded more proactively and energetically than others. There was an understanding that NEET reduction was not the only target which schools were having to meet. There was a feeling that for some schools, improving the academic profile of the institution was a more urgent priority than NEET reduction.

There was also an understanding that for National Challenge schools, the fact that they were threatened with closure if they did not meet the 30% A-C pass rate at GCSE led to pressure to concentrate resources and attention on those pupils who were "in the ball park" of 5 A-Cs (see Beadle, 2009, for further development of this point). However, in some respects, targets were felt to be unhelpful, and resulted in time being wasted in managing the figures rather than doing things that really made a difference, or short term expedients which were designed more for cosmetic reductions in NEET figures at particular points in the year:

- "You are aware sometimes when you are asking them about a destination that you need a result... you just need to get them to say something that means they are sorted... there isn't always time to discuss appropriateness.... You've just to move on and get them all done for the audit date".

- "There are some three week courses that seem to do nothing more than just getting them off the register... what message does that send to them, if that's all there is on offer.... One of them said to me 'They don't do courses for people like us'".

- "Some of the short term courses.... the three weeks here.... ten weeks there... the things that help with the figures but aren't going anywhere... it just gives them the feeling of a big nasty circle... they don't think it will lead to anything and neither do we".

- "You find that you are pushing them on to things and you get worried that you are not really doing a good job".

- "We've got a target... make sure they all have an identified destination.... You can be so focused on getting that out of them... getting that target fulfilled.... rather than genuinely taking time to make sure they are making the best choice... pressure, pressure.. If we hit the target they will give us more government money..."

- "The 5 A to C thing does get through to the kids... it contributes to some of them making the wrong choices..., I can do level 3, I can do A Levels, big badge, big tick, well done, mummies are going to love them, you know, and they're in the, in the cool thing now, because, I mean, it's not cool to work hard in high school, so suddenly you're a real thicko if you didn't get 5, so it's not cool not to do level 3, you must be thick..."

- "The government now say that it's got to include English, maths and ICT, but at the bottom line you've got kids who are not going to access all of that and they're the ones that'll be on the streets, and nobody's going to care about them, unless we put on courses that they actually want to achieve in".

OWN might consider how to ensure that best use is made of targets relating to NEET. The Nuffield Review of 14-19 provision noted that the sector had been "subject to many superficial targets that have failed to address underlying problems" (Nuffield Review, 2006: 15). Is it possible to refine the systems so as to keep the targets which are generally thought to be helpful, whilst reducing the time and effort spent in pursuing targets that are thought to be at least to some degree about massaging the statistics relating to NEET issues?

9.5   IAG and induction issues

This appeared to be an area where there was some good practice but where there were some variations in the quality of IAG and induction and transition processes. PAs were keen to stress the effectiveness of visits, "taster courses" and face to face discussions and question and answer sessions between tutors and potential students but felt that there were still some cases of students making ill-informed "brochure choices":

- "I don't believe that they, sometimes they're aware, in the prospectus they see some pictures, the, the actual prospectus, especially the college, is very wordy… very, very wordy, it doesn't actually describe some of the courses actually… they just think they, that they know what it is that they're going to do, like for instance, like Art and Design, they think they're going to draw all day, don't realise there's another aspect of it, you know, and… so quite often it's, it's the lack of information beforehand, because, as I said to you, I'm a great believer in transition, and I do think that they should have more than just a filling of the application form and then go to an interview. The Open Day at this particular college is not actually very informative either, it's basically showing, showing them the building, they need to be going in to different departments, speaking to teachers, finding out exactly what the course content is. But the Open Day is just showing them the building. So, you know, there's that could be improved I think a lot as well".

- "The most important thing is that I wish schools would take their young people to visit places like the college, take them in to an individual department, so they get to talk to the teachers and tutors".

- "What they want to do is go and have a wander, have a look around, sit in the refectory, you know, this is where you go, this is the reception, this is where you pick up your forms, you know…"

- "Because they've not had guidance they sometimes make bad choices and we know that because we pick them up…. They've chosen A level… they've gone along with their mates, or their mum or dad say 'that will be good', but they haven't researched these subjects and they don't get that help unless they ask for it".

- "It is a lot about guidance… some of them really haven't talked to anyone about their choices and they are not confident enough to ask when they are not sure about things or don't know enough to decide. You've got to be quite a confident person to do that".

- Traveller students appeared to pose particular challenges in terms of culture clashes between traveller families and school systems. Two of the PAs who specialised in working with traveller young people stressed that although there were some schools and teachers who handled these issues very adroitly and sensitively, it was an area where good practice was not always disseminated across schools. It was felt that some teachers did not always realise the educational potential of traveller students because of these cultural differences. Some schools had got traveller parents to come in and do INSET work with staff to develop a better understanding of culture issues particular to traveller young people and this was thought to have been very helpful and valued by both communities.

9.6 Perceptions of good practice and "what makes a difference"

Teachers' skills of interactions with at risk young people.

Several of the PAs made the point that often it was adults' skills of interaction with at risk young people which was one of the key determinants of whether advice and interventions had a positive effect. Often, one of the biggest variables on the course was who was running it… whether the tutor could create a good, positive working atmosphere with the group and get them to feel relaxed about talking about things, with a degree of mutual respect. In several cases, courses worked not because of the content, specifications or level of the course, but because of the rapport between tutor and student, which meant that the student would genuinely commit to trying to learn. As one PA remarked of a one day course for NEETs in the west of the county:

> "She's great, since she's been with the group she's really motivated them, she's, you know, she's got them coming out to her, they absolutely love her, you know, she's done First Aid… you know, there's young people here that didn't think they could achieve at all, and it's only because she's just put the time in that, you know, they come for a few weeks here on the programme and it's just, it's just really building confidence and, and getting them to participate, you know, I mean it's just working with them…"

The PAs felt teachers' skills and commitment to working with NEET at risk youngsters was one of the variables that influenced some students' susceptibilities to becoming disengaged from education; they felt that not all teachers either enjoyed working with at risk pupils or were committed to working with such pupils:

- "You still come across teachers who will say that they did not take on the job, you know, they took on a, a role of further education, they didn't take on the job of teaching 14-year-olds or people with learning difficulties, you know, people with autism, or, you know…"

- "A lot of traveller pupils are actually very well motivated and keen to do well if they have teachers who are good with them and recognise that they like practical, active forms of learning… A lot of them are really bright kids but not all teachers recognise that".

- "There are still a few teachers who shout at them.. who just stand and yell, and the young people that we work with again, you know, they're not used to being shouted at, from about the age of 12 young travellers are instantly adults, making their own decisions, and, you know, if somebody tells them to do something without an explanation, and just being shouted at…"

- The quality of transition arrangements and support. Several PAs suggested that confidence and dependability were 'issues' with some at risk students and that "moral support", reminders, someone at hand to help with queries and uncertainties, were all things that could help them "make it through" to a course or interview. They stressed that whereas some students could sort themselves out, there were some "who could go either way" depending on the amount of support offered.

As noted in section 9.5, the opportunity to visit the college or new institution and talk face to face with future tutors, meet other students who would be at the college and look round the social areas of the college was thought to be a major factor in getting students to "stick" with their plans. The college was particularly praised by the assiduousness of its support over helping students with their bus pass arrangements. Connexions' PAs and other Connexions' support workers often travelled with youngsters to interviews, helped them with phone calls and letters, and generally supported them in trying to ensure that they turned up on time and did not forget appointments, but it was acknowledged that there were limits to how much time they could spend with each person, and it was felt that youngsters often had good working relations with at least some of the support staff they had worked with in schools, and that more use might be made of such channels of support in transition periods.

Liaison, access and working relationships with schools

Although for obvious reasons the PAs were reluctant to pass negative comments about the schools they worked with, it was apparent that there were some schools where they felt there were particularly helpful arrangements for access, good communications, the facilitation of collaborative working to help with students who had quite serious and complex problems, and in terms of schools which seemed to value their role and potential helpfulness in working with at risk and less straightforward pathways for pupils. There was a feeling that their services were most valued in schools which had large numbers of pupils who would not be progressing through to A level courses, although it was clear that there were some schools of all "types" who went out of their way to be helpful in working collaboratively with the Connexions service. The following extracts attempt to give some indications of what PAs found helpful or thought were elements of good practice in addressing NEET issues:

- "I think we are quite fortunate in this area, most of the Connexions' Coordinators we liaise with go out of their way to be helpful although there are perhaps some schools which feel that they can handle these issues through their own systems".

- "There are some schools where they go out of their way to try and make sure that pupils turn up if you are due to have an interview with them. A big bane of life working with NEET pupils is that they are not always the most reliable and they sometimes don't turn up to appointments. Occasionally you are left to chase things up yourself but some schools are above and beyond the call of duty in terms of the care they take to get the pupils there for us".

- "If definitely helps if there is continuity in terms of personnel… when you have worked in the school with the same person and you have established trust with them… they start to see you as part of the working day and you start getting a regular flow of referrals from year heads who can see that you might be able to help".

- "There are some schools who do have really good purposeful meetings with everyone there…. the school nurse…. other support workers.. a realistic plan is drawn up, it's recorded, actioned, followed up".

- "It's important that schools and colleges work together with Connexions… it would also be helpful to have a later cut off date so that they can change courses. At the moment they come to us saying that an A level isn't working, it's horrible and it's too late to change… that's something they could work on… quicker action and response when students realise they have chosen the wrong course".

9.7   What makes a good PA?

As with all other elements of the workforce involved in working with NEET or potentially NEET young people, some PAs may be more effective in their work than others. We spoke to experienced PAs, ones who came across as accomplished in their jobs, and who had been "recommended to us" as good, experienced, effective personnel. We also spoke to several Connexions' managers and asked them what made an effective Connexions' PA, what would they be looking for at interview to appoint a PA, what advice would they give to someone starting out as a Connexions' PA? The following extracts attempt to give a representative view of the responses we received:

- "Diplomacy… not just with the kids but with the schools. It's very important to be careful in what you say and to weigh your words and feelings about situations carefully. It's very easy to upset a school and of you do that you are up against a brick wall. Don't get anyone's back up or it will be very difficult to work cooperatively with people in the school, either in terms of working with adults or getting the same access and opportunity to work with pupils".
- "Part of it is good judgement in terms of knowing when to leave people alone… when it is not a good moment. We've got over 100 young parents and young girls who are pregnant and sometimes they want help and sometimes they want to be left alone, they just want to enjoy being a mum".
- "More than anything, it's being a good listener… to both students and adults. Listening to what people say, keeping an open mind and not being too impatient to impose your own solutions and agendas, not being too pushy".
- "The number of times they say, 'You're the first person I've ever told this to'… that's the sort of person that you need to be… that means that they will be open to you and that they trust you. If they don't trust you, nothing you say will make any difference to them. More than anything you've got to have good interpersonal skills".
- "You've got to develop the ability to put them at ease. A lot of them are not very confident, they are nervous… it might be their first one to one interview… they might have very poor eye contact and be very awkward… You mustn't rush things".
- "It's partly about being really patient and determined, being prepared to go the extra mile with them and follow things up… go out of your way to be really helpful so that they can see that you are really on their side doing your best for them".

- "The job has changed and although it is obviously still about careers advice at one level, it is a world away from what that meant 20 years ago and the best PAs have grasped that and they realise that they are social workers, they are not just detached providers of information".

- "Putting things to them in such a way that it's just a suggestion…. Something for them to consider that they might not have thought of… and in the end they sort of come round to thinking about it for themselves… getting them to take some responsibility for their own actions and decisions".

- "If you have your own agenda which you try to push too forcefully, too soon…. You've got to be patient. Let them talk a bit first and listen to what they say, take an interest. You might have to listen to them talking about their mobile phone for a bit…"

- "I think it helps to have a bit of real life experience… it you've worked with people in poverty, with problems… you understand them a bit better and you know how to talk to them more skilfully".

One PA mentioned that when working in another county, there had been a system whereby PAs were able on occasion to spend modest amounts of money….. often under £5…. to buy a snack or the ingredients for a basic meal for a NEET client. It was felt that the benefits of this form of help were often out of all proportion to the sums of money involved in terms of allowing positive relationships to develop, and securing time to talk at length to clients who might otherwise have been elusive and evasive. The suggestion was made that a very modest system based on these principles might be helpful in dealing with some "core" NEET young people. Several PAs felt that it was important to continue outreach work as young people in rural areas had less opportunities than those in Kings Lynn and Norwich.

9.8   More difficult times?

Several of the PAs we talked to reported that the recent recession is already having an impact on job opportunities and apprenticeship provision in the area. This was thought to be a real problem, both in terms of a reduction in the number of jobs without training for NEET available who just wanted any sort of job, and progression routes for students who had recently completed level 2 courses at the college. It is important that any temporary increases in NEET rates are not construed as a reflection on the amount of time and effort that is going into helping to reduce the number of young people without worthwhile employment, education and training opportunities. Targets need to be flexible and reviewable as well as challenging (Imyson, 1998).

- "There are students coming out of the college with level 2 plumbing qualifications and needing to go on to level 3 apprenticeships and no one is taking people on, the places are not there… and I think this seems to be the same for bricklaying and electricians".
- "Yes, in hairdressing I haven't found one place prepared to take anyone on this year… I usually have at least two or three opportunities that come up".
- "It's got worse in the Kings Lynn area and Kings Lynn has never been the easiest place in terms of job opportunities for young people".
- "I think that there aren't a lot of opportunities out there for them, and because at the moment it's even more limited".

10   Interviews with NEET young people

10.1   Sampling issues

We were able to conduct interviews with 20 young people who were NEET. It is important to stress that although there was a balance between youngsters living in Kings Lynn, and those living in more rural areas, the sample was not representative of the NEET population in West Norfolk in other respects. The interviews were obtained by visiting the Connexions Centre in Kings Lynn, and "satellite" centres in the Western Area, the sample was thus confined to young people who were engaged with the Connexions service. It did not include any of the exceptionally challenging NEET young people described in the previous section, and it did not prove possible to interview youngsters who were pregnant or young parents. Although there were courses such as "Beyond the bump" which had been successful in engaging some youngsters, PAs acknowledged that not all young parents wanted to engage with Connexions, and some just wanted to be "left alone": "You can try to get them engaged but the ones I've talked to just want to be left alone and just get on with it". Short "thumbnail" biographies of the young people we interviewed form the most substantial part of this section. The stories will not come as a great surprise to those who are immersed in work with NEET issues full time, but the testimony may well challenge the perhaps narrow and stereotypical views of NEET young people which some student teachers and NQTs (and possibly more experienced teachers) hold.

10.2   Points arising out of the interviews with NEET young people

A sample of 20 interviews clearly does not constitute a dataset that will yield statistically significant data, but there are nonetheless some patterns which either corroborate or question data from other sources, whether it be teachers, LEA and Connexions personnel whose testimony is provided in other sections, or in other recent studies of NEET young people (see, for example, Connexions Norfolk, 2008, Gartshore, 2009, Cambridgeshire LSC, 2008, Nuffield, 2006, NFER, 2009, Tunnard *et al.,* 2008). We feel that probably the most important potential benefit which might arise from the dissemination of the NEET "stories" which are told in Section 10.11 is a better understanding of the complex and multifaceted nature of the factors that influence NEET outcomes on the part of new teachers and others who are starting to work with NEET or potentially NEET young people.

10.3   Why young people drop out of education, employment and training

A study of the case studies in Section 10.11 to some extent confirms the findings of Yorke and Longden (2004) in their international study of retention issues post 16. The study suggested that there are generally four broad reasons why students leave post-compulsory academic and training programmes:

- Flawed decision making in initial choices.
- Events that impact on students' lives outside the institution.
- Students' experiences of the programme and the institution.
- Failure to cope with the academic demands of programmes.

Whilst most of the stories told in Section 10.11 would fit some of the above criteria, there were also cultural and attitudinal factors which seemed to be in some ways contributory to students' decisions to drop out of courses or refuse to consider further education and training. Several of the interviewees reported that their parents did not give them strong encouragement to stay in education. A majority of respondents had not enjoyed school and their overall experiences in education up to the age of 16 had been negative. Sometimes this was the result of bullying, sometimes the result of difficult or negative relationships with teachers, boredom, or frustration, disappointment and lack of esteem deriving from the realisation that they were not "good successful learners". Almost without exception, they talked of D to G grades as a "fail" in terms of their qualifications, and they did not find it easy to identify ways in which they had done well or developed at school. However, it would be wrong to assume that all or most of the NEET young people we talked to were "anti-education" or that they were poor learners. Some of them were desperately keen to move on or to get back into education or training. Some of them were obviously capable, intelligent and resourceful and we got the impression that they would make very good students or employees given the right opportunity. There were also some who were not strong academically, and who one could imagine becoming quite de-motivated in a system which places a great deal of emphasis on academic qualifications.

10.4   Difficulties in getting jobs or places on courses

Almost without exception, the young people we talked to were unhappy about not being in education, employment and training. Some of them did not aspire to anything beyond a job without training and in some cases "any job", but only one of the NEET young people we talked to seemed relatively content and unconcerned about not having any job or course. Although not all of the respondents were working with equal focus, drive and determination to get on courses or get into employment, all but one wanted to do some sort of job or get on some sort of course. Evidence from the Connexions'

PAs we interviewed (see Section 9) suggested that given their circumstances, attributes and qualifications, it was proving difficult for some of them to get into work or training, given current circumstances in the area.

10.5 Information, advice and guidance

Several of the respondents felt that they had not received good advice, either in terms of choosing courses or of being aware of the full range of possible ways forward that might be possible for them. (We are aware that this was their perception and that it is possible that not all of them were receptive to attempts at IAG). Several interviewees acknowledged that they had not made the most of their opportunities at school, and that having wanted to leave school at 16 and "just get a job", they now looked back quite wistfully and regretfully, and wished that they could go back and "have another chance". Some had clearly under-estimated the difficulties involved in getting even unskilled jobs, and one facet of IAG might be to point out to students this reality more forcefully at an earlier stage (again, it is possible that schools are doing this and some students are not listening). There would appear to be the potential for some of the young people we talked to, to go back into schools and talk about some of their experiences to pupils who might be at risk of disengagement through inertia and complacency. It is worth noting that almost all the youngsters we interviewed spoke very positively about how helpful Connexions' PAs had been.

