

evaluation of the NYA engagement network

Local Government Education and Children's Services Research Programme



LGG research report



Available in the Local Government Education and Children's Services Research Programme

How to sustain and replicate effective practice

Clare Southcott and Tami McCrone

ISBN 978-1-906792-88-6, free download

Devon multi-agency safeguarding hub: case-study report

Sarah Golden, Helen Aston and Ben Durbin

ISBN 978 1 906 792 87 9, free download

Local authority progress in tackling child poverty

Julie Nelson, Lisa O'Donnell and Caroline Filmer-Sankey

ISBN 978 1 906 792 82 4, free download

Governance models in schools

Tami McCrone, Clare Southcott and Nalia George

ISBN 978 1 906792 83 1, free download

Safeguarding children peer review programme: learning and recommendations

Kerry Martin and Jennifer Jeffes

ISBN 978 1 906792 81 7, free download

Hidden talents: exploiting the link between engagement of young people and the economy

George Bramley, Liz Phillips and Shona Macleod

ISBN 978 1 906792 79 4, free download

Safeguarding children: literature review

Kerry Martin, Jennifer Jeffes and Shona Macleod

ISBN 978 1 906792 72 5, free download

Local authorities' experiences of improving parental confidence in the special educational needs process

Richard White, Shona Macleod, Jennifer Jeffes and Mary Atkinson

ISBN 978 1 906792 53 4, free download

The impact of the Baby Peter case on applications for care orders

Shona Macleod, Ruth Hart, Jennifer Jeffes and Anne Wilkin

ISBN 978 1 906792 56 5, free download

Safeguarding post-Laming: initial scoping study

Mary Atkinson

ISBN 978 1 906792 49 7, free download

evaluation of the NYA engagement network

Kelly Kettlewell
David Sims

How to cite this publication:

Kettlewell, K. and Sims, D. (2011). *Evaluation of the NYA Engagement Network*. (LG Group Research Report). Slough: NFER.

Published in September 2011
by the National Foundation for Educational Research,
The Mere, Upton Park, Slough, Berkshire SL1 2DQ

www.nfer.ac.uk
© National Foundation for Educational Research 2011
Registered Charity No. 313392

ISBN 978 1 906792 96 1



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

Contents

Executive Summary	v
Background	v
Key findings	v
Conclusions and recommendations	vi
1 Introduction	1
1.1 The NYA Engagement Network Pilot Phase 1	1
1.2 The NYA Engagement Network Pilot Phase 2	2
1.3 Aims and methodology of the evaluation	2
1.4 The context and structure of local area networks	3
1.5 Structure of the report	3
2 Engagement of young people	5
2.1 Methods used in engaging young people	5
2.2 Retention of young people	6
2.3 Lessons learnt for policy makers	7
3 Delivery of the networks	8
3.1 Structure and delivery of projects	8
3.2 Types of activities undertaken as part of the network	8
3.3 Views on the network	9
3.4 Involvement of an elected member	10
3.5 Lessons learnt for policy makers	10
4 Impact and outcomes	11
4.1 Impact on young people involved in the Engagement Network	11
4.2 Wider outcomes	12
5 The National Engagement Network	13
5.1 Views on the National Engagement Network	13
5.2 Training sessions and ongoing support	13
5.3 Future of the NYA Engagement Networks	14
6 Conclusions and recommendations	15
6.1 The National Engagement Network offer to LAs and young people	15
6.2 Overcoming the challenge of recruitment and retention	15
6.3 Sharing effective practice, lessons learnt and findings	16
6.4 The future	16

References	17
Appendix A	18
Appendix B	22

Executive summary

Background

The decisions young people make at 16 have a huge impact on their future. The majority of young people aged 16 to 18 do continue in some form of learning. However, there is still a significant minority who are not in employment, education or training (NEET).

It is the local authorities' (LAs') responsibility to ensure there are sufficient and suitable learning places available for all their young people and to encourage them to participate. To this end, the LG Group (then Local Government Association) commissioned the National Youth Agency (NYA) to develop a National Engagement Network Pilot to support young people who are NEET to have a voice and shape local provision and support for young people. The NYA Engagement Network operated at both a national and local level, with local networks established in individual LA areas.

It is important to take into account the environment in which the NYA Engagement Network was operating, which ultimately impacted on how local networks were able to function. After LAs had joined the NYA Engagement Network and submitted their project plans in 2010, all areas were then affected by nationally led budget cuts which resulted in LAs going through periods of staff redundancies, department and service restructurings and readjustments of service priorities. Understandably, all these factors impacted on how the LAs could deliver the network in their areas and complete the activities outlined in their project plans.

Key findings

Overall views on the National Engagement Network

Both local network staff and young people felt there were benefits of being part of a national network. Local network staff believed the national element was important and suggested improvements stemmed from their view that there needed to be more substance to

the national aspect of the network. In all areas, local network staff were positive about the National Engagement Network and generally felt that it should continue to be funded.

Engagement of young people

Engagement was challenging due to the characteristics of the young people involved. However, successful engagement relied on local network staff giving the young people clear information about the aims of the network, the application of experienced practitioner skills, partnership working and the provision of incentives. Constant re-engagement was needed to keep the young people involved throughout. Local network staff overcame issues of attrition by offering the young people a mix of fun and worthwhile tasks, providing incentives and allowing them to own the network.

Delivery of the network

The primary focus of the local network was the research project. Local networks used a range of approaches which included mystery shopping and focus groups with young people. The findings were then presented by the young people to local decision makers. In some cases this included the elected member; however, this was not always the case. The secondary focus of the networks was on 'incentive' activities and included 'fun' activities such as bowling and activities that worked towards future goals. These activities helped keep the young people engaged.

Impact

Young people involved in the local network appreciated being listened to by decision makers. They also developed a range of skills and learned to be more independent. Many young people were seen to grow in confidence and develop strong working relationships with their peers and local network staff. They also had

a greater awareness of opportunities and, in some instances, had gained certificates, awards and qualifications through the network.

The local network staff's awareness and understanding of local training provision, including gaps, had increased. They felt this knowledge could benefit a wider group of young people not involved in the network if it led to more relevant training opportunities in the future. They also had a clearer picture of young people's needs, what was best from a young person's point of view and reasons why some were unable to overcome barriers to engagement. Importantly, local service managers who had attended presentations made by young people could see the value of involving young people in decision making.

Lessons for policy makers

A number of the outcomes from the experiences of those involved in the local networks are relevant to policy makers:

- The recruitment and retention of young people who are NEET on to the network requires a great deal of time and resources and, therefore, needs to be adequately funded to cover these costs.
- Providing broad messages on the benefits of the network allows young people the flexibility to shape the network once they are engaged. This is important as allowing young people to own the network improves retention. Having regular, weekly meetings, rather than less frequent meetings also facilitates the young people taking more control over their project.
- Engagement of young people is not a one-off event but a continual process, and as such continuity of staff is important. Accessibility, in terms of location and timing, is also important for retention.
- The NYA audit tool, for auditing local provision and services, is a useful tool, if presented in a youth-friendly way.
- It is important to gain the buy-in of lead members from the start of the project.

