

YOUTH tracker

Issue 2, Autumn 2009

Reporting on challenges and solutions for young people in the UK, during recession and recovery

Welcome to the second edition of the *Youth Tracker* – a quarterly newsletter looking at how Britain’s young people are faring in the recession, and what we can do to support them.

The aim of the newsletter is to focus on what the recession – and the recovery when it comes – mean for the most disadvantaged young people, particularly those not in employment, education or training.

As youth unemployment heads towards the 1 million mark, there is increasing attention on what policies and initiatives can make a difference to young people and the communities they live in.

This issue provides a wealth of examples of innovative practice – from the Young Foundation’s ‘Faking It’ project to build confidence, to the Real Ideas Organisation, which is developing practical skills and experience for young people. We also feature Professor Howard Williamson who is refreshingly honest about the strengths and weaknesses of the Connexions service.

We also provide a round-up of new research, statistics and other news about what is happening on the ground.

We welcome your feedback: see the contact details on page 12.



Carey Oppenheim, Co-director, [ippr](http://www.ippr.org)



Shaks Ghosh, Chief Executive, [Private Equity Foundation](http://www.privateequityfoundation.org)



privateequity foundation
Empowering young people to reach their full potential

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The Private Equity Foundation (PEF) was set up to empower young people to reach their full potential. It does this by investing both money and expertise from the private equity community, to help excellent charities achieve a step-change in their impact. www.privateequityfoundation.org



From the coalface

Practitioners working in our communities talk about the approaches they are taking to tackle the issues facing young people not in education, employment or training

The young: today's pathway to growth

Rajay Naik, Chair, British Youth Council

To grow our economy out of recession in the short term and compete with the economies of China and India in the long, it is essential that we maximise the potential of our younger generation.

Despite being the demographic least responsible for the recession, young people are suffering the most. The British Youth Council will shortly publish the findings of a survey of 500 young people, supported by the Office of the Third Sector, into the impact the recession has had on their lives. From the work already completed we can see that young people are working hard to control how the recession impacts on their lives, from spending less on their leisure time to taking steps to 'recession proof' their job. Yet often they are caught in a vicious cycle, unable to get the experience needed to secure a job.

To limit the impact of the recession on young people socially and economically, swift and coordinated action is required. The Government's recent pledges to create thousands of new jobs, invest in support and guidance, and safeguard apprenticeships are welcome. However, without government intervention being immediate, third sector support services

being visible, and employers thinking beyond the immediate crisis, we are in danger of neglecting one of our strongest national resources: the promise of our young people.

The British Youth Council's mission of 'inspiring, empowering and campaigning' for young people is patently more necessary in a time of recession. One of our current campaigns is for an Equal National Minimum Wage. Though the rise in the Minimum Wage from October 2009 is important, parity in the system is necessary in order to signal a commitment to younger people. The current arrangement which determines that a 17-year-old is entitled to £2.23 per hour less than a 22-year-old – regardless of their ability, responsibilities or performance – needs to be redressed. How can we on the one hand espouse the centrality of getting young people working and on the other undermine them legally?

“Age-old learning structures encourage the regurgitation of facts as opposed to stimulating critical thinking, imagination and problem solving”

Paramount to harnessing the ingenuity and developing the talent of younger people, however, is an education system that responds to needs and is not beset by constant tinkering. While on the board of my local Learning and Skills Council and currently as a College Governor, I am consistently baffled by

age-old structures that encourage the regurgitation of facts as opposed to stimulating critical thinking, imagination and problem solving. The embedding of apprenticeships, diplomas and the baccalaureate system will enable these qualities to become much more central in our future workforce.

A young man taking part in one of our programmes recently told me: 'I'm not hard-to-reach; I'm just easy to ignore.' If we are to maximise fully the potential of our young people we need to see them not only as tomorrow's generation or future leaders, but today's pathway to growth and prosperity. And then act accordingly.

www.byc.org.uk

Ramping up the waves of success

Marc Chadburn, The Real Ideas Organisation

In September the first ever group graduated from Cross Step and Xtra-Vert, two new vocational, skills-based schemes that have been specially designed by the Real Ideas Organisation (RIO) for young people who are not in education, employment or training, with assistance from entry to employment and the European Social Fund.

Xtra-Vert is a carpentry scheme set up by RIO and Will Woolnough, a carpenter and skater based in Newquay, Cornwall. Cross Step, which trains young people in life-guarding skills, is run by RIO and Chris Thomson of Errant Surf, Cornwall Business Awards' Young Business Person of the Year 2009.

All nine young people who started Xtra-Vert completed it. Over the four

months Will taught them a range of carpentry skills, including furniture construction and stud walling. They built a skate ramp, which is designed to be dismantled into modules and can be hired and transported to different venues. The team has already been commissioned to build a new, bigger ramp to take to festivals next summer.