10.6 Work experience

Very few respondents spoke positively about their pre-16 work experience (although one had used it to get later part time employment). For most of them it had been 'OK', but not particularly interesting or challenging. We are aware that we were not talking to a representative sample of the young people who go out to do work experience at KS4, and that there may be many pupils who are motivated and enthused by it, but this did not seem to be the case for this group. Neither was the experience of work placement so unpleasant or harrowing that they felt impelled to work harder at school in order to avoid the fate of such work. Some suggested that it was "a bit of a change", but that it was ultimately a bit of a disappointment. We are aware that it must be extremely difficult to arrange high quality and appropriate work experience for whole cohorts of students, but it is an area where schools need to continue to work hard to get placements that will have a positive influence on students' disposition to do well and make the most of their opportunities in education.

10.7   Quietly disaffected and disengaged students

Not all the young people we talked to had been "in trouble" at school, either in terms of behaviour or attendance. Some of them appeared to have "drifted" in terms of their overall progress and development whilst at school. Earlier research involving Norfolk pupils suggested that there are significant numbers of pupils in Norfolk who are, in Oakley's terms, "RHINOs" (Really here in name only), who are not driven and proactive in terms of thinking about their future prospects (Oakley, 2002). Many schools appear to be making a major effort to improve the "curriculum offer" for such students, and to provide guidance and advice at an earlier stage (see Section 12), but this is another area which is perhaps "work in progress". Rightly or wrongly, some of the students felt that if they were not in the A-C "ballpark", they were not the school's first priority.

10.8   Teachers and PAs make a difference

Although many of the young people interviewed reported predominantly negative experiences of being in school, the majority of them made the point that some teachers and tutors had been more helpful than others. In many cases this was not described in terms of subject knowledge or pedagogical expertise, but in terms of their interactions with students: being made to feel welcome, "the feeling that the teacher did care about how you were getting on and was as bothered about you as the kids who were doing really well". Praise for Connexions' PAs was also reported in similar terms, but there was also the dimension of taking time and trouble and obviously "putting themselves out" to be of practical help.

Given the testimony from other sources about the importance of developing good working relationships between teachers and learners, this seemed to be an important point for schools to consider in terms of how to improve NEET outcomes. Most schools and colleges have some teachers who are exceptionally talented in terms of their interactions with students, and their ability to build and sustain a positive, inclusive and collaborative working atmosphere in their classrooms. What are the most effective ways of disseminating such skills?

10.9   Travel

In terms of feedback from sources other than the NEET young people we interviewed, there were differing views on the extent to which rurality and transport issues influenced NEET outcomes. More than one LEA source pointed out that where provision was of high quality, students were prepared to regularly undertake very long and convoluted journeys in order to complete the course. But there were also respondents

who suggested that the limited transport services in rural areas did sometimes deter students and inclined them to look for courses closer to home which might not be as appropriate. Both PAs and tutors reported that it was not just a question of time and inconvenience, and that sometimes NEET at risk young people sometimes lacked the social confidence to travel to new and unfamiliar places. In the words of one teacher, "People who don't really know our kids think they are quite tough and streetwise, but actually a lot of them don't even go into Norwich… they tend to hang about on the estate and just go between the estate and school". Some of the tutors running courses for NEET youngsters said that part of it was about building up their social confidence in terms of being willing to take bus journeys and new experiences in their stride.

At least three students had withdrawn from courses citing "once a day each way" bus services as at least part of the reason for doing so. However, in two cases, this was exacerbated by without-notice cancellations of teaching sessions, which left them hanging about with nothing to do until the evening bus home. There was a roughly even split between those youngsters who felt that they would have to "bite the bullet" and travel to Kings Lynn or Norwich to make the best of their chances, and those who either through lack of confidence or lack of energy and commitment said that they would not consider work or training outside the local area (see Section 10.11 for further details). It remains to be seen whether the idea of equipping young people with mopeds will improve learning and employment mobility in the county.

10.10 Success criteria

Noyes and Turner (2009) make the point that in recent years, explanations of under-achievement by young people have moved away from focusing on the shortcomings of students and their families and towards the shortcomings of the educational system in providing for learners with differing needs. It is important not to see any deficit in employment and training take-up as an indictment of the services provided for young people. In the 1970s nearly 40% of 16 year olds left school without any qualifications (Aldrich, 2004), and Norfolk has been successful in reducing NEET numbers over the past two years. Nearly all schools are working hard to improve the quality and appropriateness of the curriculum for young people, and there is evidence from this and other reports on NEET issues that there is much good and improving practice. As Section 9 indicates, schools, colleges and Children's Services have to deal with exceptionally difficult young people for whom it is not easy to find training or employment. As well as talking about problem areas, teachers and PAs mentioned several instances of spectacular success, where students with severe difficulties had ended up going on to university in spite of formidable obstacles, because of sensitive and effective support from a range of sources. However, we feel that it is important

that success in NEET issues is not seen just in terms of getting young people into full time courses or employment. Many of the positive things reported in Section 10.11 and elsewhere in this report relate to the beneficial effects of part time courses or part time employment, and incremental gains in students' autonomy, self-esteem and ability to establish positive relationships with others. None of the NEET young people we interviewed had as yet made the transition to full time work or full time employment, but most of them had made significant progress in some of these areas because of the skilful intervention and support of the professionals they were working with.

10.11 "Everyone has a story"

The following thumbnail biographies of young people who were interviewed provide an indication of how multifaceted the NEET population is and how complex are the factors influencing their situation. It should be remembered that the stories presented here do not represent a comprehensive cross sample of the NEET population (see Section 10.1).

Carla
Carla lives in a small market town in West Norfolk. She was enrolled on an FE course but dropped out due to a combination of transport difficulties and the frustrations of travelling in to the college to find that on several occasions, lectures had been cancelled. Together with a friend who also ended up withdrawing from the course, they then had to wait for the evening bus to take them back home. Her parents and family all became very disillusioned with the situation. Because of this, her younger sister had refused to consider going on to FE ("A real shame…. She's a bright girl") and has opted instead to work at a "job without training" vegetable packing depot in her home village. The whole family are very disenchanted with FE in general.

Susan
Susan is a 19 year old female who had attended a West Norfolk High School. She left at 16 with poor qualifications, no maths and English GCSE. She had not enjoyed school and was pleased to leave but now (said with a smile on her face and rather sheepishly) said that she would be pleased to go back… work had not been as pleasant or easy as she had expected.

She had been employed at local burger company but hated it and felt that she had been very badly treated. She had got into restaurant work with some basic training which was much better but had then been laid off because they were cutting back on staff… "The job had been going OK, it was just that they were getting rid of staff and I was one of the latest arrivals and at the bottom of the pile".

She had attended West Anglia College for a year and a half, finished her first year course which was based on Sport but she had then found the second year course too hard, felt she couldn't do it, and dropped out.

She is living with her boyfriend who is also unemployed. She wanted to be a carer in the longer term and would be interested in getting back into college if she could find the right course, but her first priority was to get a job and things were such that any job would be good, but it was not easy to get one at the moment.

She did not feel that she had had good advice and guidance at school but she said that the staff at Connexions had been really helpful since she had left college.

Donald

Donald has popped into Connexions today hoping to see his usual PA to discuss his CV. Unfortunately, she is not in today and Donald appears somewhat disappointed. He's well presented in casual dress and seems to have made a real effort. He has a rucksack to which he keeps pointing, informing me his paperwork is in it.

Donald left school aged 16 and is now 18. He was not academically successful at school having achieved no GCSE passes at grade C. His time at school was unhappy. Donald says he has no real memories of what it was like but tells me almost immediately that he was bullied there. He looks away as he says it, clearly upset by the memories. I ask if the teachers supported him. "No", he says. Nobody took it seriously. As a result he started "skiving" some lessons and he ended up being suspended for a while. He did however sit his examinations – five he thinks – he tries to list them but can't recall them all – and as for the grades – "G's" he thinks.

When Donald left school at 16 he knew what he wanted to do. He had applied for a training course to enable him to eventually become a RAF engineer. He does that part time now as reserve. He now wants to be a full time engineer with the RAF. He has discovered, with the help of the Connexions services, that if he completes an apprenticeship in engineering and continues with his RAF reserve duties (to include one tour of duty) he will be able to apply to be with the RAF full time. There's a clear plan but he now needs the guidance from his PA about his CV. He'll be back on Tuesday to see her.   He also comes into the office regularly to use the computers as there's no access at home. Donald is banned from the library for not paying fines for overdue books – he said he had just forgotten to take things back. When we talk more about the Connexions office, from the way he points to information on the tables it's obvious that this is someone who knows what services to expect here. He is quietly appreciative. The information given to him about apprenticeships is his passport to the job he wants.

I ask about support whilst at school when he was thinking about his future and what to do after school. He's not initially forthcoming. He can't recall any guidance from teachers. He's had no contact with staff since leaving and is not in touch with any of his peers. When prompted he recalls that Connexions staff were present at school on a weekly basis. He recalls them taking groups of pupils to factories to familiarise them with work places. No other places were visited he tells me. Nothing else of significance comes to mind. I ask him if he had contact with Connexions staff during the summer after he left school – "no", he says. He looks surprised by the question – I get the impression that he felt quite independent at that stage - having been accepted to do the training course he was not in need of support.

How does Donald see his future? He's going to become an RAF engineer. There's nothing else that he is focussed on. The support from Connexions staff leads him to believe he can do it and he's going for it.

Karen

Karen is 16 and went to a local high school. She has come into Connexions today to find out more about possibilities available to her as she recently left school. She left earlier in May but has 4-5 exams coming up, (she's taking maths, English, health and social care and IT) and is hoping to be successful. Her teachers have predicted 'G' grades but she tells me she already has a pass in IT. I ask what she will need to get into college as she wants to do health and social care at Wisbech College. She thinks she "probably" needs to pass health and social care, English and maths.

As we talk Karen reveals that she had meetings with a Connexions' PA at school. The PA gave her information about college – practical elements such as what time she needed to get up and go to college. She also was able to talk to the PA about her "problems"; "I used to get a lot of stick at school but she was there and I could talk to her". Karen has known the PA since the start of year 11 and stressed "She was really nice". Karen is here today because she was "meant go to Wisbech College" but they haven't offered her a place. She might try the college (COWA) where she would want to follow the same course - health and social work.

I ask what back-up plans she has if she doesn't get into college. Her father who arrived a few minutes ago and who is now sitting in on the interview says he has received a letter this morning saying benefits for her will cease if she is not at college. He goes on to say, "Whatever it is she has to get into college otherwise there will be no benefits for her. All my benefits for her will cease – it's different for her. Her sister has a disability and once she comes into Connexions for her help her allowances will continue".

Karen now tells me that the last two years at school have been "hell, total utter hell… The bullying has been incredible – very bad". I asked if Karen got help from the teachers. She says when she told the head of year he said "stop tittle tattling and go away"...... "and they used to wonder why I used to get in trouble and skive all the lessons. I only used to go to IT and health and social work because of my teacher. I love her to pieces. When I skived I used to go to her class and do work and stuff and – that's why I got a pass [in IT]". Her health and social work teacher was "nice" too and she thinks she should get a pass there too.

I ask if she is in touch with students from school. She is - but they have all got places at college (dad tells me) and she doesn't want to be the "left one out". I ask again why she is here and what help the office can give. She tells me they will help her with "filling the stuff out and that and sending things away because I am dyslexic".

Dad interjects and tells me Karen has a statement for learning disability and feels that she did not get much support for this.

I ask Karen why she has chosen the course she did and why she wants to work in an old people's home. She feels she gets on with them.

I ask if she did any work experience. She didn't go because she felt that the teacher who was organising it "picked on her". One day she told her to "shove it" and she wasn't then allowed to go – "she just used to 'pick and pick and pick".

I ask if she knows what the course is about, she seems to know it's "the basics" which, when I probe further, I realise she's just got information about from the PA she just spoke to. She didn't have it before.

She worked out her next steps with the PA and will be coming in to get help in making applications to get into college. I ask if she has a computer at home but she doesn't. She thinks she'll use the one here. "What's the best thing about the service she's been offered today?" "They talk to you and listen to you and they don't think you're 'a waste of space'". She compares this with the teacher at school who advised her on careers and work experience – "she used to look at you like just another person that ain't gonna do anything with their life". Where does she want to be in a few years time? If she gets on the course working in an old people's home "probably". (Her dad jokes she can look after him). I ask what will happen if she doesn't get on the course and what she expects from Connexions. "Jobs other places I can go to and that". She seems willing to do almost anything.

Mother adds she wanted to work with animals but she can't get on the course – I ask if it's because of the reading and writing but Karen goes back to the bullying - her sister was doing a course there and she was also bullied there so she quit. The girl who was doing the bullying would have been on the same course.

I mention jobs again and she reveals she is already looking after an elderly person for 3-4 hours per day. She enjoys doing the "cleaning up after her" and "listening to all her stories… That's why I love old people they can tell you so much things.. She's a feisty old lady – she's like a mum. You can just talk to her. They tell you stuff". I ask if that was good for learning as opposed to school. Yes – school was too "complicated" and "then you sit there with her and you talk to her about the war and it seems so easy". I ask about school again and what she means by "complicated". "They teach things you don't want to know about, you're stuck in a classroom and it gets boring after a while". She would have liked to have done more practical things. The old lady makes things funny for Karen – "she's always got to use a swear word – she's funny". I ask if there are any other jobs she would do – anything she says "to get the money". She reflects and says the problem with working with old people is that you get "connected to them… if anything happens to her then…" She has nothing but praise for the staff in the office. She values the opportunity she has had in school to talk to a PA – to get things "off her chest". If she sees her on the street she says "hello" to her.

Brandon

(He was very eager to talk to me as it seemed he thought I would be able to 'solve' his problems. The momentary flicker of hope in his eyes - soon diminished - said far more than any of his verbal responses to the questions. He was polite but very wary – it was interesting that he read the ethics form very carefully, laboriously pointing to each word with the pen, before signing. He needed prompting and encouragement to respond to the questions).

Brandon is 17 and is currently unemployed and feeling very despondent about his employment prospects. He would like to be a mechanic as he has learnt a great deal about car maintenance from his cousin (when he talked about banger racing, he became more enthusiastic)*.* He enjoyed school as "it was a laugh" and he could "see his mates" but missed all his GCSE exams as he had to go away (he would not say more about this). He said he didn't mind at the time but now regrets having no qualifications and "ending up with nothing" and being "bored and lonely". He said he had received advice from Connexions, including a one-to-one meeting, which helped to some extent (he looked around nervously at this point – I got the feeling that he visited the centre regularly as "a safe place" and did not want to criticise Connections in any

way). He said he often used the internet to look for jobs and courses. When I asked about his future plans, Brandon said he would like to train first and then become a mechanic in the local area. When I suggested he might eventually have his own small business, he looked astonished that anyone should think of him in this way. He said that his Mum wanted him to get a job and earn some money as soon as possible. After I had thanked him, he seemed reluctant to leave (perhaps still thinking that "the woman from the university" could do something about his situation?).

Rachel
(This 17 year-old young person, currently attending a school sixth form but considering leaving, came in with her mother. They had an appointment with one of the advisers. She may enter the 'NEET' pool but for very different reasons from the other interviewees).

Rachel is passionate about horses and wants to teach horse riding. She enjoys the practical subjects in school and achieved satisfactory grades for all GCSEs and NVQs taken at the end of year 11. Connexions came to the school and advised her to go to college – the dilemma is that there are no suitable courses offered locally. She would like to leave school and work to earn money for training elsewhere. She makes very good use of the internet to search for courses and possible jobs. The parent said that she only wanted her daughter to be happy but was getting worried about the lack of opportunities available – "it is not enough to have visits from Connexions", she said, "what is needed is someone to push and encourage the pupils – we were fortunate as there was a designated person at the school with a responsibility for careers who really put some of the suggestions, such as day release opportunities, into practice".

Linsey
(This 20 year-old came in a state of anxiety and anger – she was very willing to talk to me).

Linsey said that she had always wanted to be a hairdresser "as everyone said it was interesting" but she found the course too difficult and left after a few months. When I asked if it was the written work that was causing problems, she said that the practical work was too demanding. She hated school and couldn't wait to get a job but did leave with some qualifications (including maths and English). When she discovered there were no jobs available she became "very upset and angry". She has just started a business retail and administration course but walked out (perhaps temporarily?) following an argument with her tutor. "My tutor hates me and is always saying my work is not good enough", she said. Linsey said that as she has had the same advisor from Connexions from the age of 14 (because of her "learning difficulties"), she feels

supported. When asked what her Mum wanted her to do, she said "go to college and learn how to behave myself". She makes good use of the internet either in college or in the Centre. Her ambition is to run her own underwear shop in KL – when asked why, she promptly and seriously replied, "because there is no good underwear shop in the town".

Michelle

Michelle is 16, due to be 17 in August. She is interested in a career in the fashion industry, but didn't feel that the advice given in school helped her find out much about it. She left school with most of her GCSEs at grade D, including maths and English. She obtained one E, and a grade B for drama. Her school was in Wisbech, with around 800 pupils on roll. She believed travel was necessary to access post-16 training and education.

Through her time at school she also took up paid work, first in a chip shop earning £2.50 an hour. She also took later work at the clothes shop 'Burtons', and at the sandwich bar 'Subway'. Eventually, in July 2008, she took up work in 'Dorothy Perkins'. The impetus for this came from the work experience framework provided by her school, though Michelle stated she sought and secured this post herself with respect to her particular interest in fashion. The post developed from a work experience placement to paid work as the opportunity to cover maternity leave arose. With regard to paid work, Michelle made it clear that earning money was important to her, and alluded to her mother not having much money. Earning money, she said, was important also to her own independence, and she enjoyed the placement sufficiently to want to continue the work.

Michelle felt the advice she received about the fashion industry was limited. Most of what she knew she found out herself. Her older sister is studying fashion-buying at university in Manchester, and Michelle had some awareness of what that course entails. She knew work in the field of fashion might entail travel, and this seemed a source of interest for her, though she accepted in the short term that she would have to work in retail locally. The type of shop she might work in was important to her – she was happy to work in 'Dorothy Perkins' and 'Peacocks', but remarked with regard to 'New Look' "I have my standards". She gleaned further knowledge of the industry from magazines and the web, and had sought information via the internet to support her composition of a curriculum vitae. She had no access to a computer or the web at home, so did this via Connexions facilities.