Conclusions and recommendations

The NYA Engagement Network offered a unique opportunity for young people who are NEET; it offered them a route through to an elected member and other senior members of the LA. *It is recommended that elected members should be encouraged to actively engage with the network and similar projects trying to reach those who are NEET.*

The issue of recruitment and retention can most likely be applied across many types of provision and services that work to engage young people who are NEET. Within the Engagement Network, there were clear challenges and this was evident in the amount of local network staff resource required to keep a small number of young people engaged. *Clear aims and messages need to be articulated to the young people so they are aware of what they will be doing and why. Partnerships between agencies should also be utilised to help with recruitment.*

Despite the challenges, there has been a great deal of effective practice that has come out of the pilot of the NYA Engagement Network. There have also been a lot of useful lessons learnt. *An effective practice guide has been developed as a result of the NYA Engagement Network which should be utilised by those interested in allowing young people to have a voice. It is also recommended that the findings of the research undertaken by the young people should be collated on a national level to identify any trends and important key messages that can be distilled nationally.*

The NYA Engagement Network Pilot has served its purpose well. Given the current government's policy and focus on local rather than national initiatives, it will be the responsibility of LAs to look at the available information and decide in what way, if at all, a local network or similar project that allows young people to have a voice is applicable to their locality.

Overall, the NYA Engagement Network model, if given adequate levels of resourcing and buy-in from the elected member, provides LAs with a new way of engaging young people who are NEET. The model has been shown to both help young people to build skills and confidence, and also to enable LAs to learn from the young people about their views of current services and their diverse needs. This could ultimately help to

reduce disengagement in future, if the views of young people are listened to and acted upon, which is important to LAs generally and in the current context of the Raising the Participation Age agenda.

1 Introduction

The decisions young people make at 16 after leaving compulsory education have a huge impact on their future prospects. This is confirmed by research carried out by the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) on behalf of the Department for Education (DfE, then the Department for Children, Schools and Families) in 2007 exploring the likely benefits of increasing the participation age to 17 from 2013 and to 18 from 2015 onwards (Spielhofer *et al.*, 2007). It showed, for example, that those who remain in education or training are more likely to be in employment at a later date and to benefit from significantly improved earnings over their lifetime. Further highlighting this, the government released the following statistics¹ which show the benefits of remaining in education or training:

- Having two or more A levels leads to men earning £80,000 and women £110,000 more over the course of their lifetime, more than someone whose highest attainment is getting five or more GCSEs A*–C.
- Having a level 3 Apprenticeship increases earnings by an estimated £105,000 and a level 2 Apprenticeship by £73,000.

The large majority of young people aged 16 to 18 do continue in some form of learning, either full or part time. It is the norm for young people to engage in long periods of study and achieve a set of formal credentials (Wolf, 2011). This means that only a relatively small group of young people aged 16 to 18 are not engaged in employment, education or training (NEET). In May 2011, it was reported that 8.3 per cent of 16 to 18 year olds were NEET in the first quarter of 2011 (DfE, 2011). While this is a decrease of 1.8 per cent on the same quarter in 2010, the proportion of older young people (aged 19 to 24 years) who are NEET has increased from 17.8 per cent to 18.5 per cent. There is also a churn of young people in education and training who move in and out of vocational provision without progressing forward (Wolf, 2011).

The impact of the recession has had major implications for young people in the workplace. There are fewer opportunities for young people entering the labour market and, as Alison Wolf (2011) stated in a recent review of vocational education:

The world of our 14-19 year olds is also one of very high youth unemployment and continuing economic change.

Wolf (2011, p.20)

Despite the difficult economic climate, and because of the benefits cited above, the government is committed to make sure that all young people continue in some form of education or training by providing them with the necessary support to help them participate in an optimal way. Within this it is the LA's duty to ensure that sufficient, suitable places are available to meet the reasonable needs of all young people, and to encourage them to participate.

In response to LAs' responsibilities to support young people, the LG Group (then the Local Government Association) and the Centre for Social Justice undertook a programme of work entitled 'Hidden Talents' which examined more effective local solutions for re-engaging young people who are NEET and helping them to become more involved in shaping local support and provision for young people. As a result of this programme the LG Group commissioned the National Youth Agency to develop a National Engagement Network pilot to support young people who are NEET to have a voice and shape local provision for young people.

1.1 The NYA Engagement Network Pilot Phase 1

The LG Group funded the NYA Engagement Network Pilot Phase 1, facilitated by the National Youth Agency (NYA), in four LAs (Cumbria, Bradford, Sandwell and Plymouth) in England. It aimed to engage young

people aged 16 to 24 with experience of being NEET into the planning and delivery process of services at a local level. The four areas were chosen to represent different geographical and socio-economic areas and different levels of non-participation in education or training.

The pilot stage of the Engagement Network was established in each of the four areas and numbers of young people engaged ranged from between one young person in one of the LAs to five in some of the areas. The young people were either currently NEET or had previously been NEET. The national network began with a residential in Cumbria which brought all four areas together. The local networks then went back to their areas and undertook an audit of local services and provision for young people. The findings of these were then presented by the young people to members of the national network at a residential in London.

The evaluation of Phase 1 included an analysis of client caseload information system (CCIS) data for the four pilot areas, interviews with ten local network staff and focus groups with ten young people at the London residential. The evaluation² reported that:

- Initially, there was a lack of LA buy-in at all levels in some areas and project aims and objectives were not shared with all stakeholders. There was also a need for clearer information for young people at the recruitment stage.
- Once involved with the network, young people were committed to making the project a success. Both young people and the local network staff were generally positive about the residentials they had attended. However, project progress in terms of the local audit of services for young people had been variable across the four areas.
- Key successes of the network pilot included: improved confidence in the young people, the creation of a group identity and groups working well as a network, the project exceeding the expectations of the young people involved, and inspiration for the young people and local network staff to develop project plans for the future.
- Future considerations included: a need for clear and specific success measures for the project and the

need for areas to articulate plans and targets for their areas.

1.2 The NYA Engagement Network Pilot Phase 2

The emphasis of the NYA Engagement Network shifted in Phase 2, with a stronger focus on the local networks than the national network. The local networks were distinctive from other projects aimed at engaging young people who are NEET in that they offered young people a chance to have a voice which would be carried through to local elected members.

Phase 2 of the Engagement Network also aimed to reach more young people in a larger number of LAs. Indeed, 11 LAs signed up to be part of Phase 2, including Bradford, Plymouth and Sandwell from Phase 1. The new authorities were:

- Bexley
- Hackney
- Leicester
- North East Lincolnshire
- North Tyneside
- Southend-on-Sea
- Warwickshire
- Wigan.

1.3 Aims and methodology of the evaluation

The main aims of Phase 2 of the evaluation were to continue to inform the development of the NYA Engagement Network, to identify impacts, outcomes and challenges of the Engagement Network across areas and to collect and share evidence of effective practice across LAs. More specifically, the objectives were to:

- collect baseline information of project aims and objectives across the LAs

- explore the experiences of LAs of implementing activities
- identify impacts, outcomes and challenges encountered by LAs collect and share evidence of effective practice in engaging young people to influence and/or shape local provision aimed at re-engaging young people who are NEET³.

The methodology for Phase 2 consisted of:

- an analysis of the project plans for all LAs involved in Phase 2 of the network
- interviews with key stakeholders (strategic and operational) across LAs involved in Phase 2 of the network
- case-study visits to five areas which included interviews with local network staff and young people involved in the network.

1.4 The context and structure of local area networks

Lessons learnt from Phase 1 of the NYA Engagement Network meant there was less focus on bringing the young people together for experiences such as residential and more focus on the young people completing projects in their local areas. LAs initially signed up to a memorandum of understanding, which outlined what was expected of each local network. They were then invited to attend national training events held in London and Bradford, and produced project plans which needed to be signed off by an elected member with responsibility for children's services.