Before the Xtra-Vert scheme none of the participants was in work or education. Due to the success of the initial skate ramp project four of the Xtra-Verts, aged 17 to 21, are now able to apply for full-time jobs with RIO to build the festival skate ramps and other commissions that have started coming in. A 20-year-old has been taken on as an apprentice for two years at another company, and four others are re-entering education.

Xtra-Vert James Follett was out of work for six months before he joined the scheme and says, 'The course has been immense, I didn't think this sort of stuff existed. It has made me more organised, more confident and obviously I have learnt valuable carpentry skills that I can use to get employment. I am really hoping that I can work for RIO and carry on at Xtra-Vert.'

Luke West adds, 'I took on the course because skating is my life and I love working with wood and getting the chance to be creative with it. The fact that Xtra-Vert combines both is fantastic, it's opened up so many doors.'

The three Cross Step students, aged 22 to 24, have graduated from the three-month specially-designed training with a NARS Beach Lifeguard Award and a British Surfing Association (BSA) Award,

which will allow them to work anywhere in the world as surf instructors and lifeguards. One has gone on to secure a position at Falmouth Surf School; another, Mitch Corbett, is going to be an ambassador for RIO, which is sponsoring him in surf contests over the next year. Mitch says, 'I am really stoked to be going on to be an ambassador for RIO as they do such great work with young people. I now have qualifications that can help me get a job and compete in surf competitions all over the world. It's a real bonus to have proper qualifications in something I enjoy doing.'



Naomi and Mitch, Cross Step graduates

Jodi Redgrove, founder and Project Manager of the schemes says, 'It was fantastic to see the Xtra-Vert crew and the Cross Step graduates showing off their new skills and work to so many interested and influential people. We are really pleased to see them taking their new found skills onto other projects, further training, apprenticeships and employment. We've had such good outcomes from these schemes because we've been able to tap into something that is not only relevant and exciting for young people but is also sustainable and useful.'

www.realideas.org

Faking it to make it

Jack Graham, Young Foundation

We know that lack of confidence, aspiration and 'soft' skills are often barriers for young people trying to re-enter employment, education or training. We also know that non-participation of young people is worse than ever. At the Young Foundation, we aim to develop and support innovative ideas that tackle this issue.

Faking It was a groundbreaking Channel 4 TV series that had its participants 'fake it' in an unfamiliar role and environment. We took this model and developed a pilot training programme to help 12 unemployed people aged under 25 get back into training or employment. We challenged the group to fake it as chefs at an event to mark the launch of *Grit*, a book on emotional resilience by journalist and author Yvonne Roberts. They had just two weeks to learn the skills required to pull the wool over the guests' eyes.

The participants were trained intensively in culinary skills, team-working and aspects of professionalism. Everything built up to a final task, held at the Hoxton Apprentice restaurant in London. By this point, the young people had taken full responsibility for their own success or failure. As a result of their hard graft and team work, they pulled it off with not one guest suspecting that their three course meal had been cooked by anyone but a professional chef.

Three months on, of the 11 fakers who completed the programme, every single one was in training or employment with many crediting their progression to the lessons they learnt during *Faking It*. Two are now trainee chefs and have even cooked for the Prime Minister.



What was it about *Faking It* that led to such successful outcomes? Well, the project set the bar high for its participants. There was a genuine chance of failure during the final task and this meant that the fakers were compelled to take responsibility, work as a team and learn on the job. These are all skills that we know are essential for getting on in work. For lots of young people, learning will not begin until they are out of the classroom and operating in the real world – this is inspiring, nerve-wracking and challenging for people but it is these feelings that are the fuel that drive all genuine learning processes.

www.learninglaunchpad.org/portfolio.php#faking-it

‘Path to Life’

Dr Genevieve Maitland Hudson, Kids Company

At Kids Company we support a cohort of young people with complex needs. Some of these young people are aged between 16 and 19 and are not currently in education, training or employment. We do not, however, jump to classify them as ‘NEET’ or think of them primarily as a problem that needs resolution.

The young people who refer themselves to our centres struggle with practical and emotional issues, but they are engaged and engaging, intelligent, able, aspirational, inspirational and full of ambition for their future and the future of their communities. At Kids Company we offer a wraparound package of care. We bring together social and therapeutic care and educational support to help the most vulnerable to access external services where necessary, to achieve their

potential and fulfil their ambitions. These young people have fallen through the net of statutory services and consequently have gaps in their skill set.

We offer them a tailored system of support that, while it focuses on core skills, does so within a creative framework that engages them and draws on their ideas, interests and experience. We offer courses in film, theatre, music, new media and fashion which are accredited by the Arts Awards, and we bolster that creative curriculum through a life skills course accredited by the Open College Network.