She stated that she had "hated school" but indicated that at the time of options (year 9) had felt some enthusiasm for subjects, particularly French. The actual experience of

this and other subjects at GCSE had caused her some disappointment. She acknowledged what she called her own "anger issues" which made this phase of schooling challenging for her. She had found both her parents supportive. In general, she had found options and careers guidance limited. She was unaware what courses might be available in the eastern region, and had not heard of the Notschool e-learning course, though felt it might be of interest. Her attitude to qualifications was ambivalent "I'm intelligent, not dumb", and contended that she had been able to do all the work presented to her in her varied employment, including tasks requiring numeracy and literacy.

(My own impressions were of an articulate, confident and intelligent young woman. In my time at the Connexions centre and after my interview with her, I noted her focus at a computer workstation for at least an hour as she worked on preparing a CV).

Jenny

Jenny is 19. At 15 she left school two months prior to the standard point of exit due to becoming pregnant, and although predicted a number of A grades at GCSE, actually attained E, F and G grades across the subjects. Her situation was made more difficult given that she fell out with her father and step-mother, and had to move away to live with her mother. Initially she claimed Income Support but later obtained work in a care home, having for quite some time intended to do so for her employment. This work was also interrupted, first as she suffered a violent partner, forcing her to move again. Recently settled in a new area with a new partner, she embarked on searching for work again but fell pregnant a second time. She now continues studying to support retaking her GCSEs. Her partner works nightshifts, so the couple have some flexibility with regard to childcare. She reported a positive experience of school, and hopes to complete study for her English and Maths GCSEs in the near future.

Jenny maintains an interest in working in care, and understands the challenges of the role. Her initial interest in this area arose from caring for her grandmother. She has aspirations to be a senior care manager, and is clearly aware of a career path that would take her to such a role.

Lee

Lee is 17, currently homeless and unemployed. Lee enjoyed his time at school. He left at the end of Year 11 having successfully completed a day release carpentry and plastering course at the College of West Anglia, alongside his GCSEs, of which he passed English, maths and Science. His successful completion of the day release course entitled him to a guaranteed place at COWA to embark on a carpentry diploma.

Lee completed the first three months of the diploma course, but was "kicked out". He was asked to leave due to poor attendance. He "felt gutted" by this because his poor attendance was due to him "being homeless". Despite being given several warnings, he did not feel that anyone understood his situation.

After leaving college Lee started working full time for his grandad, plastering. However, this only lasted two weeks and his grandad sacked him. The main problem for Lee was that he found the demands of working full time "really hard", especially having to get up at 06:30 every day.

Being jobless meant that Lee claimed Income Support for ten weeks and lived at his girlfriend's home. Income Support has now stopped and he has to apply for Job Seekers' Allowance, but he won't get any money for five weeks. He is trying to get into a hostel, and this is his immediate priority. He feels very frustrated as he knows what he wants to do, but does not feel there is any support for him. He does have access to the internet, but has not as yet thought about using it to try and find a job. Lee wants to go back to college to get qualified, but he feels that his chances are slim, having been asked to leave. In the meantime, there is a chance that his girlfriend's grandad may be able to temporarily employ him as a dry liner.

Kelly

Kelly is 16. She was attending the Connexions Centre with her mother, and was looking for work. At the time of the interview, Kelly was feeling very confident that she was beginning to get herself sorted.

Kelly completed Year 10 of her GCSEs in Cornwall, and moved to Norfolk in August 2007. However, she was not able to obtain a place in any school to complete her Year 11 studies. Then she became pregnant. She sought help from Action for Children and says that Connexions "have been fantastic", helping her to obtain places on a variety of courses: "Bump to Babies" and "Beyond the Bump", to help her prepare for motherhood. She has also completed a "Time for Change" course, Adult Literacy course and is about to undertake a numeracy course to help her prepare for College. She continues to have regular contact with her Connexions' key worker.

Kelly wants to be a beauty therapist and has actively sought voluntary work experience in a beauty salon to "get a feel for the job". She has applied to COWA for the Beauty Therapy Level 2 course and is waiting to hear whether she has a place to start in September. She is going to apply to The Prince's Trust for a grant if she gets a place. Kelly's ambition is to be a mobile beauty therapist, travelling to people's houses (but

she needs to learn to drive). When reflecting on her story so far, Kelly feels that things have worked out for the best because if she had got into school to finish her GCSEs, she wouldn't have got pregnant, so would not have her baby, who is the "best thing in my life".

Richard

Richard is 17 and had planned to get a job with a firm run by a friend of his father, a gardening nursery business, as a general labourer, shifting soil, loading pallets; a job without training but he seemed to have been happy with this prospect. He was keen to leave school and start earning money, his father had made arrangements for the job so he did not feel that he needed to look round for jobs or worry about qualifications. He sat GCSEs and got a C in Resistant Materials and Es in maths and English. He did have an interview with Connexions but was not particularly interested as he thought he had a job lined up, and his parents were keen for him to take up the job, "Best to get real experience in a real job". He did the job for a month but then got laid off "due to the recession and stuff". He is now looking for a new job, and any job rather than a job with training. He is doing a few hours putting up marquees and likes this work and would be keen to do more but the supply of work is not regular – this work was again arranged through family contacts. The marquee work is "good but not many hours" and only pays £3 an hour. All his family are keen for him to get regular work and he is currently looking around for general labouring work, in construction or "even in agriculture", but "there is not much around". When asked what he thinks he might be doing in a few years time he is not sure and says he does not really know.

William

Age 17, said that he had to go to college because his GCSE grades "weren't that good", so he went to the sixth form college to do Business and Leisure and Tourism and re-sit English and maths GCSE. He then struggled to make progress in his courses and was eventually advised to leave the college because he was not making any progress in any of his courses: "I had to drop Travel and Tourism, because of the course work, I sort of struggled with it, and… I dropped maths, because, well some other reason that I had to do it, I can't really remember, so I had to drop them two, and then like I passed the Business, and then… like… that was a re-take year again, so I had to do Business, Travel and Tourism, and English and maths again, because I couldn't go on to another, because that was Level 2, but I couldn't go on to Level 3 because they wouldn't, the Director said to me, 'I don't think you'll be able to do it…', so he said, 'you can do a re-take year', and that didn't really work out, so then, then they asked me to leave and now I'm here... because it was just a re-take year I, I done everything really at the same time and done everything twice and that, and I sort of got bored with it, so I didn't really try as much as I did in the first year". Unlike many of the students we

talked to, he said he had quite enjoyed school: "Yeah, I, I got on quite well at school and that, and that was good fun. I quite liked high school, I still wish I was there" (laughs).

William had worked in a factory for a while, "but then I got made redundant, because of the recession they just couldn't, it hit the factory really hard, so they had to make me redundant". He was considering travelling to Norwich or Kings Lynn "because, erm, there's quite a lot of good courses up there, but I have to think about that, because at the minute I'm not really too bothered if I go there or not, so, but if there's like, when this course ends then I'll really have to think about it, if I don't get a job, so…. I'm not really too sure to be honest with you, I've just applied to this Prince's Trust thing as well, that's another option, or I've just applied for a job as well, down in town, so it's either a job or education again. I mean you can get a job at MacDonalds… if you're good you can get made a manager, you know, stuff like that".

(Richard comes across as an extremely likeable and articulate young man. His failure to get a level 2 qualification in maths had been a particular problem in terms of his progress and on the day of this interview, he failed his ALAN test by one mark. His tutor said that he was a very likeable and nice person, but that he had at times been in trouble at school, and had had to cope with an exceptionally difficult home situation, which he had done in a very cheerful and resilient way.)

Alex

Alex is 20 and cheerfully admits that he had been "booted out" of the local college "not for misbehaving and stuff, just for not turning up most of the time, sort of sitting at home, skiving". He said that he had not enjoyed being at school and that this was what was behind staying off with increasing frequency as he went through the school. He told me that when he left school at 16 he just wanted to get a job, any job, not bothered about training or prospects, he thought it would be better and more enjoyable than staying on at school. "I've done bricklaying courses at school, because that was like one day a week going to college, and the rest of the week going to school, or something like that, or one day a week at college and not going to school (laughs). Yeah, I got a certificate for it, Level 1 in bricklaying, so, but now you need GCSEs like, so it's a never-ending circle".

He had held down a job at a local supermarket for nearly two years "but that kind of fizzled out… you know, when you do something for a long time, it gets boring". He admitted that he had not been laid off because of the economic situation or because the supermarket was cutting back on staff, and acknowledged that it was because he had not been a model or even reliable employee. He was now unemployed and was trying

to find a job "but I can't find one, can't find one nowhere… everything I tried. It's just like, with my employment record….."

Alex lived in a hostel and said that he had found the one day a week course helpful, "Yeah it's helpful, I've actually, I was one mark off passing my test, which I was quite gutted about, so hopefully I'll pass this time". He said the course was better than just hanging about at the hostel and said that everyone in the group got on. Like many others in the group, he was full of praise for the teacher, "Yeah, she's good…if I'd had her at school I'd have been alright… I've got better English and maths now than what I had and they help me sort my CV out, help me find a job". He said that he would travel to Norwich or Kings Lynn if he could find the right course. "Yeah, I mean the Job Centre know I've been attending this course and like it'll do you some good, you know, help you find a job, and I'm taking the help instead of throwing it back in peoples' faces… Yeah, and if you'd have said to me, like if I was sat here at 16 and you said to me, 'is the course any good', I would have said 'no it's a load of c**p', but now I need the help so I'm taking it". He said that he would prefer an apprenticeship, but that any job would do.

Margaret

Margaret was 18 and had gone to an 11-16 school in North Norfolk and then done an E2E course at college before moving to West Norfolk. She had taken several GCSEs and got some pass grades but had not got grade Cs in maths and English. She had completed the course but then found that there wasn't a course that suited her. She had always wanted to become a mechanic and was trying to get onto some sort of course that would enable her to accomplish that. She lived in a hostel in West Norfolk. She was trying to get a place on the Prince's Trust course: "my friend has just come off it and loved it". She was also considering going to a college course in Norwich: "like you do mechanics for two and half days, and you do your English and your maths the other two and half days". I asked if it would bother her having to go to Norwich to do the course: "I'd rather it was local because then you haven't got to worry too much, have you, about getting there, but I'll still do it, it's what I want to do and it's better than nothing really".

She had recently tried a mechanics' course elsewhere in the county but it had not worked out. This seemed to be partly about the journey, and partly that the course wasn't quite what she wanted: "It just wasn't what I wanted to do, like I want to be a mechanic on cars, like… peds… and I didn't… I was like, no, I'd learnt everything really quick and I was like… I want to be on cars, so... It was still quite a distance to travel, because I had to be there like, I was supposed to be there at like 9 I think, and then finish at 5, and it was just, then you had to like, I had to walk all the way from, do you

know where Tesco's is? From there all the way in to the town, and then get my bus, and then come all the way home and it was just too much".

Like all the others on this one day a week course, she spoke very positively about the course and the tutor: "I love this, I think it's great… Yeah, I've been here every week, apart from that one week when I done that work (the mechanics' course). I get on really well with X (the tutor), and everyone else. I started new here but I've got good friends here now. I'd love a job, but at the moment in my life I think I'd just rather do a course, do something easy-going now… I'd like to get a job, but not yet, if that makes any sense?"

(The tutor described her as having been a pleasure to work with: "It's sad that these kids have got so much inside them, and yet, the thing is you're in a hostel… trying to get some qualifications, if she gets a job she can't afford the cost of the hostel, because the prices go up so much, she's in a Catch 22. If she gets a job, or if she takes.. she might have to go to Norwich or Kings Lynn, if she goes to Norwich or Kings Lynn then she has to join a hostel in Norwich or Kings Lynn, if she joins a hostel in Norwich or Kings Lynn she's actually really… at risk… within about 3 months… because they are so rough, and we know that from everywhere else, and the key workers, and she's a very attractive, very petite lovely little lady, and it wouldn't be hard for her to actually go… one way or the other, isn't that sad… and she wants to be a mechanic, or a hairdresser… and she's just, you know, and it's not fair is it?" She felt that although Margaret was "blaming" the transport and the level of the recent mechanics course as the reason for not continuing with it, there were perhaps issues about how she "took to" the people running the course after the rather protective and familiar atmosphere of the one day course where she got on well with the other students and knew the tutor well).

Clive

Clive is 19, went to the local high school and sixth form college and is currently unemployed, living at home, and attending a one day a week course for NEET youngsters aimed at helping them to improve their qualifications, develop their confidence and chances of getting into work or college courses. His grades were 'not very good' when he left school. He lives at home with his parents. Like several of the young people we interviewed he had not really enjoyed school, but neither had he enjoyed work experience, so he was not sure what he wanted to do at 16. He did not demonstrate the antipathy to school which some interviewees displayed, he just shrugged his shoulders and said that a lot of the time it was boring. In the end he stayed on at the college to do BTech courses in Business and Leisure and Tourism. He passed the Business course but failed the Leisure and Tourism course "because I didn't

hand in the work". He stayed on a second year in order to finish the work but still did not manage to pass the course so "after the two years at college, that was it, I left and I came here" (the one day a week course).

He said that he just wanted to get a job, and that any job would do. He said that an apprenticeship would be good but seemed to feel that there was not much chance of him getting one. He felt that there were "not many around", and that he would not be well placed anyway given his situation and record at school and college. "Just get me a job… any job". I asked him if there were any courses or jobs in Kings Lynn or Norwich which might appeal but he said "I don't fancy the travel". He said that he would quite like a course on "something like being an electrician" if such a thing were to be possible locally. As with the other students on the one day course, he was positive about the course, "Yeah, it's fine". When I asked him what he thought he would do when the course ended (in four weeks time), he said, "I've no idea, I haven't planned that far ahead".

Stanley

Stanley is 17 and went to school outside the area. He left school at 16 without GCSE grade Cs in maths and English and with Fs and Gs in other subjects. He had a job for a month "helping out" but this was only temporary, and so he had started to come to the Wednesday course because he wasn't sure what else to do. Like several of the other youngsters at the course, he had not really enjoyed school and had looked forward to leaving but was now having second thoughts: "When I was at school I wanted to quit but then when I left school I wanted to go back".

He would have liked to have carried on in the job, even though it was not really a job with prospects or training "It was just to get a bike and then a car". He had been on the course for two weeks and was looking for a job. He was quite sure he did not want a college course and wanted "any sort of job… like shift work in a factory… as long as it is not an apprenticeship". When I asked him why he didn't want an apprenticeship, he said that it was because he thought that apprenticeships did not pay a good wage ("It's s*** money" were his actual words). When I asked if he would consider going to Norwich or Kings Lynn to get a job he was not keen, citing his own transport as an issue: "I wouldn't go to Norwich or Kings Lynn at the moment because my transport is not that reliable but when my new bike is on the road… I'll sort of have more… it's a bigger bike and it's quicker and that, so I can get places quicker and easier".

He said that he was doing the course to improve his grades and said it was "OK… well, it's alright… you work at your own pace".

Kevin

Kevin is 17 and went to a high school in North Norfolk. He had not enjoyed school, and although he had not enjoyed his work experience, he was sure he wanted to just leave education and get a job. He admitted that his grades were poor and he had not got maths or English GCSE grade Cs. He had been looking for a job for about a year but nothing had come up, "It's just hard to get one". When I asked him what he had done he said, "Just this course, that's it really". He said that he liked coming to the course, he had made friends here and "they all got on". He thought he had got something out of the course but found it hard to say exactly what, other than that he liked coming and had friends – and got on well with the tutor. "It's like school, but it's better sort of thing… you can just like get on with it without… like in school the teacher just told us to write everything down, but here you can actually get on and do your own sort of work.. and I get on with people OK here". When I asked what he hoped to move on to when the course ended he said that he really wanted a job, but that he might be going on an E2E course.

Elena

Elena spoke fluent English, albeit with a European accent, and came across as an intelligent, capable and very socially accomplished person. She was 17 years old, from Eastern Europe, and had lived and gone to school in Ireland from the ages of 11-16 and attended a girls' Catholic school, had enjoyed it, and was very positive generally about education and school. Moved with family to England at 16 but was too old to register for high school but had gained maths and English Level 1 qualifications over the summer.

She registered for an Art and Design course at COWA starting in September 2008. She had really enjoyed it and spoke very positively about the course, the college, her teachers and her peers, "I loved the course…. You learn something every day… it was just great. I was very happy and very pleased with the quality of the course and the helpfulness of the tutors and the people on the course". She did the course for 2 months but then had to pull out because of major family problems. She was no longer living with her father and was now living in a hostel. Finance was the major reason for withdrawal… "I was getting £30 a week to go to college but this was not enough to live on and so left college and have been trying to get a job. This isn't easy because of the credit crunch plus most of the jobs ask for NVQs and level 2 qualifications and experience from previous employment, but I haven't got either of those things and I can't get Level 2 qualifications because I can't afford to go to college".

Although she was receiving £30 EMA, this was not enough to cover her accommodation and living costs so she left the course and was looking for any form of employment.

This had not proved easy and although she spoke good English, the lack of a Level 2 qualification in English was restricting her in her choice of applications. She appeared to be resigned to looking for jobs without training as her accommodation bills of £50 a week were becoming difficult to meet. Although she was extremely polite and helpful (one got the impression she would make a very good employee and one who would be very quick to learn), she felt that "the system" did discriminate against people in her position. Her long term aspiration was to get back into education once she had sorted out her short term financial pressures but it had not proved easy to find even a low level job without training. At present she is looking for any job that will bring in some money to enable her to pay her bills.

11 The potential of ICT to reduce student dropout and disengagement from education

11.1 Recent research on the educational uses of new technology suggests that ICT is not the unproblematic educational miracle that some UK politicians have claimed. However, there is some emerging evidence that ICT can be used to improve educational outcomes, and one question pertinent to this study is the extent to which developments in ICT are being used to reduce student dropout and disengagement from education. The issues involved are wide-ranging, encompassing the issue of the 'digital divide' in the UK and in Norfolk, the efficacy of learning platforms or VLEs, the use of ICT to communicate with parents and carers over attendance, punctuality and progress issues, the use of ICT for educational networking and modes of distance learning, the use of Web 2.0 applications such as podcasts, blogs and wikis to facilitate collaborative working, and the use of ICT to engage pupils in learning and to develop learner autonomy, self-regulation, and social/study/work skills.