Due to the timing of Phase 2 of the NYA Engagement Network, a great deal of change was occurring at both a national and local level which impacted significantly on how the local networks were able to operate. Much of this was due to the budget cuts applied to LAs which impacted on their services. The majority of network areas were facing restructuring while they were running the project, with many going through redundancy processes. Others were facing budget cuts and readjustment of service priorities. In a few instances, key staff involved in the network had lost their jobs. Consequently, local network staff were

facing a number of significant challenges while trying to run the network. This impacted on how local networks were able to run in a number of ways:

- Local networks started later than anticipated and subsequently finished later than expected.
- Local networks did not meet as regularly as intended.
- A few local networks were unable to complete all the work they had hoped they could in the time given.
- A few local networks changed their aims (please see details below).

All local networks were **led by LA teams**. In the majority of cases the Connexions service took lead responsibility. In other areas, it was led by a LA accreditation team, a youth offending service and a youth service.

Seven of the areas were **working in partnerships**. Most commonly, partner agencies were colleges, training providers or other service teams within the LA, such as teenage pregnancy, accommodation and housing or leaving care teams. Partnership working generally took two forms. The most common was partnerships set up to help with recruitment of young people (please see Chapter 2). In a few instances, partnerships were also used for delivery of the project. Generally partnerships were seen as successful and helped with the project. However, in three areas, partnerships had not been maintained throughout the duration of the pilot.

The main aims and long-term plans for the local networks, outlined in their project plan, related to: improving provision for young people; empowering young people who are NEET; improving outcomes for young people who are NEET; and long-term strategic aims for reducing the proportion of NEETs and improving services for young people in the local area. These are discussed in more detail in Appendix B.

1.5 Structure of the report

Chapter 2 of the report discusses the engagement of the target groups of young people in the different local networks, including the different approaches used to

encourage initial participation. It also discusses the methods used to maintain the young people's commitment throughout the length of the network. The chapter finishes by outlining the key learning points on engagement for policy makers.

Chapter 3 explores the structure and delivery of the different local networks. This includes a discussion on the different activities undertaken and the views of the local network staff and the young people on those activities. It also explores to what extent LA-elected members have engaged with the networks in their locality. The section concludes by outlining key learning points for policy makers.

Chapter 4 assesses the impact and outcomes of the local networks. This includes the impact directly on the young people and also wider impacts that may have arisen as a result of the network's activities.

Chapter 5 presents the perspectives of the local network staff on being part of a national network and the benefits and challenges this brings. It also discusses their views on the training and support offered and the future of the local networks in their LA.

Chapter 6 ends the report by highlighting conclusions and recommendations for LAs and policy makers.

Notes

- 1 <http://www.education.gov.uk/16to19/participation> (accessed July 2011).
- 2 For the Phase 1 evaluation findings, please see Appendix A.
- 3 An effective practice guide is available at www.nfer.ac.uk

2 Engagement of young people

This chapter focuses on how the local networks made contact with and engaged young people in activities. The first part of the chapter examines the ways in which networks recruited young people, including the challenges encountered and how these were addressed. The second part of the chapter reports on retention strategies and identifies which aspects of the local network kept young people involved.

2.1 Methods used in engaging young people

The aim of the network was to reach the young people who traditionally do not engage in education or training. Due to this, local network staff found the initial recruitment of young people challenging. Local network staff addressed this challenge by using a combination of the following approaches:

- managing the message
- applying practitioner skills
- working with other agencies
- targeting types of young people
- offering young people something different
- providing an appropriate venue.

Local network staff highlighted the importance of conveying a clear message about what benefits participating in the Engagement Network could offer young people. Offering young people the opportunity to work on a national initiative alongside others and share their vision and views to improve provision for young people like themselves was an effective engagement message. This message was sufficiently broad to allow flexibility for the shaping of the network at the local level by young people.

Local network staff explained that, as experienced practitioners, they were used to dealing with young

people's changing circumstances and requirements, and providing reassurance and support. They used these skills to develop a rapport with young people through establishing regular contact via initial and follow-up telephone calls. They pointed out that this required a considerable investment of time and that the restructuring of local services, and concomitant reduction in staffing, made it more difficult to build up relationships with young people.

The research found that local network staff worked with one or more local agencies to extend their reach and contact with young people. Recruitment partners included Connexions, the Youth Service, the Targeted Youth Support Team, the Youth Offending Service, Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services, the Looked After Children Service, schools, colleges, training providers, voluntary organisations (e.g. YMCA, Nacro), teenage parent groups and a theatre. Local network staff noted that these agencies, which were already in contact and working with the young people, provided them with vital links and referrals.

Recruitment priorities differed across the local networks. Some local network staff targeted particular groups including care leavers, teenage parents, young offenders and those at risk of offending, young people with mental health issues, apprentices and young people participating in Foundation Learning programmes. For example, in the area where local network staff wanted to work with young people who had mental health issues, they aimed to give them opportunities which one member of staff said would 'develop their voice, but also in the long term ... develop their confidence and skills, so they could then progress.'

In contrast, some local network staff decided to recruit young people who were NEET whatever their needs and circumstances. An interviewee, who had liaised with a hard-to-engage NEET cohort team highlighted the value of recruiting young people based on working relationships out in the field where staff knew their clients' needs and circumstances. Elsewhere, local network staff who had engaged young people who

were NEET saw it as a two-way learning experience 'almost like a consortium with them [the young people]' where local network staff gained an understanding of how better to support and work with them, with the young people being 'almost like advocates'.

Networks recruited young people in all the groups reported above. Approximately equal numbers of males and females aged 16 to 23 were recruited.

The research found that local network staff engaged young people by offering them something different compared with other projects available to them. Essentially, this was the opportunity to express collectively their views to local council elected members and service managers about the opportunities and amenities provided for young people. Local network staff attempted to make them feel special by giving them the opportunity to take on this role of finding out young people's experience and representing their voice to key local decision makers. This approach is articulated below:

You've been chosen – not everyone can do this – because of the type of young people [involved] this really worked. They feel that they are special and this shows in the amount of time they've taken to do this.

Local network staff

The following remark was typical of participants' willingness to champion the cause of young people and make a difference:

They [local network staff] said it was a big responsibility so I thought, yeah, I want to do this.

Young person

Local network staff attempted to make the network experience a balance of fun and worthwhile tasks for the young people. One local network staff member observed that although the experience was not highly pressured, work got done. They also promoted participation in the network as an opportunity for young people to develop skills, gain access to support in writing CVs and job applications and setting up bank accounts, and gain certificates. Incentives were sometimes offered including residentials, meals out, driving lessons and activity-based trips.

Local network staff noted the importance of locating network sessions in an appropriate venue for young people. This meant ensuring the venue was easy to get to and a place where participants would feel comfortable and secure. For example, one venue was located in a young people's centre where participants could play pool, use computers and eat in a snack bar. Another venue was a club for young people which provided a drop-in centre offering group activities and one-to-one support. In other cases, where the venue was less central, the network provided young people with a bus fare or provided free minibus transport to facilitate their attendance. The timing of sessions in line with young people's availability, especially when they had moved into education or employment, was also important in encouraging participation.

Through the approaches outlined above, local network staff recruited between five and 14 young people. As the next section explains, the groups of participants were not static.

2.2 Retention of young people

The research found that the engagement of young people was a continuing process rather than a one-off event. This serial engagement was required because issues in their personal lives meant that participants' commitment sometimes fluctuated. Local network staff had to continue to encourage young people to attend. Some interviewees pointed out that maintaining momentum was a challenge and noted the value of consistent staffing which enabled disengaged young people to build up working relationships with local network staff on the project. Uncertainty about staffing was a challenge, as this local network staff member indicated:

It's been quite difficult ... trying to keep the work with the young people going without being really sure of where we were going to be able to go with it because we didn't know who was still going to be in place.