This ‘Path to Life’ curriculum offers a bespoke series of units which emphasise social and emotional learning and the skills necessary for independent life. As young people access this programme they explore pathways into further education and employment. Kids Company continues to support them once they have made that transition. We do this because we value long-term outcomes and we know how important it is to continue to offer encouragement as young people move forward.

www.kidsco.org.uk

‘Youth Works’

Rosie Ferguson, London Youth

The term ‘NEET’ may be neat but it isn’t particularly helpful. It suggests a homogeneous group and a one-size-fits-all solution. In reality, the reasons why young people are not in education, employment or training are as diverse as the young people themselves. This truth is at the heart of London Youth’s approach.

We believe in the potential of all young people. Everybody, regardless of

their education and experience, has aptitudes and interests. Our work focuses on harnessing and developing these. We do this through a variety of flexible programmes. Not everything will work for somebody, but something will work for everybody.

“The term ‘NEET’ may be neat but it isn’t particularly helpful”

Youth work has the power to re-engage marginalised young people; this belief underpins our work. Youth workers have the unrivalled ability to reach those who are disadvantaged, and youth work training is a fun and dynamic method of educating young people.

Our Youth Works programme puts this approach into practice, providing jobs and training for disadvantaged young people in youth work. Our Level 1 Foundation in Youth Work qualification, tailor-made for 16- to 21-year-olds, gives participants the confidence to progress yet is broad enough to be beneficial whether or not they choose to continue in youth work.

We are now scaling up this model with funding from the Future Jobs Fund, which will allow us to provide a six-month job placement paying the London Living Wage to 50 young people.

Crucial to success is the provision of long-term support. Rather than focus narrowly on academic achievement, we aim to support overall personal development through the use of techniques such as life coaching. This is an effective way of identifying young people’s values and mapping out pathways to future growth and success.

www.londonyouth.org.uk

‘Youth Achievement Foundations’

Charlotte Hill, UK Youth

UK Youth’s first six Youth Achievement Foundations (YAFs) are already showing the contribution a non-formal approach can make to educational achievement. By 2011 there will be 15 YAFs around the country making a real difference for young people.

The Youth Achievement Foundations are a motivating vocational and activity-based curriculum of personal and social development for students excluded, or at risk of exclusion, from secondary school at Key Stage 4. The foundations are based either within schools which act as a hub for local referrals, or more commonly in separate buildings run by independent organisations experienced in alternative curricular delivery.

With funding from the Department for Children, Schools & Families and the Youth Sector Development Fund we are developing the first ten of these pathfinder foundations in 2008–2011.

All staff act as mentors for students, giving priority to their personal development, especially employability skills. The attendance rate shows the scheme’s success. The percentage average school attendance of participants has been in the low 30s – but typical attendance figures at all of the first year foundations stand at well over 90%.

Essential features of the Youth Achievement Foundations:

- Young people are at the heart of the programme, shaping its delivery as ‘service users’ through consultation on curriculum content, learning environment and vocational experiences.
- The foundation model is based on a

four-year pilot which received an ‘outstanding’ Ofsted report and is financially self-sustainable.

- The foundations are designed to meet the needs of young people for whom mainstream education is no longer working. While maintaining a core delivery of basic literacy and numeracy, pupils are offered a curriculum that is more appropriate to their development and accredits their learning in a variety of vocational areas. Students are empowered to take increasing responsibility for their activities, their learning, themselves and each other.
- All staff are mentors, giving priority to each student’s personal development, especially social and employability skills. Ratios of mentor to student are typically one to four as a maximum.
- YAF programmes ensure that students experience success, not failure, to enhance their self-esteem, and they lead to skills for employment.

To date over 75% have gained Youth Achievement Awards, 75% gained a Key Skill and 100% have gained accredited outcomes.

www.ukyouth.org/YA+Foundations/Youth+Achievement+Foundations.htm

Yesterday and tomorrow

Mark Vaughan, Serco

A programme focused on understanding young people’s individual histories, overcoming their personal barriers and realising their potential is reaping success in Stoke-on-Trent.

In 2008/9, Stoke’s Children and Young People’s Plan, led by a Serco-appointed management team, made tackling the number of young people not in

education, employment or training a priority. There were several hotspots around the city where young people fell into this category.

Reach4It, a programme born out of the work of Youth Services and Connexions Staffordshire, now in its second year, is improving the life chances for more than 500 of the city’s young people. It runs for 10 weeks and challenges young people to think about their ‘Yesterday’ and ‘Tomorrow’. The first stage involves unpacking their individual histories, often a very emotional journey for participants, which enables each to identify their own unique areas for development.