11.2 Evidence collected from Connexions' Personal Advisors, teachers working with NEET youngsters and interviews with NEET youngsters themselves suggested that young people who were NEET were significantly less likely to have access to the internet and broadband connection. One member of the Connexions team suggested that as many as 40% of NEET youngsters did not have internet access and there was further evidence to support this view from a small survey of NEET youngsters undertaking a one day a week course to help to develop their work skills and qualifications, where 5 of the 12 students reported that they did not have access to the internet at home or in the hostel. In individual interviews with NEET young people, this was a keenly felt grievance, particularly where internet access was available in the hostel they were living in, but was limited to members of staff. In the case of this Norfolk based course, the tutor had used the course to give them the ability to use the internet to look for educational opportunities and employment possibilities, and to access ALAN Tests and other educational resources, as well as helping them to use ICT to improve and refine their CVs. The tutor regarded the facility for each pupil to access the internet and work on PCs whilst on the course as an important asset, and one which increased students' motivation to attend the course, and their levels of concentration and commitment during the course of the day. Connexions' Advisors working with traveller pupils felt that this was a particular problem with traveller families, where connectivity was a real logistical problem, apart from issues of hardware provision.

11.3   Interviews with three members of the Norfolk Advisory Service with responsibility for ICT and Inclusion issues revealed that recent initiatives and investments in ICT, targeted particularly at inclusion issues, may well be starting to improve digital access and reduce digital exclusion across the county, as well as helping to reduce pupil disaffection and disengagement from learning. In addition to e-learning projects that were well established, BECTa's Home Access programme and LEA investments in ICT focusing on looked after children had recently provided over 400 computers with full connectivity for cared for young people in the county, together with the development of the Norfolk Virtual School and online tutoring with telephone support to provide extra support for these pupils. In terms of the deployment of these resources, the LEA had taken a broad minded and "liberal" interpretation of the guidelines for the allocation of PCs and broadband access so that machines would not be "taken away" from pupils when they reached the age of 16, and wherever possible, PCs and internet access were provided to pupils at as early an age as possible. It was felt that in terms of the national implementation of BECTa's recent inclusion funding initiative, the county was at the forefront of recent inclusion developments in ICT, although in several of these areas, the initiatives have only recently been implemented and it is therefore difficult to gauge their impact. By September 2010, it is envisaged that the County's External Learning Opportunities Directory will be maintained centrally and will list all Norfolk's external provision. Several LEA respondents envisaged that the development of VLEs by schools and colleges will be more embedded and extended in terms of communication across the system, and with parents and pupils, but in terms of virtual information sharing and communication across the county, there might be some problems arising from the use of different platforms. (West Norfolk schools are not using *Fronter,* a few schools have gone for different platforms, and COWA uses Blackboard).

11.4   Against this, there was more qualified feedback on the impact of *Notschool.* In spite of impressive figures nationally about the numbers of young people going on to post 16 courses after engaging with *Notschool,* (see www.notschool.net for further details on this), there has not been massive county wide take-up of the programme and the substantial costs involved in "signing up" pupils to the project are felt to be an issue. In terms of the impact of the project on students in West Norfolk, numbers involved are quite small and the project has only "seen through" one cohort of year 11 students. Out of the three YR 11's from last year one progressed on to a Modern Apprenticeship at COWA, another progressed on to NVQ L1 in Hair and Beauty at the college and the last one went to NCH to do an E2E course. Out of eleven YR 11 leavers this June all but one has applied for a college course to date. There have been three successful applicants so far for Hair and Beauty, Uniformed Services and Music, the rest are currently awaiting their interviews.

11.5   UK research on the use of ICT in schools and colleges suggests that although some institutions are making extensive and effective use of ICT to track performance and attendance, help with transition, provide for off site working and engage reluctant or vulnerable learners, the use made of various ICT applications is extremely variable. A recent symposium on the use of ICT in FE institutions (CAL, 2009) reported that only a small minority of institutions used ICT to get learners to solve problems, or to get students to work collaboratively. There were also disparities between institutions in terms of the effective use of learning platforms, and wikis. The development of high quality off-site working tools could be a particularly important issue for schools and colleges with widely dispersed students (see "Remote Control" and "Make the connection via on-screen applications", Education Guardian 10 March 2009 for details of recent innovation and good practice in this area, see also http://history-wiki.wikispaces.com/ for a good example of the potential of wikis for providing opportunities for off-site working). Other areas which might profitably be explored are the ideas and approaches emerging from the Mobile Learning Network (http://www.molenet.org.uk/), exploring the use of mobile phones and MP3 players to promote "mobile learning". Recent BECTa and OECD studies on the use of ICT in education make the point that many educational institutions have been reluctant to explore the possibilities of using technologies which young people routinely use outside school and college for educational purposes.

11.6   Given the proliferation of initiatives in this area, it is difficult for even the most enthusiastic proponents of new technology to keep up with every innovation and initiative. Not all institutions and authorities use the DCSF sponsored s-cool site for managing NEETs and September Guarantees (www.s-cool.com), or BECTa's *Generator* self-assessment tool, not all post-16 institutions have developed the use of blogs and podcasts to the same extent. The move towards all schools and colleges having systems for the development of e-portfolios will add a further agenda to explore (and work on) in the area of ICT. Unsurprisingly, given the breadth of areas for developing the use of ICT to motivate, engage and retain learners, schools have explored different strands of the ICT agenda. One Norfolk school is exploring the development of an alumni site on the lines of *Friends Reunited,* to develop social networking and inclusive post-16 networking, others have consciously tried to develop course websites or e-feedback systems. Not all issues relating to ICT concerned "cutting edge" applications and developments. "How to make PowerPoint less boring?" emerged as an issue which may well be relevant to many schools and colleges. Several students reported that the emergence of PowerPoint as a common mode of session delivery, with some teachers not being particularly skilled in how to make best use of the application, was one of the causes of disengagement from learning. This was not a condemnation of PowerPoint *per se;* students felt that some teachers used PowerPoint more effectively than others.

11.7   This range of approaches raises the question of to what extent there is collaboration across institutions in Norfolk, aimed at sharing ideas and best practice in ICT. The very different ways in which learning platforms are used is one possible area for sharing good practice. There are some VLEs which are extensively used by students, and others which are to a large degree bypassed by the students' own Facebook network. At the most basic, functional level, learning platforms might be used to inform students of when college sessions were cancelled, so as to avoid scenarios where students from outlying areas catch an early bus into the college, only to find that the teaching session has been cancelled and they then have to wait for the evening bus back home (see section 10).

11.8   Given the range of developments and initiatives in ICT, many of which have implications for NEET agendas, the question of how schools and colleges in West Norfolk and the county as a whole are planning to share information, ideas and good practice effectively in the area of ICT and inclusion seems an important one to consider.

12 Ways in which some schools outside West Norfolk are trying to reduce the numbers of young people becoming NEET

12.1 Although we found many examples of innovative and effective approaches to reducing the chances of students becoming NEET in West Norfolk, UEA's work with schools in initial teacher education, and its contacts with the county's advisory service made us aware that there was also much good practice in the rest of the county.

12.2 Although it was not possible to comprehensively explore work in this area in every school and college in the county, given the fairly short time scale for the research, members of the research team attempted to explore facets of good practice, and new approaches to preventative action in a number of schools and institutions in Norfolk. We are aware that some of these strategies, such as the extension of alternative curriculum provision, have been developed in the vast majority of schools in the county, but there may be some ideas and initiatives which are not familiar to all schools, and we hope that the report might help to disseminate some of these potentially useful ideas and approaches. An attempt was also made where possible to gain some insight into the factors which made these initiatives and interventions effective.

12.3 It is worth noting that many of the initiatives which have been developed have funding and resource implications. Creating small "nurture group" classes, having non-teaching year heads, running the KS 4 Engagement Project, enrolling pupils on the *Notschool* programme, costs money. One respondent with responsibility for the *Notschool* programme in one institution pointed out that although at around £5,000, the initiative was not cheap, in terms of its success rates, it was money well invested in terms of the costs associated with young people becoming long-term NEET. One of the suggestions arising from the report is that the LEA should lobby as strongly as possible, and construct as robust a financial case as possible for sustained investment in programmes which have been shown to have some success in reducing NEET numbers. Not all initiatives did carry a substantial financial cost, and some facets of successful interventions might be tailored to reduce the resource and capital costs involved.

12a The Key Stage 4 Engagement Programme

12.4 Currently in its fourth (and final year) this DCSF funded project, involving students in the central area (plus students from Downham Market) has had considerable success in working with (over 300) pupils who had been identified as having issues in attendance, behaviour and attainment. Although the figures for 2008-9 have not yet been collated, the 2007/8 figures suggested that 88% of the pupils involved in the programme

emerged with positive outcomes when post-16 destinations were tracked, and over half the students involved were felt to have made progress in terms of their attendance, behaviour and attainment. Although the funded pilot was centred mainly on the central area, it was being extended to rural 'pathfinder' schools (Connexions Manager). Further research might focus on why the initiative had more success in some contexts than others.

The 2009-10 action plan gave the following reasons for the successful outcomes:

1. Student access to accredited external learning opportunities for up to 2 days a week, matched to their interests/needs.

2. Providers quality assured and listed in an electronic directory.

3. Two Service Level Agreements between the Local Authority and Schools and the Providers and Schools which clarify responsibilities involved.

4. The attachment of a "Trusted Adult" to each student on the programme, chosen from the student's host institution, and carefully selected to closely mentor the students on a weekly basis.

5. Funding of £1000 per student to support the processes involved.

6. Half-termly meetings with the providers, school keyworkers and the steering group.

7. Two Trusted Adult Support Workers to support the programme, hosted at The Hewett School and Sewell Park College and available to help other Trusted Adults and providers.

8. A transition programme which takes place during a week in the Spring term for students who are still unsure about what they would like to do post-16. Students have access to a variety of post-16 opportunities and Connexions' PAs (in partnership with Trusted Adults) design a personalised programme for each student for the week. This is then followed-up with a support meeting to evaluate the programme and support the student with any decisions about their futures.

Funding for the programme will be significantly reduced for 2009/10 and will then cease. The Key Stage 4 Engagement Programme brand will no longer exist, although a version of it is likely to continue as one of the pathways within the Foundation Learning Tier. The electronic External Learning Opportunities Directory will continue to be maintained centrally and will list all Norfolk's external provision, Quality Assured by a central officer funded collectively by the schools.

This raises the question of what will happen to both the structures which have been developed, and the lessons which have learned from the programme when funding stops. To what extent can the good practice and systems which have been developed

be disseminated across the county, and how easy will it be to sustain progress without funding?

12b   The Pathways Project

12.5   The project operates a Youth Engagement centre based in two industrial units. The units are jointly managed by three high Schools. The centre provides resources for a range of need. Some students access the provision instead of a mainstream school for as much as two or three days a week, whilst others access specific activities for as little as an afternoon. Participants are from the ages of 13 to 16. At any given time the unit provides provision for no more than 20 students, however in combination the centre is able to offer provision to over 70 across the course of a week.

In essence this project aims to incorporate the best practice from current alternative provision into a new provision for the area, which is operated and managed by the three High Schools themselves. Students on alternative curriculum programmes often become dislocated from their school and in many cases have been permanently excluded from it. This project aims to show that this is not necessary and that schools working in collaboration with the voluntary and community sector can provide resources to meet the needs of this group whilst maintaining them as part of the school community. This project aims to provide a localised model of delivery in a small scale unit close to the home schools, thereby maintaining the connection with the resources and provision available at the home site. This massively enlarges the potential for the project to offer a wide range of learning opportunities and importantly maintains the young people within their home community. At the same time the project demonstrates the benefits to the school of investing in these vulnerable and challenging young people. Early evaluation of the programme suggests that it will be helpful in reducing the prospects of some of these students becoming completely disengaged from education and drifting into social and educational exclusion.

12c   "The Lunchtime Club"

12.6   One school operates a very successful lunchtime provision for its most vulnerable learners. Staffed by specially selected staff ideally suited to forming relationships with young people, the lunch club gives refuge and support for young people with a range of issues, from special educational needs to emotional health issues. The Lunchtime Club has provided support and stability for students who find the unstructured environment of lunchtimes very hard. In this way it has had a great impact on reducing lunchtime incidents of poor behaviour, and it has also helped potential isolates to make friends and gain in social confidence. Many of them have started to develop friendships with

pupils outside those who regularly attend the club. It is simply called "The Lunchtime Club", and no further explanation of its purpose is given in order to avoid any stigma that might be attached to those attending. Initially invitations were sent out to a number of pupils identified as being potentially "at risk" by the Special Needs Department. It simply explained that a room would be available for pupils to eat their packed lunches if they just wanted somewhere to sit, and that games would be available for anyone who wished to socialise in the room after eating their lunch. The club is supervised by a number of Learning Support Assistants and part of the success of the club is the skills of interaction of these LSAs in talking to the pupils who attend. There are fairly strict rules of behaviour and anyone engaging in disruptive, aggressive or anti-social behaviour is excluded. This provides a safe space for pupils to relax and enjoy the dinner break and in the course of this many of them are encouraged in a low key way to develop their skills of social interaction with other attendees and with the LSAs who supervise the club. The club has proved to be extremely popular and attendance is often in excess of 30 pupils, occasionally presenting problems of overcrowding and limited access to the games and activities which are available in the room. Initially, the membership was by discreet invitation, but as other pupils passed by the room, many of them thought the atmosphere in the room seemed attractive and asked if they could attend, so the club has evolved into being "open access". One teacher acknowledged that pupils sometimes complain about the quality of the games and resources provided, but the club has in a low key way become an unremarked but stable part of life at the school. One of the teachers who has been involved in observing the club in operation reported that in addition to reducing incidents of misbehaviour and bullying over the lunch hour, it had helped to improve pupils' attitudes to school as a whole, and had developed their confidence and skills of interaction with others. Unlike some of the initiatives to improving student engagement and commitment to school, it was not expensive to resource and there is a general consensus that it has played a helpful part in improving the atmosphere at the school in addition to helping some pupils to become more socially integrated into school life.

12d   Peer Mentoring

12.7   The head, a senior member of support staff, and a pupil from another Norfolk school came into the university to give a lecture to PGCE students about the school's use of peer mentoring to support pupils who might in one way or another need support. As well as the head teacher and a lead Learning Support Assistant, one of the pupil peer mentors also led part of the lecture, which was to the whole cohort of the secondary PGCE course. Students from the school also took part in the professional development seminars following the lecture, to give advice about class management. The session received exceptionally positive evaluations from the students and was a very effective

demonstration of the potential of such approaches for improving the ethos and working atmosphere in the school, and developing pupils' confidence and leadership skills. The headteacher said that the scheme had been extremely helpful in improving the overall performance and climate in the school, and that it had helped to improve the attitudes to school of many of the pupils who had been involved in the project.

12e   Non-teaching heads of house supported by non-teaching academic mentors

12.8   One Norfolk school is moving towards a complete system of non-teaching Heads of House, supported by non-teaching academic mentors. Although the resource implications of the move are clearly substantial, it was felt that the system has started to make a significant difference to the atmosphere and ethos of the school and the aspirations of pupils. The Head felt that in addition to massively increasing the amount of pastoral support for pupils, the change enabled much more time and attention to be focused on influencing students' ideas about future and feasible career options, and about what they might hope to get out of being at school. An assistant head reported that the change had helped to change attitudes to school and to attainment with some, but not all pupils. "I came here from a school where most of the pupils were self-motivated and wanted to succeed academically…. A lot of pupils here have to be supported in moving towards this attitude to education, some of them need a lot of help and support but their attitude to school and to education can be turned round with skilful and sensitive support…. This system means that year heads are not spending most of their time being reactive… fire fighting and responding to behaviour incidents… together with the mentor they can be much more constructive and focus on other things.. and develop more positive relations with pupils who could go either way". Many of the Heads of House had particular skills-sets, such as counselling, mentoring, and in one case mental health issues, and this meant that the school was less reliant on having to bring in outside agencies. The move towards non teaching Heads of House started off as a pilot, but the outcomes have been sufficiently encouraging for it to be extended so that from September, it will run across the whole age range.

12f   Courses for young offenders, young people considered at risk of becoming young offenders and for cared for children run by Norfolk Museums Service

12.9   Norfolk Museums Service runs three different courses for young people who are considered to be at 'high risk' of becoming NEET. They are currently of the seventh cycle of a 10-12 week course for young offenders. This involves attendance for two hours a week at the Castle Museum and participants "sign up" as part of their community supervision order and attend instead of reporting to the Youth Offending Team Office. A museums educator explained that "they are very varied in nature…

some have tags, one has to report daily to the Youth Offending Team, even on Christmas Day.. there is one 15 year old who is a delight to work with, has a beaming smile and appears to have a very nice nature – but he is on a two year supervision order so presumably he must have done something quite serious".

"The students work on Arts based projects and some of them do get quite involved… they can do the Bronze Arts Award and one boy is working on his Silver Award. 80% of the award can be done at the Castle… it includes helping to host the final celebration at the end of the course, and helping with the catering. Some of them help with the editing side of things, animation and filming, doing video diaries. Some of them use the collections for inspiration…. some of them do research projects on Crime and Punishment".

There is also the YISP Course (Youth Inclusion Support Panel)… this is multi-agency preventative work with children aged 8-12, for pupils identified as being at risk of offending. This is a 3 month programme which also involves working with parents as well. The youngsters are identified as being at risk of offending by the police or by headteachers. Parents or carers come with them to the first session and someone from school comes to the last session so they can be involved and witness or celebrate the positive outcomes.

Another museums' educator reported that many, but not all of the pupils involved in the courses had made progress in their social skills and general confidence over the course of the 12 weeks, and that most of them had been positive about their experiences on the course. The Youth Offending Team had also reported positively on the progress of pupils who had attended the courses for those who had offended or who were considered to be at risk of offending.

The museums service also run a course for cared for children. "This can involve work on the Egyptians which some of them know a bit about from primary school. Again it is based on a creative arts based approach including filming and animation work. One of the youngsters on the course has started to attend Museum Club and we are hoping that others will follow suit. We also run a summer school for the same target audience. We try to give them support to take responsibility for their behaviour but it can also involve practical support in terms of helping them with bus fares. We try to get them to see the museum as a safe space and a public, community place where they are made to feel welcome".

The Museum is also currently in the process of developing courses for young people who are NEET.

12g Finding part time employment and voluntary work opportunities for young adults with learning difficulties: The Assist Trust

12.10 The Assist Trust is a charity which works to help young adults with learning difficulties to become independent and to move on to employment. Part of their approach to the long term goal of moving members into full time employment is to provide part time work to develop members' confidence, skills of interactions with others, sense of responsibility and the ability to cope with more extensive integration into work.