Local network staff identified wow factor activities, such as working with creative media, and incentives, including shopping vouchers, in helping to keep participants engaged. This was also important because, although network meetings were expected to take place at least once a month, this was not always possible owing to bad weather and staff availability.

Other local network staff reported how providing something as simple as tea and toast at the start of each session helped to keep some young people involved.

There was a degree of churn in local network groups as some young people tried it and left or moved into education, training or employment. These positive outcomes for individuals were noted by young people who reported that the network presented a good opportunity to help others like themselves and to hear other people's views 'to better your future'.

When asked what it was about the network that kept them involved, young people's responses identified different reasons of significance to them, including the chance to have their say and camaraderie:

Everyone has a positive outlook and you could speak your mind and give your ideas and no one would put you down.

It isn't a strict working environment and we can have a laugh.

Finding out about different services.

Local network staff pointed out that empowering young people and enabling them to own their local network was critical to retaining participants. This involved young people setting the agenda and, for example, having a say in the questions included in the audit of local services. Where local network staff had arranged visits to local training providers, these had proved successful because young people appreciated being able to interview different providers about the

type of training they offered. Participants were also committed where they experienced a journey which took them from carrying out an audit of local services through preparing a presentation to giving evidence to elected members and service managers in the LA.

2.3 Lessons learnt for policy makers

The experience of the local network staff in engaging and retaining young people who are NEET or have previously been NEET onto their networks provides a number of useful learning points for policy makers. These are summarised below:

- The recruitment of young people who are NEET on to projects such as the Engagement Network requires a great deal of staff time and resources and, therefore, needs to be adequately funded to cover these costs.
- When initially recruiting young people, providing broad messages on the benefits of the network allows young people the flexibility to shape their network once they are engaged. This is important as allowing the young people to own the network, helps to maintain young people's involvement.
- Engagement is not a one-off event but instead a continual process. As such, continuity of local network staff is important.
- Retention is also helped by ensuring the network is accessible to the young people, in terms of location and meeting times, as they need to be able to access the project around their changing circumstances.

3 Delivery of the networks

This chapter focuses on delivery of the local networks. The first part of the chapter examines the ways in which the local networks were structured and delivered. It then focuses on the types of activities the networks delivered and the views of local network staff and young people on those activities. Finally, the chapter explores the role of the elected member in the networks and the extent to which they have engaged with their local network.

3.1 Structure and delivery of projects

Local networks generally held meetings between once a week and once a month. Around half of the projects met every week. In these areas, young people tended to have more control over the direction of the network and were more likely to be leading it with the support of local network staff.

Where networks met less regularly, they had often originally planned to meet more frequently but had needed to change their approach due to factors such as staffing issues including staff absence, redundancy or redeployment, which disrupted the progress on the network. In these networks, as the young people did not meet on a regular basis, they were unable to drive the network forward themselves and so relied on the staff to take a lead role in keeping the network going, which could be further complicated by changes in staffing. Both young people and the local network staff felt that in these instances, the project 'lacked momentum'.

3.2 Types of activities undertaken as part of the network

In order to meet the aims of their networks, as laid out in their project plans, local networks were generally made up of two types of activities. The primary activity was a research project of some kind which was the central focus of the network. Wrapping around this was

a package of activities that can be described as incentive activities and could be both fun and enjoyable or beneficial to the young people. These two different types of activities are described in more detail below.

The **research project** investigated either the local support and provision for young people or the needs of young people in their area. The findings of this would then be fed back to service providers and local decision makers through reports or, more commonly, presentations.

The research projects used a range of different methods to identify the information required. The approaches used can be summarised as:

- **Interviewing staff working at different providers and services.** Young people developed questions to ask staff in training providers and Connexions. In one area, the young people learnt how to film the interviews using the different equipment and turned the interviews into a film.
- **Undertaking focus groups with young people who are NEET.** Young people developed questions to ask young people who were currently NEET about their views of services for young people and what their needs were. In one network they used this approach to speak with over 100 young people.
- **Surveying or interviewing young people who are NEET or ex-NEET.** Young people filled out questionnaires on the street or in local Connexions centres and training providers. In one area, the young people involved filmed other young people answering questions using a 'big brother' style diary room approach.
- **Mystery shopping services for young people who are NEET.** Young people undertook mystery shopping activities such as calling out of hours numbers for services and having meetings with services which were judged on a range of criteria and written up into a report.

After completing the research project and analysing the data, the majority of local networks held presentations as a way of disseminating the findings. The presentations were led by the young people and often to service managers and those with commissioning responsibilities. The elected members with the portfolio for children's services were invited to the presentations in all areas; however, only a few of the local networks stated that the elected member attended (this is discussed further in section 3.4).

In one local network, which consisted of young people with mental health issues, a DVD recorded by the young people was played at a celebration event for young people. This was played instead of the young people doing a presentation as it allowed the young people to feedback the information gathered but in a way that was not too daunting or uncomfortable for them.

The primary activity of the research project was packaged alongside a number of activities that provided young people with **incentives** to keep attending. These included activities that provided fun and experiences for the young people and also those which benefited the young people in terms of their future goals. Examples of both of these are given below:

- **Fun/experiential activities:** Residentials, kayaking, canyoning, art exercises, teambuilding exercises, laser quest, days out and meals out.
- **Future goals activities:** Interview techniques, CV writing, job applications and job searches.

The local networks were also able to access an online diagnostic tool⁴ to help the young people to assess their strengths and areas for development and to measure change over the course of the local network. Local network staff were given training on how to use the tool at national training events.

Overall, local network staff found this diagnostic tool to be useful and could see the benefits to young people that they work with. However, the majority of areas only completed it up to two times or did not use it at all. The two main issues related to logistical problems. The first being that the tool took too long to complete, which was a particular issue when some projects only met once a month for an hour. The second

issue was that each young person needed a computer to complete it, which was an issue when local networks held their meetings in youth clubs with no, or very little, access to computers.

3.3 Views on the network

Overall, both the young people and the local network staff were very positive about their involvement in the networks. Young people had stated that they 'have enjoyed it', that it was 'something different' and that they 'work well as a group'.

The local network staff generally felt the research and presentation activities were the most useful for the young people. In particular, they felt that speaking to people on the street when doing questionnaires and standing up in front of people when doing presentations were useful for the young people in terms of skills development and confidence building.

Other useful aspects included residentials and team-building activities, exercises that were different to 'pen and paper' exercises such as collecting the information on film or by computer, and visits to training providers. The NYA audit tool supplied by NYA which helped the young people to undertake an audit of local provision and support for young people who are NEET was also seen to be very useful. However, local network staff believed it could be improved by making it more young people-friendly by being less confusing and presented in a less formal way.

The young people felt that the most useful elements of the network related to the presentation and the research skills they had picked up. Others felt the social aspects of the network had been the most useful.

The young people also found the presentation one of the most enjoyable aspects of the network, alongside the social aspects including meeting new people. In one network, the young people had found working with a filmmaker the most enjoyable part.

The local network staff generally felt that the initial meeting of the network had been the least useful, particularly in areas where the young people were being brought together for the first time and the local network staff had to spend considerable time building relationships between and within themselves and the

young people. A small number of local network staff felt that initially the young people had not understood the aims of the local network when they had started working together.

Young people were unable to think of things they felt had not been useful to them. However, there were aspects of the project that they had not enjoyed. These included undertaking the more mundane tasks involved in research projects such as tallying numbers of responses and double-checking figures. Some young people were surprised by how boring they had found the filming element of their project to be as they had had to re-film elements, stating that 'filming is not glamorous!'.