The Tomorrow stage then uses group work, one-to-ones, focused individual work and exposure to new experiences to help young people challenge their personal barriers. Participants can then get further consultation through the programme or from more specialised organisations. This stage is key as young people gain a sense of achievement from having identified their demons and a great sense of trust develops between them and programme staff.

Having brought the young people this far, organisers use the knowledge gained about them to find participants opportunities in education, employment or training – this was achieved for a staggering 82% (217 out of 265) in the first year, exceeding the 40% target.

Nigel Tootill, Deputy Director of Children and Young People’s Service at Stoke-on-Trent Council says: ‘The success of this programme lies in treating our young people as individuals rather than a mass problem. Listening, challenging, and supporting through this programme is giving these young people a better future.’

www.serco.com/markets/education/

In the news ... and in numbers

Youth Tracker summarises how issues around young people not in education, employment or training have been highlighted in the media in the last few months, and presents a round-up of the latest published statistics

Ruth Sunderland covers the issue of rising numbers of unemployed young people in *The Observer* (24 May 2009). She points out that the high number of young people not in education, employment or training is not new, as, even 'before the downturn, a shocking 13 per cent were classed as NEETs; now, the proportion has risen to 14.2 per cent'. Predictions from The Prince's Trust and the University of Sheffield estimate that of the three million predicted unemployed resulting from the recession, 1.25 million will be aged under 25.

Sunderland proposes a focus on keeping the young in particular off Jobseeker's Allowance and in skills training and education. A more robust and responsive apprenticeship programme would be a good place to start. Policies that seek to react to the changing nature of employment in the UK – including the shift away from manufacturing and heavy industry – must have regard to the needs of young people.

www.guardian.co.uk/business/2009/may/24/youth-unemployment-uk-benefits-jobmarket

The **Work Foundation** (17 June 2009) responds to International Labour Organisation (ILO) statistics relating to employment during the recession. ILO figures show 270,000 job losses and a greater rise in economic inactivity – as

opposed to unemployment – driven in part by growing numbers of NEETs. This has been exacerbated as job losses have been concentrated among male full-time employees and the under-25s.

www.theworkfoundation.com/pressmedia/news/newsarticle.aspx?oltemId=156

Barnardo's chief executive **Martin Narey** suggests, in an article by Polly Curtis in *The Guardian* (16 June 2009) that 'we urgently need a more relevant education system – with more vocational options for young people who are not suited to narrow, academic learning'.

This is in response to a rise in the percentage of 16- to 18-year-olds not in school or in work due to the current recession from 9.7 to 10.3 (as at June).

www.guardian.co.uk/education/2009/jun/16/teenagers-not-work-school-neets-rises

Polly Curtis explains in a further *Guardian* article (26 September 2009) that fears of an estimated 60,000 shortfall in the number of degree places available to well-qualified students have not been borne out: the intake in 2009 has been 35,000 more than in 2008 – and 22,000 more than the government cap of a 13,000-place increase.

www.guardian.co.uk/education/2009/sep/26/administration-universityfunding

Brendan Barber, general secretary of the Trades Union Congress, has urged the Government to 'ensure its guarantee

of training or work for young people out of work continues to be well funded, as demand will be high'. Meanwhile, **David Willetts MP** wants consideration to be given to the number of apprenticeship and postgraduate study places, and an improved careers service to cater for NEETs (BBC News online, 18 August).

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/education/8207180.stm>

Reviewing the policy implications of the OECD statistical report *Education at a Glance*, **Mike Baker** finds that investment in education has increased at a slower rate in the UK than in many other OECD countries (BBC News, 11 September 2009). Expenditure in education now accounts for 5.9% of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in the UK, lower than the 6.1% OECD average. The argument that basic education can improve youth prospects is supported by the statistic that in 2007, 6.4% of all 15- to 19-year-olds in the UK were classed as NEETs – double the average in the OECD as a whole.

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/education/8251701.stm>

In his keynote speech to the Labour Party Conference in Brighton, Prime Minister **Gordon Brown** committed to 10,000 skilled internships, aimed at university graduates, in partnership with the Federation of Small Businesses. Interns would receive £100 a week from

the Government and a top-up from their employer. And a partnership with the Eden Project and Mayday Network aims to create up to 10,000 'green' job placements.

www.labourmatters.com/the-labour-party/gordon-browns-labour-conference-speech-full-text-and-video/

The Federation of Small Businesses has called for an increase in the apprentice minimum wage, from £95 to £123 per week. Speaking in the *Training Journal*, FSB national chairman **John Wright** said 'Seven in ten of all apprenticeships already happen in small businesses and around 20% would take on a graduate intern.' The FSB also used the Labour Party Conference to call for a £3 million investment in the creation of 5,000 new graduate placements.

www.trainingjournal.com/news/2440.html

Chloe Rhodes in *The Sunday Times* (13 September 2009) raises the issue of a potential skills-shortage in STEM subjects (science, technology, engineering and maths). Both Lucy Parker, chair of the Talent and Enterprise Task Force at the Department for Children, Schools and Families, and Richard Wainer, head of education and skills at the Confederation of British Industry (CBI), argue that alongside the current higher education route, a viable option which mixes both apprenticeships and diplomas should exist as a possible career path.