Three "Job Coaches" look for employers and organisations who will be prepared to offer members the opportunity of part time or voluntary work. At present this supports 12 members in paid work and 49 members in voluntary work. Members do on average 6 hours per week, but some have moved on to full time employment. "We believe that everybody has the right to opportunities in life. We also believe that if you don't try you don't know what you are capable of, so we encourage some managed risk taking. This means the members are allowed to make mistakes, so they can learn from those mistakes".

The organisation generally looks for small independent organizations who are more likely to support a small local charity: "They are mostly sensitive and more patient with people with learning difficulties and easier to deal with… When asking for a placement we emphasize the level of support (from all three job coaches) how long the support is available (as long as the member and employer feels it is necessary) and that we are only asking for a small amount of time the member will be with them per week" (average of 2 hours per week to begin with). Several members do paid work acting as reception managers for a few hours a week at the city headquarters of the charity. This provides valuable opportunities for several members to move towards fuller forms of employment The Trust offers strong levels of support to members to support their development and to reassure the employers providing these opportunities: "We operate a properly organized review process and share all relevant info with the staff group. This means we take into account the information collated over the years the member is growing until they and we feel they are ready to try this step into independence". The provision of "small steps" towards independence is thought to be an important element in the success of this work.

12h Advanced bridging courses at a sixth form college in Norfolk

12.11 The college has been selected by QCA as one of four case studies on best practice in developing post 16 advanced bridging courses. The course is funded through the LSC and the local authority.

Students who are not ready to progress to level 3 courses, usually because they do not have the required grades at GCSE, take a bridging year at level 2. Applicants can choose from a range of BTEC courses including Leisure and Tourism, Business, Countryside Management, ICT, and Health and Social Care. As part of the level 2 programme, students also have the opportunity to retake qualifications in GCSE maths or GCSE English Language if necessary and to undertake extended work experience. They can also choose an apprenticeship programme and, from September, sport and other programmes. About 40 students are on the bridging course each year and the "bridging course" is a number of options rather than a prescribed course.

A number of factors may lead to a student undertaking a bridging course rather than going straight onto a level 3 programme: poor GCSE grades, lack of confidence, or not yet quite ready for level 3. The teacher works hard to develop their academic and social confidence and their learning skills, and believes that their experiences on the course help to develop their emotional maturity and willingness to apply themselves wholeheartedly to the challenge of succeeding in whatever elements of the course they are pursuing. Motivating students by responding sensitively to their different needs and personalities is seen as crucially important to their progress. There is a learning support assistant to help students with particular learning needs. The teacher who leads the course believes that many of those who have been disaffected and disengaged in the mainstream school have a good chance of being successful on the bridging programme.

Between 80 and 90% of the students on the course go on to level 3 programmes, others go into employment. It is clear from talking to the students that they enjoy the course and there is a very positive classroom climate in teaching groups. It is apparent from talking to students and the college principal that although the course does provide the opportunity for applied and active learning, the success of the course depends in large part on the exceptional skills of the lead teacher. Several of the students unabashedly tell me that she is a wonderful teacher and how much she has done for them. The success of this course makes the important point that it is not just about course content and course design. The skills of interaction which the lead teacher possesses, and the very strong trust and working relationships she has developed with the students are an important element in the success of the venture.

12i   Exchange visits with an independent school

12.12 This was part of a broader strategy to raise pupil aspirations in an area of high social and economic deprivation. Selected pupils spend a week at an independent school and then host a return visit for pupils from the independent school. It might be supposed that there are risks involved in such approaches but the head and assistant head both

reported that there had been several gains from the project and no apparent "collateral damage".

> "Our exchange programme with Gresham's has built up gradually from a link through the Arts. It has recently culminated in a small group of students completing a residential for a week - the primary intention of this was to raise aspirations. Some of the students who attended could be classed as being disaffected and truly benefitted from the experience. They will be visiting again for the second phase. It is essential for children to understand the 'bigger picture' - that there is a world of opportunity from which they are not excluded. Gresham's Bac students completed a 4-day long visit to Oriel to study provision for predominantly SEN students and we have received very positive feedback from them regarding their experience" (Headteacher).

The visit had radically transformed the attitude to school of some of the pupils on the exchange: "I'm not quite sure why it has worked but there is one pupil who would be in trouble at this school most days who I now rarely hear about in terms of trouble. The visit seems to have transformed his ideas about what schools are for… about it being 'for them rather than for us'". Another incidental benefit of the visit was the fact that many pupils for the first time appreciated how much their teachers did for them: "Because teachers came across as being more detached and could perhaps rely on pupils just getting on with their learning… perhaps not feeling they had to work as hard to capture the attention of their pupils…. Some of our pupils started to realise that a lot of their teachers do try to go the extra mile to make the lessons interesting and to show an active interest in them".

12j   Developing the quality of work placements and links with the local community

12.13 This school had also made a big effort to improve the quality of their work experience placements, and to make the work experience that their pupils undertake more challenging and interesting:

> "Many of our students do a chunk of their timetable - so if they're not school shaped, we build an element of the school to fit them. This helps to build good links with local businesses. We also participate in a working partnership with businesses who are looking to offer jobs for the students who attend at Key Stage 4. Our community relations are improving with links with multi-national businesses in the area and getting pupils exhibiting their work in prestigious public institutions. Improving our NEET figures is essentially about raising students' aspirations, and I feel that in spite of our issues, we have increased our focus on meeting their needs".

This was felt to be partly about being more explicit with providers of work experience about the ways in which it could be helpful to pupils, and many placements had responded very positively to this in a way that had strengthened community links with the school. "Work experience can really help many of our pupils but if they are low quality, boring and do not stretch or engage them, they can almost do more harm than good… if they end up thinking that work is going to be as boring and negative as the bits of school that they don't like… but when they work well they can transform what the pupils are like back in school… they seem to be much better at putting up with the bits that don't suit them… they can see that we are doing our best and they appreciate that". The school also works assiduously to develop its links with the university as part of raising pupil aspirations. Even having an experienced member of the police on the premises and a PC support officer is seen as being helpful (apart from the presence of the police car in the school car park), in terms of helping students understand the adult world and the possible consequences of their actions: "They are very accomplished in talking with our pupils and they get across to them the seriousness of things, they bring home to them what the consequences of things will be in the grown up world in a way that we can't do…. They begin to see that in many ways, school is quite a sheltered and artificial environment". The school also has close links with Connexions and Aim Higher, and has generally been seen as making good progress partly as a result of these initiatives.

The school has also tried to dissuade pupils for settling for 'resits':

> "More often than not, students receive the message that D grades are enough to access particular courses - or that retakes are always possible if they fail at 16. We have worked hard to dispel the myth that retakes are acceptable - young people need to understand the social implications of actively disengaging and retaking. We hope they now understand how detrimental and wasteful this time period can be. I also try to insist that the local colleges tell students they need C and above to get college places… not doing retakes as a fall-back position".

12k   Reducing exclusions by improving the mechanisms for 'internal exclusion'

12.14 Many schools have worked hard to try to keep pupils within the school system and on the school premises, even if they are not able to keep them in ordinary classrooms. One school had tried to move to a position of not excluding pupils at all, and developing on site but detached provision for very challenging pupils. "We were not able to maintain that policy because sometimes there are safety issues, if for example, two pupils have

been in a fight and there is clearly going to be further trouble if they come into contact again".

> "Our Exclusion Unit is run by a single member of staff to ensure consistency. To emphasise that the time spent there is officially an 'exclusion', the timings of the day are different. Students complete work appropriate to their levels of ability whilst in situ to highlight the difference between being excluded to home, where we are unable to track their progress adequately - clearly, parents/carers are often at work when exclusions to home take place. However, if we have to exclude to home, we have a duty to provide work for students so do not fall behind".

12l   A one day a week course to support NEET youngsters in Norfolk

12.15 This is a 16 week one day a week course supported by a high school and Connexions which provides an off school site equipped with a suite of computers for NEET youngsters to work to improve their qualifications. The course is run by a very experienced and effective teacher who is particularly accomplished in her interactions with the young people on the course. There is also a Connexions advisor who helps with refining CVs and goes along with youngsters who have interviews or who are starting on new courses. In the course of the visit to the centre, several of the youngsters sat the ALAN test (some passed, some failed. One student failed by one mark and there was real support and sympathy from the other students).

> "We pay them £5 a day to come on a Wednesday, and we pay their travel expenses and we provide them with lunch… and tea and coffee and everything, and that covers all their exam fees, so we get all the exam fees done for them, we've covered all of that…. The course is to try and get them to move on, to progress like mixed and go on to Prince's Trust hopefully, I can get them in to that, which is really good for them… Angela wants to get on Prince's Trust.. we have Connexions here, Emily, who works with them as well to get their CVs done and to actually bring in the latest vacancies through Connections, and will contact them".

The Connexions' Advisor stressed that the success of the course was partly due to the skills of the teacher, and in particular, her skills of interaction with the pupils. Many of the students were disappointed that there was going to be a two week break for the Easter Vacation. The teacher explained that especially for those who lived in local hostels, the course gave them something to do and meant that they did not have to hang about in the hostel all day. Attendance at the course also gave them a sense of self-esteem: "At least they have a little place to come to, and they call it college, not, you know, but they call it college, they say to people, I'm going to college, and it's

lovely for them, you know, they say, oh I said I've got to go to college tomorrow so, and I think, great, you know…"

The teacher who led the course felt that developing teachers who were talented in terms of getting pupils to engage with learning was crucial with NEET at-risk students: "That's the main thing… and the way in which they learn is different, and I think we need to get young teachers and older teachers to actually realise it isn't… you've got to get them engaged in it, you've got to get them to like what they're actually doing".

The course may not have been "perfect provision", but it was a good example of a comparatively modest investment that, given an inspirational tutor, could make a big difference to young peoples' attitudes. There were 14 members of the group and attendance was very good.

12m The Use of Nurture Groups at Key Stage 3

12.16 Until recently, the use of nurture groups has largely been confined to primary schools, but the increasing acknowledgement that many pupils are not perfectly developed in social and emotional terms in a way that will enable them to access the curriculum and fit into school life, has meant that several secondary schools in the country have experimented with variants on Nurture Groups or an integrated curriculum on primary school lines, which entails pupils working with the same teacher in several subjects. The creation of such teaching groups generally has resourcing implications as it is generally a small group in order to give attention to individual needs, and it often requires an experienced and accomplished member of staff to cope with the challenge of working with a group of pupils who all find learning difficult, or who do not want to learn. One senior member of staff pointed out that if such pupils were split across the year group, they tended to be simply "submerged" and that their development needs were not really addressed. In nearly all cases, the pupils in the nurture groups were the sort of students who were considered vulnerable to becoming NEET further down the line if there was not intensive intervention at an early stage.

A particularly interesting feature in one school was an attempt to build into the assessment and feedback processes elements that explicitly acknowledged progress in personal and social gains and in respect and consideration for others. It was made explicit to pupils that this was considered to be an important part of their educational progress, and feedback to pupils was based on how well they were developing in terms of making an effort to do well in lessons, and how well they were developing in terms of their ability to interact in an appropriate way with other pupils and with adults in the school.   It is now 35 years since the Hargreaves Report (1984) which strongly

advocated that assessment should acknowledge improvements in motivation and commitment, and the development of personal and social skills if learners who were cognitively less able were not to be de-motivated. More recently, contextual value added scores for schools have been predicated primarily on cognitive rather than social gains. Although "hard" mentoring models, such as assertive mentoring, have made a massive difference to the number of pupils who begin to realise that they are capable of academic success, there may be some "collateral damage" caused to pupils who are quite limited in terms of their cognitive ability. Danish approaches place considerable emphasis on the development of personal creativity and the capacity for strong, easy relationships with others (Bunting, 2006:1); Tunnard *et al.* (2008) stress the need for young people to develop "soft skills" such as confidence, motivation, self-control and interpersonal skills, and the OECD lists "key competences" to be developed through education as "thinking, making meaning, managing self, relation to others and participating and contributing" (quoted in Hattie, 2005). One question which schools might ask themselves is the extent to which assessment and feedback practices get across to pupils the importance of these aspects of progression. Holt (1984: 34) pointed out the dangers of paying insufficient heed to the affective domain of education and the importance of learners' attitudes to education:

> "Most people understand education as being made to go to a place called school, and there being made to learn something that they don't much want to learn, under the threat that bad things will be done to them if they don't. Needless to say, most people don't much like this game and stop playing as soon as they can".

Three of the schools who were experimenting with nurture groups reported that they felt they had the potential to reduce the number of pupils vulnerable to becoming NEET, but as with other initiatives, it was acknowledged that the success of such groups depended to a large extent on the teachers' skills of interaction with pupils.

12n   "Themed Thursdays"

12.17   Connexions in the southern Norfolk region offer "Themed Thursdays", aimed at lowering NEET figures, that they hold once a month. Choosing themes that will encourage young people to spend time at the centre and hopefully bring them back to speak to a PA about school training or work. Recent themes have included parents' and carers' evening, drugs and alcohol, Chlamydia screening and "Have a safe summer". They are supported by the Thetford Sexual Health Steering Group. The Third Thursday of the month a PA and a youth worker are always in attendance and prepared to help and advise. They are supported by PAYP, Youth Services, Include Shockwave and the Youth

council. Events range from films on drug addiction shown and discussed by right direction to a Thursday with live bands and BBQ. "Connexions works with many other agencies including BEST, PRU and Zone for Learning, to engage these young people and keep them in education and give them direction. They hold a job shop in the centre when they help young people fill in applications and contact employers. Many of the PA's go so far as to pick up young people from their homes to take them to these events. However as an AIG agency they may only give advice when asked for it, they cannot volunteer it. The IAG development team work with Connexions to support local schools and instruct chosen staff members in how to counsel young people in their schools. The community of practice which operates through and from the Connexions office is awesome".

12o   The importance of skills of interaction and developing good relationships with students

12.18 We came across many examples where success in improving NEET outcomes had depended on the relevant professionals possessing very strong skills of interaction with young people, and being able to develop good relationships with them. The following is a small but, we feel, good example of this. Attendance rates are generally acknowledged to be fairly difficult and intractable statistics to change and are not generally susceptible to simple, quick solutions, but one form teacher (an NQT), was able to improve the attendance rate for his class from 86 to 93% over the course of the year. Part of this was attributed to his practice of providing a muffin for all pupils who had 100% attendance for the week on Fridays. The assistant head who mentioned this pointed out that it was not the muffins *per se* which explained the improvement in the attendance rates:

> "He works really hard with them as a form tutor, he talks to them a lot outside the lessons, he spends time with them over lunchtime chatting to them, they know he is there for them and really wants to help them, he does a lot of work in terms of extra curricular activities and has got a lot of them playing volleyball…. It means something to them because he is the person giving them the muffin and his praise, respect, approval means a lot to them".

12p   Open Road

12.19 Open Road Open Road offers pupils at risk of educational exclusion the opportunity to work with cars, motorcycles and motor sport. As well as the Bracondale workshop, which now has an attached classroom, the project now also has a mobile workshop

which makes it possible for them to do outreach work with schools. They have already done work in Watton and several parts of North Norfolk. (http://www.openroadnorwich.co.uk.)

12q Activities and courses to help to re-engage pupils who have been in Pupil Referral Units

12.20 Part of the Key Stage 4 Engagement Programme, there has been an attempt to provide a broader range of reintegration activities for students who have been studying in PRUs. This has included taking small groups of students to supported visits to FE college and a course which gives students the opportunity to take courses in canoeing and bushcraft. Both these strands are designed to help pupils who have been in PRUs to reengage in education, to get them to take responsibility for their actions and to develop their ability to relate to others. The respondent who was responsible for these initiatives made the point that what works for some students doesn't work for others, and therefore a range of approaches are necessary. "Half of them really took to the college and saw it as being very different to what had alienated them in school, the other half didn't like it and were apprehensive and negative…. It was just so big. Again, about half of the group of eight students got a lot out of the canoeing and bushcraft courses, did really well and finished the course…… one student asked if he could go back and act as a volunteer and has begun to do that, but not all of them liked it and some fell by the wayside".

12r "Collapsed Curriculum days"

12.21 A number of schools were experimenting with abandoning the normal school timetable on one day of the week and having "special project" activities. Several heads and assistants felt that this was working well and that it offered the opportunity for teachers to work with pupils in a different way, and in a way that enabled them to develop stronger working relations with pupils. Most of these initiatives were comparatively recent innovations and there is perhaps a need to follow up and evaluate their progress and effect, and to share ideas on formats and focuses for such days.

13   Literature Review

13.1   The range of available literature pertaining to NEET provides numerous references and statistical data on the circumstances of young people who are disadvantaged or otherwise experiencing difficulties in making the transition between adolescence and adulthood.   A review of this material seems to offer two essential perspectives to understanding and addressing NEET effectively: that "life does not begin at sixteen" – in other words, problems that surface in mid-teens typically have roots in childhood that invariably have not been fully addressed – and that services and support for excluded young people must be integrated "across more than one domain of disadvantage".[1]

This Literature Review explores:

- some characteristics and issues of the NEET group, including statistics;
- factors which cause or contribute to young people actually or potentially becoming NEET;
- challenges to policy-making; and
- examples of good practice.

The material covered geographical areas beyond Norfolk. In addition to investigating evidence from the county's statistical neighbours, England-wide examples have been considered as well as research evidence from Europe, North America and Australia.

13a   Some characteristics and issues of NEET

13.2   The age of young people described as NEET is usually the mid and upper teens, typically 16- to 18-year olds. However, some sources cover age groups between 14 and 19, while a few encompass ages 16 to 24. The bulk of the literature reviewed here refers to 16- to 18-year olds and 14- to 19-year olds.

The diversity of NEET young people must be emphasised. As Yardley (2009) points out in her study of stigma and teenage motherhood, teenage mothers are one example of diversity within the NEET group. Furthermore, it is "problematic" to address "young people as homogeneous groups".[2]

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[1]Employability Framework for Scotland: Report of the NEET Workstream, June 2005 www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2005/08/30111605/16069 (accessed 16 May 2009); S. Pemberton (2008),
 Social Inclusion and the 'Get Heard' process: Implications for the Horizontal and Vertical Integration of Governance and Policy in the UK, *Public Policy and Administration* (23/2), 135.
[2]E. Yardley (2008), Teenage mothers' experiences of stigma, *Journal of Youth Studies* (11/6), 673. She cites MacDonald and March (2005) in her comment on the lack of NEET homogeneity.