3.4 Involvement of an elected member

The involvement of an elected member in the network was encouraged by NYA and the LG Group and there was a requirement that an elected member be named on the initial project plans. All local networks had undertaken this step, but many then struggled to further that involvement of the elected member.

In just under half of the local networks, the elected member had no further involvement after having been named on the project plans. In all these areas, the local network staff had invited the member to attend the presentation by the young people but they had not attended. In a few instances the elected member had nominated someone else to attend in their place who subsequently also had not attended the presentation. Generally local network staff believed that the elected members did not attend because they were too busy or because they felt there may be too many local projects looking at the views of young people, citing youth councils as an example.

In a similar number of local networks, the elected member had attended or was expected to attend the presentation made by the young people but had not had any further involvement in the networks. However, in two areas, the elected member had been keen to be involved in the network and had held meetings with the local network staff, signed off plans and attended the presentation. In these areas, the local network staff

stated that the elected members were aware of the long-term negative impacts of having high NEET figures and had previously been keen to get involved in projects relating to this group of young people.

Despite patchy involvement of the elected member, all local network staff could see the potential benefits of their involvement. The main benefits were strategic in that they felt having the support of the elected member would mean that changes to services and provision would happen as a result of the work of the young people. Also it was felt that the elected member would raise the profile of the network locally by championing it. However, due to the timescales of the evaluation, it was too early to ascertain if this had happened. Local network staff also believed that young people would benefit as they would feel that they were being listened to and that they were valued.

3.5 Lessons learnt for policy makers

The experience of the local network staff and young people relating to the activities undertaken as part of their local engagement network provides a number of useful learning points for policy makers. These points are summarised below:

- Structuring a local network around weekly meetings allows young people to have more control over the network. As noted in section 2.2, allowing young people to have this control, empowers them and ultimately helps with retention.
- If presented in a more youth-friendly way, the NYA audit tool can be a useful tool for helping young people undertake an audit of their local services and provision.
- It is important to gain the buy-in of lead members from the start of the project so that they can champion the network and help to empower the young people.

Notes

4 www.selfsmart.co.uk

4 Impact and outcomes

Chapter 4 focuses on the impact of participating in the NYA Engagement Network on participants. The first part of the chapter reports on the impact on young people involved in the local networks and the second part presents evidence of wider outcomes for other stakeholders.

4.1 Impact on young people involved in the Engagement Network

The research found that participation in the NYA Engagement Network had several positive impacts on young people identified by the local network staff and the young people themselves. The main impacts were young people:

- appreciating being listened to by decision makers
- learning to be independent and take responsibility
- becoming more aware of learning and earning opportunities
- gaining confidence in forming working relationships with their peers and local network staff
- developing skills
- gaining certificates, awards and qualifications.

Each of these impacts is outlined below.

Young people felt valued because local network staff, and in some cases elected members and service managers, had listened to their issues and concerns. Local network staff noted that through these dialogues young people were more empowered to influence and challenge decision makers, especially around the training offer. The point was also made by local network staff that through having their opinions heard, young people understood more about how they could influence and shape the delivery of services. This was echoed in these young people's remarks:

... getting straight to the point to managers at the presentation [was the biggest achievement of the network] – we spoke directly to the source and so things may actually get done.

I don't know if it will change people, but they're listening, aren't they?

Local network staff identified another effect of participation in the local networks on young people which involved their working more independently and taking responsibility. This was considered by some young people as learning 'how to go about doing things ourselves'. They appreciated that the local network staff 'have let us do it ourselves. They have given us advice but not told us what to do' which was different from other experiences they had had. Some young people reported that participating in network activities had motivated them to complete tasks by 'following something through and not giving up'.

Another benefit for young people from participating in the Engagement Network was an increased awareness of what they could do in terms of education, training or employment. They were more aware of the range of training providers and training opportunities available in the local area. In addition, participants became more aware of what other local services such as the Youth Service could offer them. Their awareness of the recreational activities on offer in local centres for young people also increased.

A significant impact on young people was increased confidence from getting involved in local network activities. This was characterised as developing the confidence to contribute to debate and discussion about the opportunities and provision available to young people at the local level. In addition, participants grew more confident about working in a group and about building working relationships with the local network staff and other young people. Local network staff observed that the experience was a good networking tool which enabled participants to meet new people and expand their horizons, in some cases through the experience of residential. Another type of

confidence gained by young people was the confidence to move on to the next stage, to progress to training or employment which some had done.

Young people gained skills from their involvement in the local networks. These skills included team-working skills, research skills and presentation and public speaking skills. Young people considered that presenting the findings of their audits of local services to large groups of adults was a challenging and useful experience relevant to future employment. Some local network staff noted that participants had learned negotiation skills through working in groups.

Some young people gained certificates, awards and qualifications from their involvement in local networks. These included certificates of participation, Duke of Edinburgh awards and accredited qualifications such as introduction to communication skills and media and creation. These certificates and awards were particularly valued by those young people who did not have GCSE qualifications.

The wider outcomes emerging from the networks are presented next.

4.2 Wider outcomes

Some local network staff reported that a wider outcome from the network was an analysis of local training provision, including gaps, which could benefit young people not involved in the network if it led to more relevant training opportunities in the future. Other interviewees observed that services were also being shaped by young people's contributions through other channels such as the UK Youth Parliament and youth forums.

Local network staff felt that another outcome from the network was local service managers gaining a clearer picture of young people's needs and what is best from a young person's point of view. They also found out more about the reasons why some were unable to overcome barriers to engagement in education, training or employment. There is now more of a focus on vulnerable young people in some areas.

Local network staff pointed out that the local service managers who had attended presentations made by young people could see the value of involving young people in making decisions about provision. Interviewees thought that sessions such as these had helped some organisations to make contact with other agencies and to find out what others in the area were doing which might help to fill gaps in provision and avoid duplication of provision.

Other benefits were a school examining its pastoral support and exclusion policies as a result of working with network participants and in another area the results of the network feeding into a new European Social Fund NEET project by raising the profile of young people with mental health issues.

It is worth noting that a minority of local network staff pointed out that it was too early to assess the impact of the network on young people or other stakeholders.

Finally, local network staff reported that having the involvement of elected members now and in the future would help to maximise impact by providing valuable strategic leadership and drive for implementing the type of changes articulated as important by young people in their local network activities.

5 The National Engagement Network

While all the activities described in the previous chapters occurred at a local level, the local networks were part of a National Engagement Network run by the NYA. The LAs signed up to the National Network when they joined the project and were invited to attend training sessions in either Bradford or London. The National Coordinator of the network for NYA was also responsible for monitoring the local networks throughout the process.

This chapter focuses on the national network and the views of the local networks on being part of this. We also look at the training and support that was offered through the National Engagement Network. Finally, we explore the future of the NYA Engagement Network.

5.1 Views on the National Engagement Network

Overall, all local network staff believed there were benefits to being part of a national network. Local network staff believed the national element was important and would have liked this to have had much more of a focus. Generally, they felt the value of being part of a national network was the ability to share ideas, information and good practice and also broadened their horizons. One local network staff member commented:

There are massive benefits of being part of a national group. I think it's good for young people's development as well and they can make those links with other young people.

However, local network staff generally felt the national network had not facilitated this to any great extent as there were no opportunities, after the initial training for the areas to meet and share ideas. Indeed, in a small number of LAs, the local network staff questioned to what extent there had been a true national element to the NYA Engagement Network, believing that, apart from the training element, they had been working independently.