Rhodes comes out in support of the mixed education and experience approach.

<http://business.timesonline.co.uk/tol/business/specials/workinspiration/article6831716.ece>

NEET Statistics Quarterly Brief (Q3 - England only)

Department for Children, Schools and Families, November 2009

Data from a range of sources including the Statistical First Release (SFR) *Participation in Education, Training and Employment by 16-18 Year Olds in England*, the quarterly Labour Force survey (LFS) and the Connexions service's Client Caseload Information system (CCIS) is presented in this statistical brief for the third quarter of 2009.

The SFR analysis shows that the number of 16- to 18-year-olds categorised as not in education or training has fallen since 2003 due to an increase in participation. However, the overall proportion of the 16-18 cohort with NEET status rose from 9.5 to 10.3% between 2003 and 2008 due to a rise in the number who were not in employment.

While the LFS shows seasonal fluctuations in the number of NEETs, which reflects the academic year, the proportion of the 16-18 cohort classified as NEET was slightly higher in the third quarter of 2009 than the same period a year ago. On the LFS measure 13.4% of 16-18s were NEET in Q3 2009. However, LFS data shows a big increase in the percentage of 16- to 24-year-olds who are classed as NEET - 18% in Q3 2009 compared with 16.2% in the same period of 2008. The North of England has the highest proportions of NEET-classified 16- to 18-year-olds, with Yorkshire & Humber, the North West and North East exceeding the CCIS average of 6.8% (with rates of 7.9, 7.8 and 9.8% respectively).

www.dcsf.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/STR/d000870/index.shtml

Youth Cohort Study and Longitudinal Study of Young People in England: The Activities and Experiences of 17 year olds: England 2008

Department for Children, Schools and Families, June 2009

This statistical bulletin is based on the responses of young people to the Youth Cohort Study (YCS) and the Longitudinal Study of Young People in England (LSYPE). It suggests that at 16, young people not in education, employment or training (NEET) were noticeably less happy than other 16-year-olds.

The study shows that the Level 2 educational attainment (including GCSEs) has an impact in subsequent years: 37% of young people with no qualifications were NEET at age 17, compared with 2% of those with 8 GCSEs at grades A*-C. Low levels of parental education and low-skilled parental occupation also have a bearing: 11% of NEETs identified their parents to have attained 'Below A-level', and 32% to be in 'Routine & Other' jobs. Permanent exclusion from school and persistent truancy in Year 11 led to the highest probability of becoming NEET.

The NEET category is not composed of a homogenous group and there is 'churn' in and out of the category. In this study, 66% of those identified as NEET at age 16 were no longer so at 17. The average time spent NEET is nine months, but those more predisposed to being NEET are more likely to be so for longer. For example, 66% of those with no reported qualifications were NEET from September 2006 to May 2008, 28% spending 12 months or more in the category compared with less than 1% of young people with 8 GCSEs at A*-C.

www.dcsf.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SBU/b000850/index.shtml

EXPERT INSIGHT

Howard Williamson, Professor of European Youth Policy at the University of Glamorgan, has worked with young people for decades. Here he talks to ippr's **Daniel Neilon** about what does and doesn't work on NEETs issues

Daniel Neilon: NEET is a heterogeneous group, isn't it?

Howard Williamson: We have to think about how people differ on the basis of attitude, experience, current priorities, current behaviour and so on. Some kids are getting on very well on the edge of the labour market, some through crime and some are rotting away with drugs and drink. Others are at home playing computer games. They are all NEET, but they are all very different types of NEET with different motivations to re-engage. Over the past 20 years, we have aspired to reach the most excluded but we have tended to cherry pick the easiest to reach and now even they will suffer from the recession.

DN: With the recession making graduates and youth unemployment the targets of government policy, is there a danger that the really excluded will be forgotten?

HW: The really excluded have never been forgotten by the criminal justice system, but they generally have managed to manipulate themselves into

fairly invisible places where they are not known to the system. I've been a youth worker all my life, so I've worked with a lot of these kids and until they get nicked by the cops, they are off the radar of many of these agencies. Unlike a lot of European countries we do not



have an identity card scheme. There are still arguments why we should not have one, but when I talk about NEETs in places like Denmark or Romania, people

say 'this could not happen here because we can keep tabs on all the kids'.

Because an ID card is something which spans the whole range of services that you might need access to, whether that's health or employment, or leisure, you can pick up kids that you have lost through the education system in the local sports centre, for example, or the policing system. So it allows greater monitoring, positive and negative.