In addition to the sub-groups which give NEET great diversity, the group tends to be characterised by episodic NEET experience. Many teenagers enter (or re-enter) NEET status for short periods – which needs to be considered for informing the targeting and delivery of effective, relevant NEET support.[3]

General and detailed statistics on NEET are widely available and in a variety of forms. BBC reporter Mark Easton, for example, blogged in February 2009 about the "plight of the 60,000 [looked-after] youngsters" in Britain. He referred to government statistics on NEET, adding that "35% of children leaving care are 'Neets' at the age of 19. But that compares with a national average of just over 6%."[4] He compared the different outcomes for care-leavers in Britain with those in Denmark: in Denmark, six out of ten enter higher education; by contrast, only six out of 100 do so in the UK.

Included here are three sets of general data, the first showing the UK relative to the OECD average and to three other OECD countries. The differences again show a sharp distinction between the UK and some other European countries:

OECD (reported in 2008 for year of reference 2006):[5]

Percentage of youth (age 15-19) not in education and unemployed

OECD average	3.0
Canada	2.9
Denmark	1.9
Ireland	2.6
United Kingdom	5.3

The UK's 5.3% is the highest within the OECD and is substantially higher not only than the OECD average but also than countries as diverse as Canada, Denmark and Ireland.[6]

13.3   The second set of general data, which was produced by Connexions Norfolk, shows NEET figures from Norfolk in comparison with the English national average, the Eastern regional average and the county's statistical neighbours as of November 2007:[7]

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[3]Employability Framework for Scotland: Report of the NEET Workstream, June 2005.
[4]Social Pedagogy in RCC, 3 February 2009, http://www.bbc.co.uk/blogs/thereporters/markeaston/
  (accessed 27 May 2009).
[5]*Education at a Glance 2008: OECD Indicators*. OECD
http://browse.oecdbookshop.org/oecd/pdfs/browseit/9608041E.PDF (accessed 23 May 2009).
[6]Although beyond the scope of this Review, the NEET figure in the UK for the 20-24 age group is 6.8%, which is lower than the OECD average of 7.3% for this age group. This might suggest that factors including UK social and educational opportunities combine to produce better outcomes for this age group compared with the teenage group.

Percentage of youth (age 16-18) NEET

National average	6.7
Suffolk	7.4
Derbyshire	6.3
Norfolk	6.1
Cornwall	6.0
Eastern Region	5.9
Devon	5.8
Herefordshire	5.7
Dorset	5.6
Cumbria	5.2
Shropshire	4.7
Somerset	4.3
Lincolnshire	4.0

The third set of figures is the most recent and indicates the percentage of 16-18 year olds who were NEET as of the end of 2008:[8]

Percentage of youth (age 16-18) NEET

Eastern region	6.2
Suffolk	7.9
Derbyshire	6.7
Devon	6.4
Cornwall	6.1
Herefordshire	5.8
Norfolk	5.2
Lincolnshire	4.4

Figures available from a recent needs assessment in Suffolk show that the highest levels of NEET "map closely to areas with high levels of multiple deprivation and low income, and highlight the multidimensional nature of deprivation and poor life chances".

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[7]http://www.norwich.gov.uk/internet_docs/docs/Partnerships/CoNP/Forums/151008/Workshop_1A_presentation_NEET.pdf (accessed 25May09). The table has been restructured for this Review in order to show percentages in decreasing order.

[8]NEET figures for Local Authority areas, http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/14-19/index.cfm?go=site.home&sid=42&pid=343&lid=337&ctype=Text&ptype=Single (accessed 25 May 2009). Compared with November 2007, Norfolk is the only county where the NEET percentage decreased. The figures reproduced here are a small excerpt from this source. The data cover all Local Authority areas in England and include estimates of the number of NEET (age group 16-18), as well as percentages.

The needs assessment also lists the Suffolk localities with the highest percentages of those NEET in the 16-18 age group:[9]

Lowestoft	11.02%
Ipswich N&E	10.83
Ipswich S&W	9.24
Haverhill	8.37

Multiple deprivation is a major factor contributing to young people who become NEET. According to the DCSF strategy for NEET in North-east Lincolnshire, the significant differences in educational achievement across this region is linked to "those with the highest levels of deprivation… and the greatest incidence of young people at risk of, or being classified as NEET" (DCSF 2009).

13b Factors causing or contributing to young people actually or potentially becoming NEET

13.4   Social class background is a major factor in those who become or at risk of becoming NEET. As Thompson (2009, 34) points out:

> Participation of 16–17 year olds in education and training declines
> markedly with social class position, with a commensurate increase in those
> in government-supported training, those in employment without training,
> or those not in employment, education or training.

Thompson's sample dealt with data from England and Wales. The European context also discusses the significance of social background (Ianelli and Smyth 2008) and the findings of Simpson and Cieslik (2007) supports previous research "which links social background and the structure of opportunities to different transition routes [to adulthood]". In their study of NEET in Canadian and UK contexts, Côté and Bynner refer to the challenge posed by disadvantaged social backgrounds making the transition to adulthood, remarking that young people compensate for such disadvantage "by exercising their own agency in ways that have risks and benefits" (2008, 262). They add that young people may "require additional time in making the transition to adulthood, often on a trial-and-error basis'" This underscores the previous point that those who are NEET do not constitute a homogeneous category. The individual circumstances and needs presented by young people must be addressed in supporting this age group.

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[9]*Joint Strategic Needs Assessment for Suffolk, 2007*, 94, 95.
www.nfer.ac.uk/emie/inc/fd.asp?doc=CYPP_SUFF.pdf (accessed on 25 May 2009).

Particular mention will be made of pregnancy, transport and rural locations as factors causing or contributing to those who become NEET, beginning with pregnancy. Statistically, the United States has the highest adolescent birth rate among similarly industrialised countries: for every 1000 females 15 to 19 years of age in 1992, there were 4 births in Japan, 8 in the Netherlands, 33 in the UK, 41 in Canada and 61 in the US (Klein 2005, 283).[10]   There is a high correlation between poverty and teenage pregnancy in the UK and elsewhere, though teen pregnancy in the UK is the highest in Western Europe.   Some of the popular media speak stridently against teenage pregnancy, equating it with social downturn and moral shortcomings. In addition, the provision of benefits is often cited as the reason for teenagers becoming parents. The situation is not likely to be always as simplistic as this. Taking the reverse standpoint, for example, Klein points out (regarding the US's highest teenage birth rate) that America has far less generous benefit provisions than in Europe, therefore "it is unlikely that the current welfare system motivates or explains American teenagers' decisions to have children".   The reasons seem to be more complex.   Furthermore, teenage pregnancy does not necessarily result in the dire outcome which popular media suggest. Some have pointed out that "having a child can motivate a girl to return to education" (Tickle 2006) and spur teenage mothers "to do better" (Spear 2002).   Examples of innovative approaches to teenage pregnancy vis-à-vis NEET status are mentioned in the section below on good practice.

13.5   **Transport and rural locations**

The head of an 11-19 comprehensive school in Cornwall which is a 25-mile round trip away from the nearest college has described problems of transport, with attendant impact on NEET, in the following way:

> "The friction of distance means significant numbers of young people don't engage in education or training post-16. … What that means is that significant numbers don't bother. The social impact of geography is to create social problems… as young people are dropping out of the system at 16".

As a result, this school head is pushing for a new Sixth Form college at an accessible distance in order to address the NEET problem (*Western Morning News* 2009).

The impact of poor public transport combined with rural or hard-to-reach areas is felt in ways both direct and indirect on NEET.   In their evaluation of Activity Agreements (AAs), a government initiative targeting 16- and 17-year olds in work but not training, Maguire and Thompson (2009) cited one of the reasons given by teenagers for not taking up AAs: "an unwillingness or inability to leave the immediate area, in particular

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[10]The OECD figures discussed earlier indicate 2.1% figure for 15-19 NEETs for the United States, which distinguishes it substantially from the 5.3% reported for the UK.

in rural areas." Similarly, Connexions Norfolk (2008) cited transport as a barrier to employment, while a Resolve2 project based in Wiltshire has been funded by the European Social Fund (ESF) in order to reduce NEETs in Wiltshire and Swindon, "particularly those living in rural or inner town areas of deprivation or who have profiles of multiple deprivation". Mention will also be made of a Canadian Council on Learning report (*Lessons in Learning* 2005), which highlighted the problem of school drop-out rates among high-risk groups: these rates are higher in some parts of rural and small-town Canada than in urban areas (excepting impoverished inner-city areas). While this report did not categorise these drop-outs as NEET-equivalent, the impact of rural locations on education echoes aspects of what NEET data have indicated within England.

13.6   In addition to the problems posed by multiple deprivation, rural localities and transport, **other challenges** must be considered regarding the NEET groups. Much research deals with issues faced by young people as they make the transition from adolescence to adulthood. For example, McCrystal *et al.* (2007) have pointed out the "increasing detachment from the norms of mainstream society" during these transitional years. Much as Côté and Bynner (2008) noted that some young people may require more time to accomplish the transition, some of which may involve trial and error, the literature speaks about the extra difficulties posed by the liminal stages of the teenage years.

Some researchers have addressed issues of discourse, referring to messages of economic worth outweighing personal identity (Fergusson 2004), of the focus on economic concern of education and employment outweighing personal and individual dimensions of vulnerable young people (Yardley 2008) and the "commodification of young people under the guise of preparing them" for the economy (McGregor 2009). McGregor is referring to the Australian context but views of a similar vein have been made within the UK by many others, including Yardley (2008) and Simmons (2008), the latter who states that "the needs of those [who are NEET] … are subordinated to the needs of an English economy that is increasingly based upon low-skill, low-pay work relations". In view of the current economic recession, Corney (2009) has emphasised that specific measures are required to meet the needs of 16- and 17-year olds. Finally, the work of Wilson *et al*. (2008) should be mentioned: they are concerned that recent attention may be diverted away from others who, while not categorised as NEET, are still experiencing fragile and vulnerable situations.

13c   Examples of good practice

13.7   The examples of good practice are not presented as a panacea or as a one-size-fits-all, rather as examples or models of what can be adopted and adapted – typically within a

larger, comprehensive programme or group of services – to support those who are NEET.

Mentoring has been suggested as particularly helpful to excluded young people for coming to terms with difficult family relationships (Colley 2006), while Basit (2009) recommended that mentoring programmes be devised for NEET.

An approach which considers teenagers in the round is being advocated by some local authorities as well as researchers. In Northumberland, a three-year strategy called *Whatever It Takes* (2008) has been launched underpinned by a commitment to build on good practice across the county and for partners to work together:

> Whilst educational attainment is a key element of breaking the cycle of deprivation, there are wider factors which are also important. For example research has shown that a child who has a good community learning environment in the early years together with high quality pre-school provision who then goes on to attend an effective primary school is more likely to show improved outcomes compared with children that have two, one or none of these experiences.

Social exclusion is, as Savelsberg and Martin-Giles (2008) report on the Australian situation, "a multidimensional phenomenon". Acknowledging Percy-Smith's social exclusion framework (2000), they point out that someone who experiences "more than one of the dimensions of social exclusion" is likely to become more vulnerable to further exclusion. As a result, immediate needs of food and shelter are given precedence over government targets that prioritise economic participation and employment. As the work of Yates and Payne (2006) and of Pemberton (2008) indicate, young people's own feedback stresses their concern about a lack of integrated support encompassing housing, financial management, mental health, substance misuse and access to training and employment.

In Cornwall, a statistical neighbour of Norfolk, some work has dealt in a more comprehensive way with children's and young people's problems than other single-focus projects. One of these was a pilot project which identified children as young as 14 who were at risk of becoming NEET and provided intensive support, consisting of a 4-week residential, Outward-bound-style activity followed by 15 weeks of vocational training. The results were positive, with 13 of the 15 students moving on to college courses or into work. Despite a high per capita cost of £15K, the pilot nevertheless encouraged Cornwall to secure further funding to repeat the project. The director of the southwest region's Learning Skills Council is now bidding for European funding to expand the pilot to offer it to as many as 120 students from Cornwall.

Springing from the success of the two pilots, the South West region's Learning Skills Council secured funds from the European Social Fund to engage hard-to-reach, vulnerable teens from 14 to 19 years, including those who are NEET or at risk of NEET. A key feature of the project, Freestyle – Best Start for Young People, is a learning plan which is individually tailored to the needs of teenagers in Cornwall.

A new programme called Reaching the Heights has been awarded funding from the European Social Fund and the Welsh Assembly to run two individual projects (First Footholds and Routes to the Summit) to prevent 11- to 19-year olds from becoming NEET. Both projects are expected to employ innovative practices, including workshops, taster sessions, mentoring, support and work-related experience, in order to raise skills and aspirations and enhance young people's opportunities of obtaining work-relevant skills. The projects also seek to share good practice among Welsh local authorities.

Engaging disaffected learners, including those of NEET status, was behind a series of seven projects run in 2007-2008 by the Mobile Learning Network, MoLeNET, which used a variety of mobile technologies to address issues of low levels of aspiration and confidence, as well as skills gaps, in young people. The projects reported improved attendance or attainment and improved engagement and motivation from the NEET status learners. Whether these results can be sustained has not yet been addressed, but incorporating the use of mobile technology such as podcasting can be one of the positive factors to engage learners of NEET status.

Good practice in addressing teenage pregnancy has also been reported in the literature. An American ethnographic study looked at the social and learning environment of an alternative school programme for pregnant and parenting females aged 13 to 19 (Spear 2002). The study reported that many teenagers on the alternative programme experienced academic success for the first time and were motivated by impending motherhood to do better in school. It recommended that a school-based approach to meet the needs of this group of teenagers be made. In the UK, the findings from a secondary analysis of data from a randomised trial of sex education provided evidence of the value of improved communication between teenage females and their parents or guardians (Allen *et al.* 2007):

> ….. findings suggest that ease of communication with parents/guardian is protective against girls, pregnancy by age 16 years… [and] support a policy of dealing with multiple influences on teenage pregnancy including recent initiatives addressing communication, personal development and education.

In Cornwall, a project called Karenza "actively encourages teen mothers to bring their children with them as they try 'bite-size' training courses", while their children are looked after in an adjacent room by childcare professionals (*Western Morning News* 2009). Canadian researchers reported on a one-year tracking of life-course trajectories of street-involved young women (King *et al.* 2009). Pregnancy and parenting were constructed as a turning point away from street involvement and drug use. A renewed interest in education and employment was manifested, along with reduction of risk behaviours and help-seeking behaviour to ensure a safe environment for the baby. The researchers added that the availability of day care was important in the decision to return to school.

Yardley (2008) points out that within many teenage mothers' families of origin, young motherhood is valued and esteemed. She also argues that teenage mothers who have decided to be NEET in order to care for their children may not necessarily represent a problematic or permanent state and that the stigma and lack of support networks for teenage mothers should be addressed. John Coleman, deputy chairman of the UK government's advisory group on teenage pregnancy, recently stated that pregnancy can be a positive option for some teenagers when good childcare, a supportive family and decent housing are in place. He added that "perhaps it's time to rethink the idea that having children ruins young girls' lives" (Morrison 2009).

Acknowledging young people as decision-makers who also play an active role in shaping their own identity is starting to be seen as positive practice. Trotter and Campbell (2008) aimed to engage and empower NEET 17- to 21-year olds in a project on mental health and well-being. By enlisting the young people as co-researchers with 'youth-friendly technology' (e.g., mobile phones), they attempted to increase their engagement and, by extension, their sense of well-being. While ethical implications were raised during the course of the project, one of the participants experienced a marked improvement in social engagement and well-being.

For Tanner *et al.* (2007), collecting young people's views and developing young person-centred support and development activities were key variables to preventing and re-engaging NEET young people in London. Directly consulting, engaging and enabling young people helped them to be ultimate decision-makers during their research. The success of such findings was supported by school staff, such as this School Inclusion Project Manager, who said:

> "The model will work as long as you understand that you have to work with these students differently and treat them as individuals. A lot of their rebellion is about, 'I'm an individual, treat me with respect'" (p. 32).

Good practice has emerged over a number of years. As remarked in the *Report of the NEET Workstream, June 2005* produced for the Scottish Government, the primary NEET determinants of educational underachievement, educational disaffection and family disadvantage through poverty are being addressed through strategies including:

- offering flexibility to match the needs of the highly diverse young people who are NEET,

- the recognition that progression may not always be linear,

- the most effective approach, which incorporates the involvement of young people in designing NEET services (2005, sections 46, 61).

13d   What are other LEAs doing to address the issue of teenage pregnancy?

13.8   The following URLs are links to local authority sites which have been designed to provide resources aimed at reducing teenage pregnancy and helping young parents:

- **Supporting pregnant teenagers and teenage parents (including young fathers)**
http://www.wirral.gov.uk/LGCL/100005/200086/736/content_0002371.html

The Wirral website also linked to two other relevant sources:

(1)   Teenage Pregnancy Pathways
http://www.wirral.gov.uk/LGCL/100005/200086/736/Teenage_Pregnancy_Pathway_A5.pdf

(2)   Teenage Pregnancy in Wirral
http://www.wirral.gov.uk/LGCL/100005/200086/736/TeenagePregnancyReportJune2007.pdf

- **Busy Mummy: Education, Employment or Training for Teenage Parents**
www.busymummy.co.uk/assets/attachments/Busymummy_Media_Kit.ppt

Busymummy has designed a tool to encourage teenage parents to work on their own to find a way back to employment, education or training (EET). It is a home-study programme that parents can work on in their own time and at their own pace. Through effective coaching and questioning it guides the young parent through the stages to moving from NEET to EET:

-    pilot ran in South London involving 70 teenagers (either pregnant or parents).

-    results: 54 (77%) moved from being NEET to EET within 6 months of starting the programme.

- Me & My Education, Employment and Training Home-Study Programme.

- Me and My Education, Employment and Training Workshop Programme.

- **Reaching out to pregnant teenagers and teenage parents**

www.dcsf.gov.uk/everychildmatters/_download/?id=3138

An education pack designed for teenage parents wanting to return to education.

- **ContinYou: Changing lives through learning**

http://www.continyou.org.uk/case_studies/gateway_cluster_supports_teenage_parents

The Gateway cluster in Birmingham has set up a network of support to help teenage parents back into education, employment or training.