Improvements to the national network generally stemmed from the local network staff's views that there could be a greater focus on the national element of the NYA Engagement Network. Improvements included:

- Allowing young people to meet other young people involved through national or regional celebration events to showcase their activities and learn from each other. Young people were invited to the initial training events; however, most of the young people had not been recruited onto the projects at this stage and there were no subsequent opportunities of this kind.
- LAs working together on collaborative NYA Engagement Network projects.
- Sharing results of the research project with other LAs.
- NYA representatives attending local network meetings to meet the young people.

5.2 Training sessions and ongoing support

Nearly all of the local network areas sent staff along to training sessions in either Bradford or London. Local network staff were generally very positive about these events and found them informative.

Local network staff were particularly grateful for the opportunities to meet with colleagues from other LAs working on networks where they could see a range of approaches being used and develop links with other areas. Local network staff felt this sharing of ideas was very important at the beginning of the networks. Most of the interviewees stated that they would have welcomed opportunities to continue the networking and take it forward throughout the life of the project.

There were a few suggestions for improvements to the training. Firstly, the local network staff stated that they

would have found it useful to have more practical insight into how projects were being set up in other LAs and what constitutes a realistic timescale for the project. Secondly, a small number of local network staff wanted the training to be more localised so that they did not need to take a whole day away from work.

Ongoing support from the NYA National Coordinator was clearly valued by the local network staff who felt it was important for ensuring their networks stayed on track. However, local network staff did identify some issues with ongoing support which are highlighted below:

- A need for closer monitoring of the networks from the National Coordinator. Some local network staff felt as though they had not had much contact with the NYA.
- More leadership from the NYA. Some local network staff would have liked the NYA National Coordinator to take on more of a leadership role rather than supportive role. This was felt to be important to help projects stay on track.
- A need for consistency of staff at the NYA. Due to a time of transition at the NYA, staff members with responsibility for the Engagement Network changed and local network staff commented that this impacted on communication and the amount of support they had received. Local network staff felt that they received fewer monitoring calls from the National Coordinator as the network progressed.
- A lack of direct input from the NYA to the young people. Some local network staff believed the young people would have valued direct contact with the NYA.
- There was a lack of network examples. Local network staff would have liked more information and examples of research projects and networks in other areas.

5.3 Future of the NYA Engagement Networks

The National Engagement Network Phase 2 came to an end in June 2011. Due to financial challenges and a reduction in funding to support improvement activities, which has resulted in significant restructuring of the NYA programme for the LG Group, the Network will not be continued or expanded in its current form. Instead, the NYA has planned to provide tailored support in a responsive and reactive way to LAs that would like to set up their own local engagement network or similar provision for young people who are NEET.

At a local level, in most cases there were no immediate plans for the continuation of the network. In all cases this was not a result of the network failing, but rather a symptom of more strategic changes at a local level, including a change in local priorities, staff redundancies and the closure or reduction of services. In a small number of areas, there were plans for the local network to continue. For example, in one area there were plans for the young people involved in the network to take up an advisory role with the network going on to recruit new young people to undertake the same project next year.

Local network staff in all areas were positive about the National Engagement Network and generally felt that it should be continued to be funded. One local network staff commented that 'if everybody had reaped the benefits that we did, then yes [it should be continued to be funded]'. Most local network staff commented that they had seen the benefits and value that networks had brought to the young people. They also felt there was a need for LAs to speak to young people before making decisions about their services and provision and as such felt it was important that projects such as the NYA Engagement Network continue to be funded:

I see the value on a local, personal level to the young people and their involvement... and that's one of the many things that the Engagement Network really got 'spot on' [...]. There was no 'we're doing this' and [...] it was very much about hearing their voice... How can we know about the experience of the NEET young people if we never ask the NEET young people?

Local network staff

6 Conclusions and recommendations

This chapter presents the main conclusions for the evaluation of the NYA Engagement Network Phase 2. Recommendations are also presented clearly within the chapter to highlight where action should be taken.

6.1 The National Engagement Network offer to LAs and young people

The NYA Engagement Network offered something unique to young people who are NEET: it offered them a route through to an elected member and other senior members of the LA. The young people greatly valued this aspect of the network and local network staff believed that there were considerable benefits to having an elected member involved. However, in practice the elected member's role varied significantly between LAs. In some instances they were not engaged with the network at all. Therefore, in these instances it was hard to determine what impact the research undertaken by the young people would have on local services and provision.

Recommendation: to maximise the effectiveness of local networks or similar provision, the elected member should be encouraged to actively engage with the network or with similar provision. Elected members should listen to the findings of such projects that offer young people a voice and, where possible, provide feedback to the young people on their suggestions and insight. This would maximise the benefits of the network both personally for the young people, and also more widely as the research findings may influence changes to services and provision.

Despite the challenging circumstances that were present in all the LAs involved in Phase 2 of the NYA Engagement Network, the networks were seen to have a positive impact on the young people. There was also

evidence of wider impacts, highlighting the reach and possible results this type of provision can have. However, some local network staff said it was too early to tell what the wider impacts had been and, therefore, the extent of the National Engagement Network's benefits is unlikely to be fully measured.

6.2 Overcoming the challenge of recruitment and retention

The issue of recruitment and retention can most likely be applied across many types of provision and services that work to engage young people who are NEET. Therefore, lessons can be learnt from, and good practice applied to, a wider spectrum of projects working in this area. Within the local networks, there were clear challenges in recruitment and retention of young people and this was evident in the amount of staff resource required to keep a small number of young people engaged in the local networks. However, this could be buffered by working in local partnerships. These are critical for recruitment and can also extend the reach of the network.

Recommendation: Clear aims and messages need to be articulated up front to young people so they are aware of what they will be doing and why. This will assist with both recruitment and retention.

Recommendation: Partnerships should be utilised wherever possible if working with young people who are NEET. Partnership working, particularly at the recruitment stage, can remove a great deal of the staff time that would otherwise be needed to build new relationships with the young people.

6.3 Sharing effective practice, lessons learnt and findings

Despite the challenges, there has been a great deal of effective practice that has come out of the pilot of the NYA Engagement Network in how best to work with young people who are NEET and allow them to have a voice. There have also been a lot of useful lessons learnt, both of which are worth sharing and should not be lost.

Recommendation: An effective practice guide⁵ has been developed as a result of the NYA Engagement Network which should be utilised widely by those interested in allowing young people to have a voice and inform local provision.

While the mechanisms of the network have allowed young people to grow and develop and lessons should be shared, the findings from the research undertaken by the young people should not be forgotten. The findings are already being used at a local level but there has been little attempt to collate the findings at a national level.

Recommendation: The findings of the research undertaken by the young people should be collated on a national level to identify any trends and important key messages that can be distilled nationally.

6.4 The future

Overall, the National Engagement Network Pilot Phase 2 has served its purpose well. Given current government policy and focus on local rather than national initiatives, it will be the responsibility of LAs to look at the effective practice guide and decide in what way, if at all, a local network or similar project that allows young people to have a voice is applicable to their locality.

Notes

5 Effective Practice Guide is available at www.nfer.ac.uk

References

Department for Education (2011). *NEET Statistics: Quarterly Brief May 2011* (Statistical Release OSR/2011). London: DfE [online]. Available: <http://www.education.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/STR/d001004/osr10-2011.pdf> [6 July, 2011]

Spielhofer, T., Walker, M., Gagg, K., Schagen, S. and O'Donnell, S. (2007). *Raising the Participation Age in Education and Training to 18: Review of Existing Evidence of the Benefits and Challenges* (DCSF Research Report 012). London: DCSF [online]. Available: <https://www.education.gov.uk/publications/eOrderingDownload/DCSF-RR012.pdf> [6 July, 2011].