In England the Connexions service has implemented something called tracking. Here in Wales we have gone down a similar route but have called it 'keeping in touch', because you're simply not going to persuade some of these kids to find a way in with all the good counselling and advice of personal advisers and youth workers until they are ready to come back in, but they would all like to have a mobile phone number that they can contact when they are ready to come back in. Being NEET, or

Status Zero, is generally not a very nice place to be: you haven't got any money, you are probably on the fringes of crime or you are desperately lonely. It is not that they have dropped out of the labour market; they can't get into the labour market that they would like to be in.

DN: So how well do you think that the Connexions service and Personal Advisers approach works currently?

I was very closely involved in the development of Connexions when it was launched in February 2000, and there are some things to commend it. But, generally, I thought Connexions was a very poor policy outcome from all the analysis that the Social Exclusion Unit had undertaken. It has had vast amounts of money spent on it and it is very badly linked up, but it could have been a lot worse. The bottom line is that most professionals do not command any credibility with the hardest to reach of this group. The original idea of Connexions was that it would be a 24/7 kind of service, that there would be someone on the end of a mobile phone at any time particularly for that really hard to reach group at the top of the Connexions triangle, but those staff ended up being 9-5 careers advisers.

There is an essentially confused group who are the kids that have lost their way. The helping hand of the personal adviser or school teacher will be well received by these kids. They want to come back in but haven't found a way to do it. They look to us to give them a helping hand.

Then there is a smaller group in the middle who are temporarily sidetracked, who have different priorities in their lives, but are not alienated from learning,



or training or work. Neither of those groups is particularly a policy problem.

It is the kids who are out on the streets, drinking, taking drugs and shoplifting, who are the policy challenge and they are alienated from work because they want a job that will pay them £200 a week. But there are no such jobs for unqualified, bad-attitude kids like these. Those are the ones that twist the professionals around their little fingers. They come along for assessments and they blag it, they tell a load of lies and then the well-intentioned professional tries to match some kind of training placement to the lies and no wonder it doesn't work for the kid.

I am not putting all the blame on the professionals. I am just saying that with that group of kids, interaction between the professional and the young person produces a vicious downward cycle of mistrust. With the other kids, because they are eager to get back into the system, they will be more straightforward and honest and you produce a virtuous cycle that will propel them into some placement if that is available to them.

DN: So, what sort of policies should we be considering?

HW: I chaired a Confederation of British Industry conference on the NEET problem in London last year where lots of businessmen were saying how important it was to include the NEETs and I said, 'OK, so are you going to give them the job ahead of the kid who has got some GCSEs, then?' No, most of the time they are not going to.

I still believe in a very wide-ranging public works programme, for example, introducing bus conductors and supervisors for kids on school buses. On a

school bus upstairs you've got 14-year-old boys spitting out of the window, opening the emergency exits at the back, and so on; that breeds a culture of contempt for everything around it.

"If we give real opportunities to some of our more marginalised young people, it pays dividends because they desist from offending"

The point is the loss of respect, the lack of controls over young people in public space. You could actually rear, cultivate and nurture a group of NEET young people who haven't got a great deal about them, who would actually work for minimum wage levels, not the ones I am talking about – not the criminals – but some of the others and you could actually help them to keep safe the public space of our society. If we do not do that, then it seems we are not going to restore social security, which would be another option, with the third option being to imprison them. Which is what we are doing. We are spending phenomenal amounts of money in Britain and Wales on imprisoning young people compared with most other parts of Western Europe.

I was on the Youth Justice Board for seven years and I know that the minimum we pay to lock up a kid in a young offender institution is £50,000 a year. And there will always be some exceptions to this rule, but I do believe that if we give real opportunities to some of our more marginalised young people, it pays dividends because they desist from offending, move into more legitimate behaviour, become more responsible

citizens, more diligent parents and so on.

This is why in Wales we do not have Connexions but a policy framework called 'extending entitlement'. If you wrote a list of things which got you into your job, you would probably list good schooling, family support, being in the Scouts, and so on. You probably had a computer from a certain age which you learnt how to use for studying and internet navigating, musical instruments, sporting activities, foreign holidays, which gave you contact with other peoples, and so on.

Now, the kids that we are most bothered about get very little of that package. So my view is that public policy has to make a much more strenuous and concerted effort to get out, make contact. It's hard. These kids don't want to know you. But, slowly, you build some sort of rapport with them and slowly you will be able to introduce the offer and the opportunities that we just talked about.

We need skilled professionals who can get out there and make contact with these kids. Second, we need political patience. Things will not happen overnight with these young people, particularly those most entrenched in their predicament. Third, we've got to make sure that there is a ladder of destinations for them. If we win their hearts and minds to get on the first step of the ladder, we have to ensure that the next steps are not missing.