13.9 At the outset of this Review, two essential perspectives were suggested: that problems surfacing in mid-teens typically are rooted in much earlier years and that support for NEET or those at risk of NEET must be fully integrated and joined up with the full range of services appropriate for this group. To this can be added the perspective offered by Fergusson (2004, 316): "young people's participation in education, training or employment is not a fixed category. It is ephemeral, and it has multiple meanings".

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14   Conclusions

14a   Data

14.1   The proportion of the 16-18 cohort in Norfolk who are NEET is below the national average and is not hugely different from the rest of Norfolk.

14.2   The single most significant reason for being NEET is pregnancy/parenthood. This figure is added annually to a core of NEET but it is pregnancy which is the most significant cause of the annual rise in NEET. As a result, the majority of NEET are female.

14.3   There is variation in the numbers of NEET and statutory school. This variation also coincides with variations in numbers of NEET and parish/ward and is linked to socio-economic conditions, confirming the national perspective linking NEET and socio-economic status.

14.4   Whilst Connexions share summary data with schools, data protection has prevented sharing of individual names. Schools would welcome the opportunity to see names in order to amend IAG processes, if necessary, and to assist Connexions in tracking Unknown NEET.

14.5   In the period November 2007 to March 2009, the proportion of NEET Available fell from Year 12 to Year 13 and then to Year 14. By contrast, the proportion of NEET Unavailable (due to pregnancy) is higher in Year 13 than in Year 12.

14.6   In March 2009, the proportion of NEET in Years 12 and 13 was the same.

14.7   The number of "Other" young people who Connexions have lost touch with, gradually increases across Year 12 to 14.

14.8   The work carried out by Connexions in November 2008 to ensure as many young people as possible were effectively engaged in learning or employment produced a significant fall in NEET. However, this fall was not sustained to March 2009, possibly reflecting current economic conditions. Several of the Connexions Personal Advisors who were interviewed reported that the past few months had seen a reduction in the number of apprenticeships on offer, and fewer vacancies in terms of both skilled employment and "jobs without training". It is therefore possible that NEET figures may well rise in the near future. It is important that this is not construed as a failing on the part of the schools and agencies who have worked so hard to bring down NEET figures.

14.9   Schools, colleges and Connexions often have to work with exceptionally difficult young people, and sometimes have to make very difficult decisions, where the behaviour of some students may be impacting very seriously on "the right to learn" of other students.

14.10   Data from some of West Norfolk's statistical neighbours suggested that rurality was an issue (see Section 13). Testimony from LEA respondents, Connexions PAs and NEET

youngsters who were interviewed also suggested that living in outlying villages with limited transport services was a problem for some students.

14.11 A recent study by the Centre for Market and Public Organisation (Observer 14 December 2008) found that white pupils were far more likely to leave school at the earliest possible opportunity compared to all other ethnic groups. Several of the Connexions' PAs interviewed also felt that attitude towards education of the indigenous population in areas of West Norfolk were less positive than those from Eastern European arrivals. Cultural attitudes to education are part of the NEET issue.

14.12 Testimony from LEA, school and Connexions respondents suggested that many schools now see NEET reduction as an urgent priority, but that there is a need to share good practice in order to secure sustained and widespread improvement across all schools and colleges.

14.13 International comparisons (OECD 2008) suggest that other countries have ideas which may be worth exploring in relation to NEET issues. In Denmark over 60% of cared for children go on to Higher Education. Experiments in early intervention and social pedagogy are being piloted in several Norfolk schools, and it will be useful to monitor their effect.

14b   Managing NEET

14.14 Some schools have a very clear policy for managing NEET including early identification and fast tracking to Connexions but such robustness is not universal across the area.

14.15 There is very clear and strong evidence demonstrating the positive impact of curriculum flexibility both through provision at COWA and Notschool. However, rising costs are placing a strain on all school budgets to pay for this provision.

14.16 Most schools have a very clear commitment to inclusion. Through this, they recognise that mainstream school provision and support does not meet the needs of all young people. Additional support comes through mentoring, additional advisers/counsellors, work with youth services, curriculum flexibility, in house support units.   The development of inclusion in school will help to reduce NEET further. The chances of becoming NEET increase significantly when a student is moved to being "Educated Otherwise".

14.17 The level of student absence in West Norfolk is high. Failure to attend school not only reduces level of qualification, it also disengages a young person from educational routines and processes increasing the difficulty of re-engagement post 16. Concerted work with the Attendance Team, including a robust approach to prosecution, in order to reduce absence is a key process in reducing NEET.

14.18 Most young people are "placed" at the end of Year 11 but every September Connexions must track a significant number young people who are "missing". Whilst Connexions try to sustain contact with young people over the period between the end of statutory

schooling and the start of Year 12, there is only limited evidence of other actions to sustain contact with potential NEET over this important period. Programmes involving the county youth team, E2E, identified "link" mentors to support young people at this time, are some of the strategies that can be applied to reduce the number of young people who do not make this transition. Failure to make the transition has many causes - lack of parental support, nervousness over the new place of learning, inability to manage the bureaucracy of transition as well as lethargy.

14.19 70% of young people who are NEET are below Level 2 in Year 12. Weaknesses in literacy and numeracy restrict access to learning in main school so work done in Years 7 and 8 to improve literacy and numeracy will potentially reduce risk of NEET.

14.20 Several centres, especially at post 16 level, reported that they do not inform Connexions that a young person has left that institution. Connexions has a statutory responsibility to remain in contact with all young people aged 16 to 18. They should be informed immediately.

14.21 The majority of NEET come from backgrounds where education and training are not valued. Successful activities with parents, in partnership with primary schools, which seek to break this culture, will again contribute to the reduction in risk of becoming NEET.

14.22 The reduction of NEET requires multi agency engagement that is proactive and focuses on individuals. There is some evidence of multi agency working but it is not consistent across the area and there is no strong evidence that area wide strategies have been developed to define how multi agency partnership involving schools and all others responsible for "Every Child Matters" and the "wrap around care" of Extended Schools are to operate.

14.23 In many instances, successful outcomes and initiatives relating to NEET reduction and prevention were in significant part due to the involvement of personnel who had exceptionally high-order skills in interacting and establishing good working relations with students. It is important not to see progress in this area simply in terms of course design and content.

14.24 Although there have recently been major improvements in terms of curriculum flexibility in terms of providing an appropriate curriculum for all pupils, there are still many pupils for whom school is not a positive experience. Many pupils still have profoundly anti-school attitudes by the time they get to Key Stage 4. Getting all pupils to want to learn and to value education is still a major challenge.

14c   Information, Advice and Guidance

14.25 Early identification will not recognise all NEET. Several providers spoke of young people who are passively disengaging throughout compulsory schooling. High quality IAG is a right for all young people. This research identified a variety of different approaches

within schools and examples of practice which in at least one institution has been identified as "Outstanding" by OFSTED.

14.26 Where the IAG is linked to a recognition that processes need to be differentiated to meet individual needs, then there is very good IAG. In some schools, the early identification and tracking is linked to robust general processes of IAG. There are excellent examples of "extra-curricular" activities within IAG. The Lynnsport careers convention was widely praised in all schools. In schools where elements of IAG were a formal part of the scheme of work of a department, this was recognized and valued. In some schools there was concern about the consistency of IAG where there was tutor involvement.

14.27 There was variability in the management of applications. In some schools, all applications are read and "quality assured" by the careers coordinator, looking not only at quality of English, but more importantly at ensuring aspiration matched predicted grades. The need for this quality assurance to be more widespread is confirmed by COWA where a substantial number of hours are needed to be spent contacting applicants over applications where aspiration does not match entry qualification. For some courses at COWA, places are limited. Potential NEET are usually not strong at completing applications to time. This means they run the risk of not getting first choice of course. Students on a substitute course are inevitably less enthusiastic about learning and if they were potentially NEET in the first place, the risk increases. In addition, some post 16 providers expressed concern about the lack of information they had on applicants that would help them in processing the application and supporting the student once they had transferred.

14.28 All centres were generally supportive about Connexions PAs. All recognized the workload carried by the PAs. Strong support came from those centres dealing with some of the most difficult to place young people. NEET youngsters interviewed spoke very warmly of Connexions staff. The only concerns about Connexions were linked to issues of internal communication within the school, the knowledge/experience of Connexions in dealing with Higher Education courses, and the fact that not all youngsters seemed to be aware of the continued help that Connexions were able to provide post 16.

14.29 Connexions' PAs felt that 'taster visits' and face to face conversations with course tutors running post 16 courses were very helpful in reducing the number of poor course choices and "brochure decisions", and that extending such opportunities would help to reduce dropout rates.

14d   Post 16 Learning

14.30 All centres have entry thresholds but there is variation and varying degrees of flexibility in the way these thresholds are applied. Several centres are reviewing their thresholds,

especially for maths and science. In some centres, there are several students on Level 3 courses without at least a C in maths and in English. Some students are following Level 3 courses which require a high level of literacy skill in reading and writing without a C in English at GCSE. Centres should look at the value added achieved in such circumstances. A similar comment can be made about subjects which require a high level of numeracy.

14.31 Several centres commented that whilst most students make the transition from GCSE to A level quite comfortably, for many students, it is not easy. Whilst all centres sought to give personal and academic support, only one centre identified the provision of full time personal tutors as well as additional subject based lessons in core skills such as note taking, essay writing, data handling as key strands in their retention rate as well as the high value added achieved by that centre.

14.32 Centres provided details of reasons why students who had left either after one year of an A level programme or part way through. In most cases, the centre knew why a young person had left but this was not always the case. Equally, in only two centres was there a policy to conduct exit interviews. Even in those centres, the difficulties of getting a young person who is leaving a course to explain the reasons for leaving are significant. Reference has already been made to the need to inform Connexions immediately a young person leaves a course.

14.33 Connexions were given the names of young people who had left the courses. Only a small proportion of those young people had actually become NEET, although the figure is probably higher as Connexions did not know all who had left. The fact that so few NEET are students who start post 16 courses and then leave the course suggests that the origins of NEET lie in those who were already disengaged from education before post 16 learning. It emphasizes the longer term approaches that need to be taken to addressing NEET.

14.34 Experienced teachers, Connexions' PAs and students made the point that vocational courses would be limited in their effectiveness if they still relied on "traditional" pedagogy rather than practical and applied learning. There were some pupils for whom "learning by doing" made a massive difference to their commitment and attainment.

14.35 Advanced Bridging Courses which provided for a mixture of level 3 and level 2 courses at one sixth form college had proved to be very successful in moving many students on successfully and had elicited considerable interest from QCA as an example of good practice (see Section 12 for further detail).

14.36 In spite of recent BECTa and county initiatives, the digital divide remains an issue for many NEET youngsters, and particularly for those from a Traveller background. The proliferation of ICT initiatives and portals in recent years has made it difficult for institutions to keep at the cutting edge of all developments which might help improve NEET related outcomes and there is a need for good inter-institutional communication and collaboration in this area (see Section 11).

14e   Students' Views

Year 11

14.37   Whilst most students were able to remember IAG activities presented in Years 10 and 11, peers, friends, siblings and parents are strong influences affecting final choice. Students were very positive about Lynnsport but with the exception of one school, views on the role of form tutors in IAG ranged from lukewarm to scathing. In one school, the IMPACT Theatre Group's work was warmly praised. Students were also positive about structured and planned IAG activities which took place in subject areas. Students acknowledged the value of the action in one school where writing CVs is part of the English scheme of work.

14.38   Students generally spoke positively about Connexions' PAs. In several schools students had the perception that Connexions exists primarily to support in choice of learning/employment at the age 16 transfer. Very few students were aware of the role Connexions has post 16. With the exception of the schools in Kings Lynn, students were not aware that Connexions has an office in Kings Lynn. There was equally little awareness of the wider support available from Connexions.

14.39   Students from only two schools could remember any reading of their final application to check it for grammatical accuracy or, more importantly, to ensure that the course applied for matched the likely GCSE grades. There was support in almost every school from young people attending COWA in Year 11 for the day spent with a tutor in COWA completing the application form.

14.40   Students were asked what aspects of IAG they would like to see improved. The two strongest responses were
•   More visits to post 16 providers during the course of the working day.
•   Better teaching of IAG.
•   More help and support in completing applications and writing CV.

Year 12

14.41   Students gave very good and clear reasons why they had chosen their statutory school's sixth form. The strongest reason was proximity. When A level students were interviewed in COWA, they came from all the towns in the area as well as Wisbech. They did not see distance as a factor affecting their studies.

14.42   Students were asked about the role IAG played in making their decision about their post 16 provider. There was a significant contrast with the Year 11 students interviewed. Very few students studying A level had attended the Lynnsport convention, only a small number had had a Connexions interview. Whilst students in several centres felt there was an assumption they would attend their statutory school's sixth form, in only one case did they feel this was translated into pressure.

14.43 When asked if the reality of their chosen centre matched the information pre 16, most students felt this to be true. All students commented on the huge jump from GCSE to A level in terms of academic rigour and the need to have good organizational skills. Students were positive about actions to support them such as core skills workshops, full time tutors, sixth form tutors who were very empathetic. In most school sixth forms, the Head of Sixth was seen as a key source of support and information.

14.44 In subject lessons, students were very positive about teaching which was varied in style and approach; staff who supported them positively in the skills of essay writing and note taking and lessons where there was a structure available either through a lesson plan or available on a learning platform. Students were negative about lessons which were repeatedly based on note taking, used Powerpoint excessively, staff who made no allowance for the transition into the sixth and told them that they were sixth formers and they should get on with it, and learning instructions which were too general such as "Go away and read up on this."

14.45 Students' experiences of E2E courses were vary variable and Connexions' PAs also felt that courses were of variable quality. Education and Youth Services (www.eysuk.org.uk) and the Prince's Trust were identified as high quality providers by several PAs.

14f   Pregnancy

14.46 When staff were asked the reasons why young people were NEET, in only one instance was pregnancy mentioned. There was no general awareness in schools of the significance of pregnancy as a reason. This may be the reason for the limited engagement of schools in the west with the county SRE Partnership.

14.47 Whilst the majority of pregnancies are unplanned, there is variation linked to socio-economic reasons in the levels of termination. The effectiveness of strategies to reduce pregnancy requires collaborative working between schools and other Children's Trust Partners.

14.48 Take-up of "Beyond the Bump" courses was variable, Connexions' PAs suggested that a degree of flexibility was particularly important for this client group. "Critical mass" was also thought to be a factor influencing take-up. Social networking, including "virtual networking", was thought to be an area that could be explored and developed further with young parents.

14.49 Although the SRE Partnership felt that most pregnancies were unplanned, and that alcohol was a factor in some cases, several Connexions' PAs believed that in a number of cases, the pregnancies were "a lifestyle choice", and one which was influenced by low aspirations and the belief that 'there is not much else out there'.

14.50 There were some variations in pregnancy rates in terms of students' place of education. Although there are limits to the extent to which schools can be held responsible for the sexual behaviour of both pupils and former pupils, schools may wish to review how well SRE works within their own institution.

14.51 The issue of teenage pregnancy rates is not confined to West Norfolk or Norfolk as a whole. The UK has the highest teenage pregnancy rates in Europe, and like truancy rates, such phenomena are not generally susceptible to "quick fixes". Given the part that pregnancies play in NEET Unavailable figures in West Norfolk, there is a case for giving this aspect of the NEET agenda particular attention, thought and priority.

15   Recommendations

15.1   There are six points which seemed to be of overarching importance and we have listed these first. These points are followed by more specific recommendations related to particular facets of NEET issues:

1   One of the most important messages emerging from the enquiry was the strong feeling shared by many of the professionals most closely involved with NEET issues that earlier intervention was needed to prevent students developing the characteristics, attitudes and dispositions which would make them more vulnerable to becoming NEET as they went through school. Many of the Connexions' PAs made the point that many students were well on the way to becoming NEET before the statutory school leaving age, and that even Year 9 was too late to be acting on this. It is worth noting that the recent Cambridgeshire NEET enquiry found evidence of successful primary school initiatives which were designed to get pupils to think positively about education and schooling (Gartshore, 2009).

2   Although there is a strong correlation between low levels of attainment in literacy and numeracy and the likelihood that students will enter the NEET churn, many respondents felt that there were other fundamental issues which needed to be addressed in order to reduce NEET numbers, such as social and interpersonal skills, self-esteem, and attitude to learning and the process of education in general. The Scandinavian model of "social pedagogy" provides some examples of possible ways forward in these areas and many high schools in Norfolk are exploring some of these approaches. Given the importance of raising standards of attainment generally, and reducing the amount of underachievement due to low expectations of pupils, there are difficult tensions for schools and teachers in terms of maximising attainment and yet trying to ensure that all pupils have positive experiences of schooling. A key question for schools to consider is how to ensure that pupils who do not find learning easy and who struggle to reach the higher National Curriculum levels of attainment and GCSE qualifications can nonetheless find the experience of education as positive and fulfilling as pupils who are academically more able. Every year, most PGCE and SCITT/GTP students in Norfolk shadow a group of pupils through a school day, and become aware that for less able pupils, the school day is often not an unremittingly positive experience.

3   In many of the instances of good practice and successful initiatives in reducing student dropout and NEET figures, one of the key elements was the tutor's skills of interaction with students and their ability to create a positive climate for learning. Although appropriate course content and 'technical' pedagogical approach were important factors, often what really made the course work well was the interpersonal skills of the teacher. One of the key variables in the educational system (and one which particularly influences students who are not committed scholars) is the learners' working relationship with the teacher. Most schools and colleges have some teachers who are exceptionally talented in this area but it has often proved difficult to share or disseminate this excellence across all teachers in the institution. In terms of workforce development, whether in ITE or CPD, it would be helpful if more time and attention could be invested in this facet of training, as high levels of expertise in this area appear to have a particularly beneficial effect on pupils who are at risk of becoming NEET. More could be done to develop teachers' understanding of the factors which make pupils want to learn.   There is a body of research evidence in this area, including research done with Norfolk students (see, for example, http://www.uea.ac.uk/~m242/nasc/welcome.htm). In the words of Hallam (1996), "They must want to learn; if you lose that you lose just about everything". The success of the Key Stage 4 Engagement Programme (see Section 12) is a good example of what a big difference improving pupil engagement can make to NEET figures.