Wolf, A. (2011). *Review of Vocational Education: the Wolf Report*. London: DfE [online]. Available: <http://www.education.gov.uk/16to19/qualificationsandlearning/a0074953/review-of-vocational-education-the-wolf-report> [6 July, 2011]

Appendix A



Evaluation of National Youth Agency (NYA) Engagement Network – Phase 1

Introduction

This document presents the findings from the first phase of the evaluation of the NYA Engagement Network. It is based on:

- an analysis of Client Caseload Information System (CCIS) data from the four pilot areas – Sandwell, Cumbria, Bradford and Plymouth
- interviews with ten project staff across the four areas
- focus groups with ten young people at the London residential.

Key messages and implications

Project start up

- Lack of local authority buy-in at all levels in some areas
- Project aims and objectives not shared with all stakeholders
- Clearer information needed for young people at recruitment stage

Current situation

- Young people are committed to making the project a success
- Youth workers and young people were generally positive about residential
- Overall project progress has been variable across four areas

Future considerations

- Need for clear and specific success measures for the project
- Areas need to articulate plans and targets for their areas
- Will all four areas continue to be involved in the project?
- Will other areas get involved?

Successes so far

Improved confidence

'I think it's brought my confidence out'
(young person)

Learnt about the project aims

'I learnt more about NEETs – what it's about'
(young person)

Create group identity and networking

'It was good to meet others involved, and to feel like part of a group. It enabled them to see things on a wider scale'
(youth worker)

Exceeded expectations

All young people described the project as being better and more useful than they expected

Inspired project plans for the future

'I think the London residential made them realise what they are capable of'
(youth worker)

Views of the residential

Likes

- **Meeting young people involved in a similar project:** 'They motivated the young people to think if you're happy enough and you're confident enough then you can make changes happen in your local area' (youth worker)
- **New experiences, such as visiting London:** 'I felt the travelling round was actually a good thing for them, to experience rush hour on the tube' (youth worker)
- **Meeting new people:** 'talking to random people...having to spend 3 days with them 24/7' (young person)

Dislikes

- **Being talked at:** 'We met two groups yesterday, met a guy and basically he was speaking to us like we were adults but we didn't understand, so we were just sitting there bored' (young person)
- **London residential was too rushed:** 'On some of the activities we've been rushed in and rushed out' (young person)

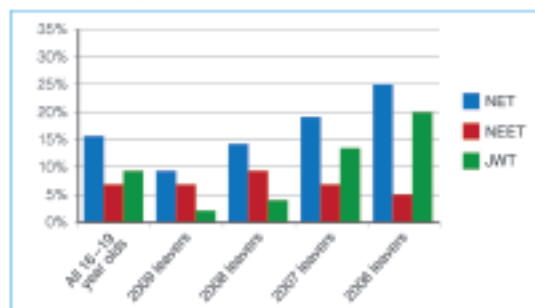
Analysis of CCIS data

The figures below present the proportions of young people in each of the areas who in January 2010 were:

- not participating in any education or training (NET)
- not in education, training or employment (NEET)
- in a job without training (JWT).

The figures display levels of non-participation for all 16–19 year olds and, separately, for those who completed year 11 in 2006, 2007, 2008 and 2009.

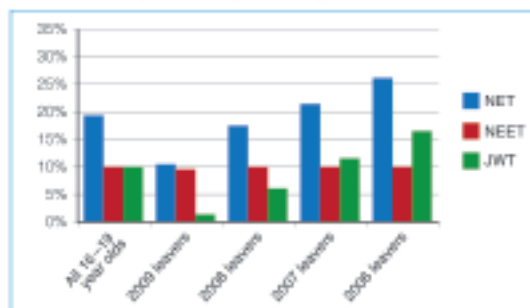
Bradford (January 2010)



Key messages:

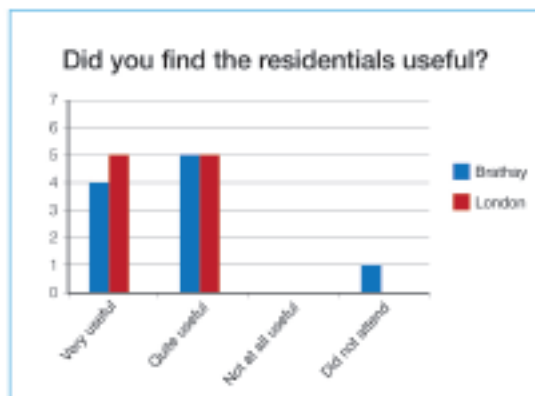
- 75% of 16–19 year olds in education or training
- Same proportion of males and female NEET
- Males more likely to be JWT (10%) than females (7%)
- Levels of non-participation increase as young people get older
- Proportions who are NEET decrease
- Young people who have learning difficulties and disabilities (LDD) are more likely not to participate

Sandwell (January 2010)

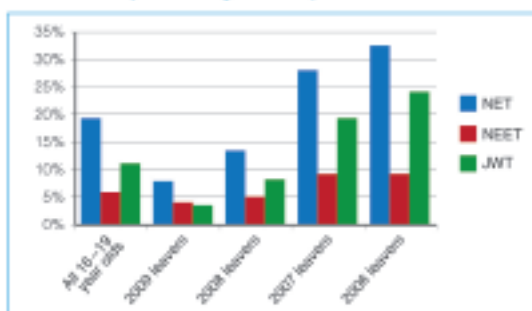


Key messages:

- 80% of 16–19 year olds in education or training
- Same proportion of males and female NEET
- Males more likely to be JWT (11%) than females (7%)
- Levels of non-participation increase as young people get older
- Proportions who are NEET remain fairly constant
- Young people who have LDD are more likely not to participate



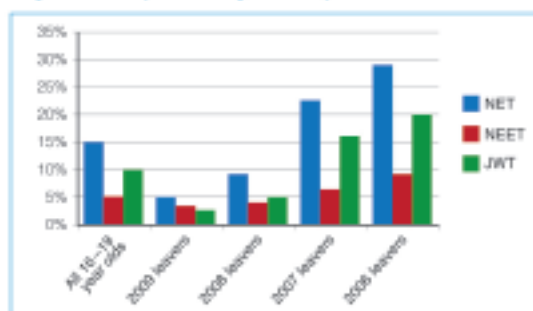
Cumbria (January 2010)



Key messages:

- 77% of 16-19 year olds in education or training
- About same proportion of males and female NEET and JWT
- Levels of NEET and JWT increase as young people get older
- Young people who have LDD are more likely not to participate

Plymouth (January 2010)