DN: That links into the problem of 'warehousing'?

HW: Absolutely, there is a problem with warehousing. There is a problem with raising hope and then dashing it. It's what [researcher] Shane Blackman calls 'the fear of the fall'. You decide to take the steps back in and then there isn't the door



open to continue. You end up going back to your old mates from the street who probably think you are an idiot for even trying to go back in. Then, you have lost those mates as well. You are stuck. Blackman asks, 'why don't homeless people step into the warmth of the hostel?' It is because of this fear of the fall. If they end up back there they will have lost the little support they have got.

DN: What are your main reflections on the public policy response to NEETs?

HW: I wonder, given our stable politics, good resource base and highly trained professionals, how are we still in the same situation we were in 16 years ago. I was one of the people involved in the identification of the NEET category, when the Training and Enterprise Council (TEC) commissioned us to research this group of young people that the Government said did not exist. The TEC were really brave to fund this study when they faced the risk of looking like they weren't doing a good job, but they did it anyway and look, we're still talking about NEET today.

There were problems within government – both before and after 1997 – in that there were differences in opinion as to what to do with the development of different policies. When Connexions was established, it was a pale shadow of the work that was being done by the Social Exclusion Unit. Only a few months after its creation, the Policy Action Team 12 strategy was released, which was a much more comprehensive and effective strategic approach. Unfortunately, by that time the Connexions model had gained a hold and that was what was eventually rolled out. In my opinion, not following the

PAT12 recommendations was the greatest missed opportunity of the Blair government in terms of youth policy.

“Education still needs to be the preferential route to improving opportunities”

When [Labour MP] Alan Milburn wrote an article attacking Connexions, however, I found myself writing to defend it, and the job that Anne Weinstock [director of the Youth Taskforce] did there. The main problem was that Connexions was supposed to be a youth support service which drew approaches from the careers service and the youth service. There was a friction between what the careers service people were willing to do, and the youth service was not under direct control of the Government and so could not be fully integrated into Connexions. Therefore you got a service that wasn't accessible 24 hours a day, that was essentially just a job centre for young people.

There needs to be a shift in the way that education is seen, too. For too long there has been a culture of substituting traditional education (even on a basic level) for the type of 'experiential training' that the youth service provides. It must be recognised that no matter how much of this experiential training the kids get, it's no good if they can't even read. Education still needs to be the preferential route to improving opportunities.

There needs to be professional persistence in terms of securing the best outcomes for young people. When Connexions was developed it was

envisaged that it would cater for the differentiated needs of individuals within a heterogeneous group. David Blunkett has spoken about creating 'advanced skilled teachers' with career-grade salaries linked to experience; the more experienced can choose to either stay in the classroom for a higher salary or go into the management of the school for the same pay. I propose that there is a similar system introduced into youth services, with the creation of 'advanced skilled practitioners' who are rewarded for their experience but who can choose to stay at the forefront of the service, working with the most difficult cases and bringing their experience to bear.

There must also be a commitment to ensuring long-term employment once young people are engaged in youth unemployment programmes. They have to be given a real reason to become involved. This can be done with public funding.

DN: How can policy create opportunities for those who are happy to work?

HW: We need to align expectation with labour market supply – but when one road that we can let these kids follow is to imprisonment, the better and cheaper option is publicly funded employment. One example is providing jobs in the service sector that will be created with an increasingly elderly population – there are going to be a lot of jobs in gardening and maintenance for old people which could mop up many of those who are categorised as NEET.

The fundamental point is that the NEET category is not a residual policy problem, it is a significant policy challenge.



Backing young Britain

The Conservatives' view on the NEETs issue was presented in the last edition. Here, **Iain Wright MP** explains Labour's commitment to supporting young people

I grew up in the North East in the 1980s, in the height of Thatcherism. I took my GCSEs in 1988, as a severe recession was gripping the region, and sat my A-levels just as another recession was starting. From comprehensive school onwards, my entire education was accompanied by a sense of dread, a belief that the Government of the day really couldn't care about my generation of school leavers in the North East, wouldn't fight for our futures and give us hope and aspiration, because we were somehow expendable in the wider goal of economic efficiency.

People I went to school with have carried those thoughts around to this day – one lad I went through primary and secondary school with and who was blighted by drink and drugs throughout his adult life, killed himself only last week. A whole generation of 16-year-olds from the 1980s were written off and we are still suffering from the social and economic consequences of the policies of that time today.

Being NEET disproportionately affects vulnerable young people and those from the poorest backgrounds. It is passed on from generation to generation like some sort of grotesque inheritance. It is a moral and social injustice that we have a responsibility to deal with. A progressive government

could never write off a generation. We must give young people the tools to achieve their potential.