4   The quality of transition arrangements appears to be an important variable in terms of factors which influence dropout rates and NEET outcomes. As much time and care needs to go into post 16 transition as to KS2/3 transition. At the moment, Connexions personnel appear to be the main support for "at-risk" students. Schools might consider how key school personnel such as form tutors, learning mentors, learning support assistants and regular contact through the use of learning platforms, email and social networking might help in the transition period. Some consideration might also be given to the provision of bridging courses comparable to the TIRO project or U project in Cambridge. Curriculum flexibility involving the College of West Anglia, and opportunities for potential students to do "taster visits" and have face to face talks with tutors had a very positive impact on student attitudes to learning, achievement and retention. Colleges and transition institutions should consider how to maximise the quality of IAG, induction and familiarisation so as to reduce the number of students who make poor course choices or who do not feel confident and positive about transition to post 16 institutions.

5   Some schools had been exceptionally proactive in devising strategies and interventions which might help to reduce the number of pupils becoming NEET. There was strong support from the Senior Management Team, a sense that NEET outcomes were an important priority in terms of the school's work, and support in terms of investment and resourcing to allow innovative approaches to be explored. Schools need to agree and adhere to a protocol for managing NEET concerns and issues within their own institutions. There was evidence of innovative and effective practice in many schools and it would be helpful if thought could be given to how to maximise the extent to which schools and colleges share information and work collaboratively to improve NEET outcomes, so that ideas and initiatives which seem to have potential can be disseminated across all schools and colleges. There was some evidence to suggest that simply making NEET issues a key priority for the school was an important first step. There is also a need for a clearer definition of partnership working. There was no strong evidence that schools and Children's Services had common agreement about thresholds of intervention and support which are beyond the resources of a school to deliver. In some cases, there was a strongly negative view about the support from the Local Authority. An initiative led by the local authority on sharing good practice would be a helpful start in developing more effective partnership working.

6   Teenage pregnancy emerges as one of the biggest contributors to NEET unavailable figures, and this should be an urgent priority in terms of NEET reduction. One recommendation related to this is that schools in West Norfolk should consider how they might work more closely with the Norfolk SRE Partnership, as well as reviewing their own IAG in this area, and exploring approaches which have been successful in reducing teenage pregnancy outside Norfolk.

15.2   Some schools addressed NEET as a discrete issue with key personnel/core teams and specific policies and strategies for addressing NEET, rather than regarding it as an issue which the school's pastoral system encompassed. There was some evidence to suggest that there were some advantages in the former approach.

15.3   Given that permanent exclusion for school significantly increases the risk of pupils becoming NEET, schools should continue to explore imaginative and resourceful strategies for minimising "complete" and out of school exclusions. We are aware that schools do not take decisions to exclude pupils lightly, and often have to make difficult decisions over exclusion. Massive progress appears to have been made in this area over the past few years, but several respondents felt that this was another area which was a

variable in terms of NEET outcomes. Two senior LEA respondents felt that the "Managed Moves" system generally works well in the county, but some respondents felt that some schools made greater efforts than others in terms of inclusion. It was widely felt that some schools have NEET reduction as a higher priority than others. This raises important questions about the distribution of "difficult" pupils and support mechanisms for the schools which have a higher proportion of potential NEET. OWN should take the lead in developing a strategy for those potential NEET who have exhausted normal school processes; this would include approaches to tackling the problem of persistent absentees.

15.4   It is essential to the work of Connexions, and to the tracking and management of NEET, that all schools and colleges notify Connexions when students drop out or move away (or "drop off the radar").

15.5   It is equally essential in the tracking and management of NEET that students who have become NEET are reported back to statutory school by name rather than by statistics. This approach will improve tracking and allow schools to review their IAG systems if necessary. One suggestion for facilitating this would be if "opting out" could be the default position when talking with NEET youngsters rather than "opting in" in terms of data sharing with schools. Another suggestion was that schools and Connexions might explore moving to a common information sharing system.

15.6   Although many respondents felt that potential NEETs were quite easy to identify at an early stage, in other studies (Gartshore 2009) schools were surprised at some of the pupils who had entered the NEET pool. There would appear to be a number of pupils who are "quietly disaffected" from education (see for instance, Oakley, 2002) and who drift out of education in spite of not having presented significant problems in terms of attendance and behaviour. Schools should explore what might be done a) to identify such pupils and b) to consider how their engagement with education might be improved.

15.7   Many respondents, especially students, expressed reservations about the effectiveness of using form tutors as the main vehicle for IAG. Differences in the quality of delivery of IAG by form tutors emerged as one of the "key variables" in the system. There was some evidence to suggest that in schools where IAG is delivered by a small and carefully managed core team, this is effective in reducing NEET outcomes. If schools are committed to retaining the form tutor model for IAG delivery, some thought might be given to how to improve the overall quality of delivery of IAG by form tutors.

15.8   More could be done to make students aware that Connexions offer guidance and support post 16. There was strong praise for the work of Connexions but there is the question of what proportion of young people who are not "sorted out" avail themselves of Connexions support and advice post 16.

15.9   Some schools appeared to have closer and more effective working relationships with Connexions than others. Schools should consider whether they have the best channels of communication and systems for collaborative working with Connexions (and other children's services agencies).

15.10   There is some evidence to suggest that close inter-agency working between key school staff and children's services agencies can be effective in providing the "wrap around care" which might help to prevent at-risk students from disengaging from education. Although some schools have substantially reduced their NEET figures though the use of regular, purposeful and "followed-up" meetings with support services, not all schools have fully developed systems for optimising the support provided by Children's Services.

15.11   Some schools have developed very strong guidance and support for ensuring that applications to post 16 courses are appropriate in terms of aspiration and qualifications, and that the applications meet the requisite deadlines. Schools should review their practice in this area to see whether it reflects best practice.

15.12   Some schools and colleges have very structured systems for helping students struggling to meet the demands of transition to level 3 courses. This is another area where institutions should review their practice.

15.13   The Lynnsport event evinced widespread praise and is regarded as a very useful contribution to IAG and induction in the area. It should be retained and developed as an important element of the transition and IAG process.

15.14   Many schools are exploring the potential of social pedagogy approaches to improving students' social skills, self-esteem, interaction with others and attitude to learning rather than focusing primarily on academic mentoring and development approaches (see, for example, Bunting 2006). There is tentative evidence to suggest that this can be helpful in reducing the chances of less able pupils becoming disaffected and disengaged from education. In some schools, this includes a strong emphasis on acknowledging gains in personal and social skills, and in motivation and commitment, in assessment and feedback to pupils (see Section 12). The potential of such approaches might be explored more widely.

15.15 Some forms of E2E provision elicited very positive feedback from NEET youngsters and Connexions' PAs. Further research might be undertaken to see what exactly these high quality providers do that makes the courses so well thought of.

15.16 The development of VLEs, Web 2.0 applications and e-portfolios means that ICT is likely to play an increasingly important part in several areas which are likely to influence NEET outcomes (see Section 12). Schools and colleges need to review their strengths in these areas and to work collaboratively to ensure dissemination of best practice in areas such as e-communication with learners and parents/carers, use of Web 2.0, e-portfolio development etc.

15.17 There was evidence to suggest that some ITE students had a limited understanding of NEET issues. Although the professional development programme places considerable emphasis on 14-19 issues, there is no designated lecture or seminar which focuses exclusively on NEET issues. We recommend that both the UEA ITE Partnership and the Suffolk and Norfolk ITT Course consider the incorporation of a discrete input on NEET as part of their initial training course, so that all NQTs are familiar with NEET issues when they enter the profession.

16   Draft Action Plan / Checklist for Schools

Self-assessment on NEETs

Issue	Not developed	Developing	Embedded in school routine
STATUTORY SCHOOLING			
1 School has a written policy/strategy for reducing NEET, including work with parents and Childrens' Services with responsibility with member of Leadership			
2 School uses 'potentially NEET' as part of its IAG processes			
3 School identifies potential NEET during Key Stage 3			
4 School has raising attendance as a key priority			
5 School has intervention programmes in place to raise levels of literacy/numeracy			
6 School has support provision in place which is reducing numbers of young people who are Educated Otherwise			
7 School makes full use of 'bridging activities' at the end of Year 11 such as E2E, Youth work, summer programmes			
8 School has a planned and structured transition programme ensuring individual support over transition for students identified as potentially NEET and at risk of disengagement			
9 School monitors and has evidence of impact on retention of flexible curriculum provision in Years 10 and 11			
10 School meets the IAG standards of impartiality			
11 School has a structure for carefully monitoring all post 16 applications to ensure they are appropriate and realistic			
12 School reviews IAG annually using student voice			
13 School uses annual activity survey from Connexions and, from 2009, names of NEET, to review IAG			
14 School ensures Connexions has names of all students on roll, especially those educated off site/frequent absentees			
15 School has a structured approach to SRE using the Norfolk SRE Partnership Model			
POST 16			
1 Centre has structure and capacity to give effective support to students pastorally and on core skills			
2 Centre conducts exit interviews and knows why a student has left			
3 Centre ensures Connexions are informed immediately a student leaves			
4 Centre rigorously reviews retention and value added on a course by course basis			

APPENDIX

REFERENCES

1   Terms of Reference

To investigate the reasons for student withdrawal from courses of education and training in schools and colleges in West Norfolk, and to consider what might be done to reduce the number of such withdrawals and the number of young people not in education or training in the area.

Statutory School of all NEET aged 16 to 18

	NEET – Available to the labour market				NEET – Not available to the labour market								Total
	16	17	18		16	17			18			Total	
	Other	Other	Other	**Total**	Other	Preg	Parents	Other	Preg	Parents	Other	**Total**	**Total**
6th Form/College outside	1	0	4	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	**5**
Alderman Peel High	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	**1**
Attleborough High School	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	**2**
Charles Burrell High	0	0	2	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	**2**
Downham Market High	6	10	8	24	1	0	0	0	3	1	1	6	**30**
Education Otherwise	2	8	3	13	0	0	0	2	0	1	1	4	**17**
Ethel Tipple School	0	0	2	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	**2**
Fakenham High School	0	0	2	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	**2**
Fred Nicholson School	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	**1**
Hamonds High School	2	6	8	16	0	0	2	2	0	1	0	5	**21**
King Edward VII School	0	11	14	25	0	2	0	1	1	7	2	13	**38**
Litcham High School	0	2	2	4	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	**5**
Marshland High School	5	1	4	10	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	**10**
Methwold High School	4	3	7	14	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	**14**
PRU – Northern	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	**1**
PRU – Southern	1	0	3	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	**4**

	NEET – Available to the labour market				NEET – Not available to the labour market								
	16	17	18		16	17			18				
	Other	Other	Other	**Total**	Other	Preg	Parents	Other	Preg	Parents	Other	**Total**	**Total**
PRU – Western	4	7	9	20	1	1	0	2	1	4	2	11	**31**
Rosemary Musker High	0	0	1	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	**2**
School outside Norfolk	0	9	4	13	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	**14**
Sheringham High School	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	**1**
Smithdon High School	4	10	12	26	0	0	1	1	0	3	1	6	**32**
Springwood High School	5	16	16	37	2	0	5	0	1	3	0	11	**48**
St Clements High School	2	3	3	11	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	2	**13**
The Park High School	1	18	19	38	0	0	4	2	0	4	2	12	**50**
Unknown	2	2	3	7	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	**7**
Wayland Community High	4	10	5	19	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	**20**
Total	**45**	**117**	**136**	**298**	**4**	**3**	**13**	**12**	**6**	**26**	**11**	**75**	**373**

03/04/2009

3   Strategies to Improve Attendance

We are grateful to Colin Spinks, Attendance Officer, West Norfolk, for his assistance in providing this check list.

3.1   Attendance is given a high priority by leadership to ensure it is embedded in all practice in the school:

- tutors and subject staff report absentees.
- students are always asked about why they are absent.
- attendance data is regularly reviewed.

3.2   First day calling to the homes of absent students.

3.3   Form tutors are rigorous in asking students on return for an explanation for their absence and keep accurate registers.

3.4   Individual plans are drawn up for poor attenders.

3.5   Reward incentive schemes that actually motivate the unmotivated rather reward those who were good attenders anyway:

- e.g. Passport to the Prom at Marshland.
- weekly draws which reward 100% attendance rather than monthly draws.

3.6   Attendance panels. Parents are invited into school and asked to explain what reasons there are for a student's absence and asked what they can do to improve. No mention yet of court but reminder of legal expectation. Seen essentially as partnership working prior to more formal procedures.

3.7   The school has a very clear policy on dealing with holiday requests, drawn up in partnership with local primary schools.

4 Good Practice in SRE in Secondary Schools
Support that can be offered to secondary schools from different organisations and agencies

Component of good practice SRE	Subsections – where applicable	Detail of what is involved	Lead Post ▪ Supporting agencies
Awareness	**Ensuring school has an awareness of local trends and needs**	▪ Support school to identify local needs and trends through provision of statistics and local data and through consultation	**All partner agencies**
Commitment	**Ensuring school prioritises SRE**	▪ Communicate information, strategy and developments to all relevant parties ▪ Communicate and make accessible SRE best practice model ▪ Helping school to understand how effective SRE contributes to OFSTED self assessment/Healthy Norfolk Schools Standards and ECM	**Adviser of Teaching and Personalised Learning / CS**
	Ensuring school has knowledge of feeder schools' curriculum	▪ Highlight need to build upon primary curriculum of cluster schools ▪ Raise awareness of good practice through a developmental curriculum that builds upon previous learning	**Adviser of Teaching and Personalised Learning / CS** ▪ TPSU
	Ensuring Governors have knowledge and understanding of SRE	▪ SRE training for governors ▪ Information re: SRE and teenage pregnancy supplied to Governor Support Services ▪ Outline Governors' responsibility for SRE and policies ▪ Highlight need for a governor with key responsibility	**Adviser of Teaching and Personalised Learning / CS** ▪ TPSU ▪ Governor Support Services
	Understanding and implementing whole school approach to SRE	▪ Explain best practice of overhauling SRE: - involves parents/carers, pupils, governors, staff, external agencies, local community ▪ Make links between whole school approach and the SEF ▪ Provide tools for consultation process	**HS Development Worker (Secondary) / Healthy Schools** ▪ TPSU ▪ Adviser for Teaching and Personalised Learning

Policy	Supporting a school with effective policy development (including clear guidelines for active referrals to sexual health service)	▪ Consultation and guidance ▪ Provide action plan for policy development ▪ Provide example policies ▪ Provide component tool for policy development	**Adviser for Teaching and Personalised Learning / CS** ▪ TPSU
	Acknowledging Norfolk SRE Guidance	▪ Ensure awareness of Norfolk SRE Guidance and Policy documents	**Adviser for Teaching and Personalised Learning / CS**
Co-ordination	**Ensuring the PSHE/SRE coordinator understands the implications of their role**	▪ Provide model role description ▪ Provide regular updates re: SRE and TP developments	**Adviser for Teaching and Personalised Learning / CS** ▪ TPSU
Effective Programme	**Providing SRE training**	▪ Provide training for staff in school environment ▪ Provide training for staff outside school environment ▪ Provide training for Governors ▪ Provide training for agencies who deliver SRE in schools ▪ Networking between schools to share good practice ▪ PSHE CPD Programme ▪ Provide access to Norfolk Sexual Health Training Programme ▪ Advice on training relevance and priority	**SRE Development Worker (Secondary) / TPSU** ▪ Norfolk HIV/AIDS & SH Unit ▪ Healthy Schools ▪ Adviser for Teaching and Personalised Learning
Effective Programme	**Developing an effective programme**	▪ Provide example scheme of work ▪ Provide information about local service provision re: TP and sexual health to support programme ▪ Raise awareness of ineffective practice through consultation and guidance ▪ Offer continuing advice and support	**SRE Development Worker (Secondary) / TPSU** ▪ Adviser for Teaching and Personalised Learning Healthy Schools
	Involving pupils in SRE	▪ Provide ideas and tools for consultation and evaluation processes ▪ Provide recommendations for pupil involvement ▪ Networking between schools to share good practice	**SRE Development Worker (Secondary) / TPSU** ▪ Healthy Schools ▪ Adviser for Teaching and Personalised Learning

Effective Programme	Involving parents and carers in SRE	- Provide ideas and tools for consultation process - Networking between schools to share good practice	**Extended Schools Project Manager / CS** - TPSU - Healthy Schools
	Developing targeted work (with vulnerable Groups)	- Support to identify vulnerable and at risk groups and individuals - Provide information of effective practice and interventions - Identify appropriate agencies to support delivery of targeted programmes - Highlight relevant training re: addressing the needs of vulnerable groups	**Area Service Manager (Youth Support) CS** - School Nursing - Voluntary Sector - Connexions
	Resource materials for SRE	- Providing knowledge of the resources available in the county - Make resource recommendations	**Resources and Info Officer / Norfolk HIV/AIDS & SH Unit** - TPSU - Healthy Schools - Millennium Library
	Ensuring SRE is inclusive	- Consultation and guidance on policy, programme and resources - Make recommendations for parents/carers who withdraw their children from SRE	**Adviser for Teaching and Personalised Learning / CS**
	Assessing, monitoring and evaluating SRE	Provide ideas and tools for assessing, monitoring and evaluation processes	**HS Development Worker (Secondary)/ Healthy Schools**
	Advising about use of external agencies to deliver SRE	- Developing awareness within school of appropriate use of agencies - Checklist of how to work with external agencies (Healthy Schools) - Advice on policy development re: external agencies - Provide knowledge of local agencies that could be used to complement programme	**HS Development Worker (Secondary)/ Healthy Schools** Adviser for Teaching and Personalised Learning

External Agencies	Developing a school based health service	- Consultation, information and advice on developing a school based health service with a management committee - Provide good practice guidance from local and national sources - Identify appropriate staffing/agencies for school based health service - Networking between schools to share good practice - Provide ongoing support	**Health Improvement Manager / PCT** - School nursing - CS Youth Support - Extended Schools - Voluntary Sector - Connexions
	Delivering input to complement programme	- Provide knowledge of local agencies and what they can offer to complement programme - Organise appropriate support to complement a school's programme (when available) - Advise on organisations that have attended relevant training	**SRE Development Worker (Secondary) / TPSU** - Voluntary Sector - School Nursing - CS Youth Support
	Adhering to local guidelines and policies	Ensure awareness of Norfolk SRE Guidance and Policy documents	**Adviser for Teaching and Personalised Learning / CS**
	Developing and maintaining active referral pathways to sexual health services	- Provide knowledge of local agencies and service provision - Advice on policy development re: active referral pathways - Networking between schools to share good practice	**Area Manager / Connexions** - School Nursing - Voluntary Sector

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