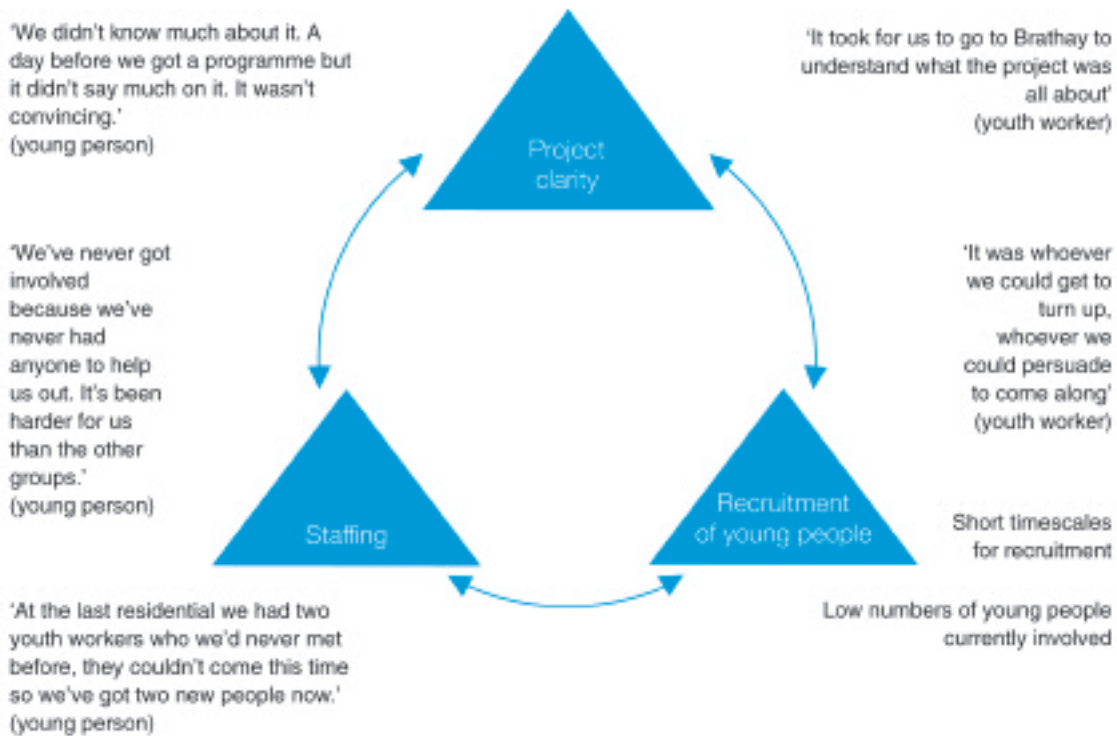
Key messages:

- 80% of 16-19 year olds in education or training
- Slightly more females in JWT than males
- Levels of NEET and JWT similar for first two years after end of year 11
- Young people who have LDD are only slightly more likely not to participate

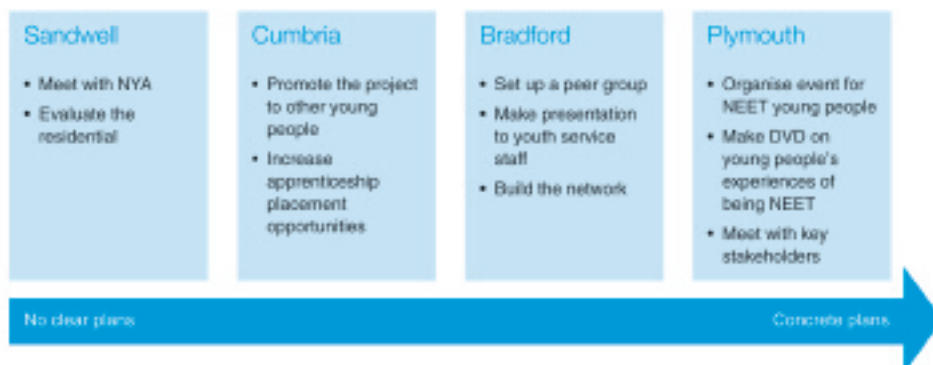
Challenges

The main challenges identified in the initial stages of the project related to three areas: project clarity, recruitment of young people and staffing.

The diagram and the quotes from young people and youth workers show the inter-related nature of these challenges.



Future plans for Engagement Network



Appendix B Summary of the project aims of local area Networks

The majority of area plans had at least one aim which related to **improving provision** through listening to young people who were NEET. The aims that fell into this category included:

- To understand from young people what current provision and services are on offer.
- To understand how young people view current provision and services.
- To identify the current gaps that exists in provision.
- To shape services and support to meet the needs of young people who are NEET or from vulnerable groups.
- To develop a greater understanding of the reasons young people become NEET and how best to reach these young people.

Related to the aims highlighted above, nearly all areas had an aim or long-term plan to give young people a voice or **empower the young people** who are NEET by engaging them in service planning. While similar to the aims already reported, this aim was slightly different as it focused on the young person rather than on the provision.

Another set of aims identified in half the networks related to **improving the outcomes for young people** who are NEET or from vulnerable groups, particularly those directly involved in the local

networks. These can be summarised as the network aiming to:

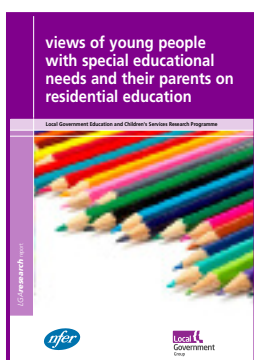
- identify and work through barriers to young people engaging in education, employment or training
- improve the confidence of the core group of young people involved in the network and allow them to experience new things
- provide advice and support to the group of young people engaged with the project.

A small number of aims were identified as **strategic long-term aims** of the network which related to reducing or continuing to reduce the numbers of young people NEET or sustaining the project and embedding it in normal practice.

Generally, network aims identified in the project plans did not alter and most networks were able to work towards completing these aims. However, in a few instances, the focus of the network changed when they started to complete the work due to structural or budgetary changes at both a local and national level. For example, one network changed their plans to focus on how young people felt about the abolition of the Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA) after this was announced by the government while another network, after learning about the closure of their Connexions centres, changed their focus on to where young people would go for support and advice in its absence.

Recently published reports

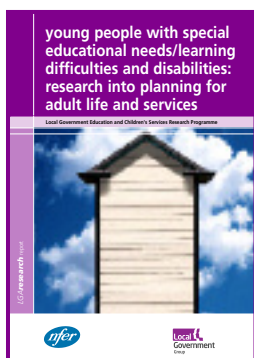
The Local Government Education and Children's Services Research Programme is carried out by the NFER. The research projects cover topics and perspectives that are of special interest to local authorities. All the reports are published and disseminated by the NFER, with separate executive summaries. The summaries, and more information about this series, are available free of charge at www.nfer.ac.uk/research/local-government-association/



Views of young people with SEN and their parents on residential education

This report explores families' experiences of residential education for young people with SEN or a disability, and their views on the placement process. Based on interviews with 25 parents and seven young people, the report reflects on their experiences and draws out the implications for local authorities and service providers.

<http://www.nfer.ac.uk/publications/LGRC01>



Planning for adult life and services for young people with SEN/LDD

The process of transition to adulthood for young people with SEN/LDD can be difficult and not always successful. Based on interviews with parents, young people and professionals in six local authorities, this report highlights key priorities and includes examples of recent initiatives.

<http://www.nfer.ac.uk/publications/SENT01>



Young people's aspirations in rural areas

Youth unemployment is a serious issue affecting rural areas. One possible cause is believed to be low aspirations among young people, their families and the local community. Based on a rapid review of literature and case-study visits, this report explores the influence and impact of low aspirations.

<http://www.nfer.ac.uk/publications/LYPA01>

For more information, or to buy any of these publications, please contact: The Publications Unit, National Foundation for Educational Research, The Mere, Upton Park, Slough, Berkshire SL1 2DQ, tel: +44 (0)1753 637002, fax: +44 (0)1753 637280, email: book.sales@nfer.ac.uk, web: www.nfer.ac.uk/publications.

The National Youth Agency's (NYA) Engagement Network aims to support young people who are NEET to have a voice and shape local provision for young people through local projects. This evaluation explores the experiences of LAs in implementing activities and identifying impacts, outcomes, challenges and effective practice in engaging young people to influence and shape local NEET provision. It covers:

- Engagement of young people
- Delivery of the local networks
- Impact and outcomes
- Conclusions and recommendations