We must support all young people into education, employment or training. The current government has a clear vision, based on evidence from local areas, about what works to drive down the number of young people who are not in education, employment or training. This builds on our 14-19 and Aiming High reforms.

My work in Hartlepool has emphasised to me that every young person is different and must be supported as an individual. We have asked local authorities to take the lead on delivering this strategy, tailoring their approach to the young people in their area, as they should know the local circumstances better than anyone. It is telling that more areas have chosen the NEET target in their Local Area Agreements than any other, sending a clear signal that this issue is top of their priority list.

The best way to give young people a bright future is to give them better and relevant skills. Encouraging them to stay on in education or training, perhaps through an apprenticeship, is a key priority for this government. There are signs of success. As a result of our September Guarantee, where all 16- and 17-year-olds are guaranteed a place in full-time education at school, college or in work-based training, nearly 80% of 16-18s – a million and a half young people – were participating in learning at the end of 2008, the highest ever rate. Our determination to see young people fulfil their talents, matched by an unprecedented investment of £6.9 billion, saw the

proportion of 16-year-olds who are NEET fall to the lowest level for more than a decade at just over 5% at the end of 2008.

But in a recession we cannot be complacent. Young people are susceptible to unemployment because they have not yet built up a record of skills and experience in the workplace. There are now fast-track arrangements so that 18-year-old jobseekers who have been NEET for six months are receiving early entry to the additional support available through the New Deal.

Another new scheme is the Young Person's Guarantee of a job, work-focused training or a place in a Community Task Force for 18- to 24-year-olds who have spent 10 months unemployed. The full Guarantee will start in 2010, but we have already announced the creation of up to 55,000 jobs. A new mentoring network will help young people into a tough jobs market and we are also providing more help from day one of unemployment through job clubs and personalised support from both Connexions and Jobcentre Plus advisers.

But government cannot do this alone; in August we launched the Backing Young Britain campaign, calling on business, the third sector and government to work together to create opportunities for young people. This is already yielding results, with 85,000 new opportunities for young people at the start of September.

Iain Wright is Labour MP for Hartlepool and Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for 14-19 Reform and Apprenticeships

New research

Lessons from history: increasing the number of 16 and 17 year olds in education and training

James Kewin, Mark Tucker, Sarah Neat and Mark Corney, Centre for Enterprise, September 2009

This study was carried out in the context of commitments from the three main parties to increase participation in education post-16; a Labour pledge to raising the participation age to 17 in 2013; and the impact of the current recession on unemployment among young people.

With Labour responding to the possibility of mass youth unemployment with a range of extra places in training and education, and with limited positions available in the labour market, the study draws on lessons from past policy interventions to make recommendations for the current time.

The authors argue that policymakers should take an approach that combines different types of programmes, with a focus on 17-year-olds who do not wish to stay in full-time education.

Apprenticeships should be encouraged through offering wage subsidies to employers taking on apprentices aged 16 to 17 – specifically targeting small businesses.

In the development of unemployment and training policies, providing full information, individual support and planning, programme flexibility, and a degree of oversight of employer-based training all contribute to more effective policy outcomes. In terms of increasing participation, the study suggests that training should be made compulsory for all young people in employment, that employment should be limited in terms of working hours, and that any programmes tackling the transition from education to employment should include the elements mentioned above.

www.cfe.org.uk/page.php?p=232

Getting back on track

John Copps and Sarah Keen, *New Philanthropy Capital*, October 2009

This report is intended to help donors make informed decisions about their giving, and to provide charities with a

context for thinking about their work.

Some interesting findings include:

- Government services are failing the most at-risk children. Even before the recession, the proportion of young people who were NEET had remained stubbornly unchanged for more than a decade.
- While evidence of what works to help young people is limited, there are certain characteristics of good programmes that donors can look for when choosing a charity. These include providing one-to-one support; helping young people work towards defined goals; and cultivating good relationships with families and schools.
- Charities play an important role in not only supporting children who aren't in education or work, but also in stopping them from getting into that situation. A number of charities, for example, tackle the problem early by providing mentoring or emotional support to children in primary schools.

www.philanthropycapital.org/research/research_reports/education/NEETS.aspx?dm_i=59B,21K6,KFLN2,6IPR,1

Youth Tracker: [Acknowledgements](#) | [Contact us](#)

The following ippr and PEF staff members contributed to this newsletter: Andy Hull, Daniel Neilon, Kayte Lawton, Dalia Ben-Galim, Kate Stanley, Carey Oppenheim and Sophie Livingstone. Georgina Kyriacou edited and designed the newsletter. We would like to thank all the other contributors to this publication.

If you would like to discuss making a contribution to the next issue, or have any other comments or suggestions, please contact Jonathan Clifton on +44 (0)20 7470 6166 or j.clifton@ippr.org

