

**Final Report**  
**of**  
**NEET Prevention Research and Development Project**  
**September 2007 – March 2008**

**Commissioned by: Swindon Borough Council Children's Services**  
**Funded by: the Learning and Skills Council**  
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**in collaboration with colleagues from organisations across Swindon**

**The consultants would like to thank all those who contributed to the NEET research and development project between September 2007 and March 2008**

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## Executive Summary

In September 2006, Swindon Borough Council Children's Services appointed Dr Jacqui Hughes and Mary Opie to carry out a research and development project to:

- Clarify early identification and prevention measures that need to be in place to effectively reduce the numbers of young people Not in Employment, Education or Training (NEET) in the 13 – 19 phase
- Agree a framework for good practice regarding early intervention and prevention of young people from becoming NEET, hence increasing the numbers of young people progressing in learning

The research was undertaken between September 2007 and March 2008. During the project the consultants worked with a range of partners including schools, colleges, training providers, voluntary and community organisations, the Youth Service, Connexions and young people themselves to consider national and local research and practice. Throughout, the consultants actively sought a wide range of perspectives, collating and analysing responses on an ongoing basis and checking out findings and viewpoints to produce a framework for good practice.

The approach taken involved: desk and telephone research; face to face in depth validated interviews with ten key organisations; email questionnaires and telephone follow up with other agencies; active engagement with young people through the Choices event and the organisation of seven focus groups; partnership activity through attendance at, and facilitation support for, the NEET Strategy Conference and the facilitation of a workshop for the Swindon Youth Support Forum; the organisation of a series of workshops with colleagues from partner organisations to take the work forward; the production of a draft framework through an iterative process with these colleagues and the planning and delivery of a Swindon wide consultative workshop.

The outcomes of the project are:

- A framework for good practice regarding early intervention and prevention of NEET
- The identification of common risk factors to aid the early identification of those at risk
- Good practice exemplars
- A good practice self assessment checklist
- A NEET briefing paper identifying good practice in other areas
- A report on the findings and recommendations arising from the research and development

In addition, members of the group, which supported the development of the framework, have already produced organisational action plans and arranged to meet to develop the work further. It is suggested that partners in Swindon:

- Adopt the Framework as a working document to aid good practice across the area
- Review and evaluate the framework through the NEET sub group and with key partners across Swindon on a regular basis
- Encourage and support key organisations to produce implementation plans based on the framework
- Use these implementation plans as models to encourage and support others to adopt the framework
- Carry out a series of collaborative development activities to support the further development and implementation of the framework.

# Report on the NEET Research and Development Project September 2007 – March 2008

## 1 Introduction

### 1.1 Broad context

The dramatic growth in developing economies, particularly in China and India, is transforming the global market, placing greater emphasis on educational achievement as a key indicator of young people's prospects. Keeping pace with change will become increasingly important if Britain is to remain competitive.

However, educational underachievement affects the relative performance of the UK economy and there has been little change since the mid-1990s in the percentage of young people in the United Kingdom<sup>1</sup> aged 16-24 with no qualifications.<sup>2</sup> In addition, the proportion of 16-18-year-olds not in education, employment or training (NEET) has remained broadly static over the last decade<sup>3</sup>.

The financial and social costs of having high numbers of young people in the NEET group are huge. The productivity loss to the UK economy as a result of youth unemployment is estimated at £10 million every day. In addition, the estimated total cost of youth crime for Great Britain was over £1 billion in 2004. England and Wales have a higher percentage of prisoners under 18 than 12 other European countries and the second highest percentage of those aged 18 to 21.<sup>4</sup>

### 1.2 Swindon context

The reduction of young people in the NEET group ( Not in Education, Employment and Training) is a priority for the Children's Trust in Swindon and is a key target in the Children and Young People Plan, the Local Area Agreement and the 14-19 Strategy.

The Swindon NEET Strategy outlines how partners will work together to develop and implement strategies to increase the number of young people who are in education, employment and training aged 16-19. Connexions is the lead partner for the NEET Strategy. The responsibility for the Connexions Service, including NEET work, transfers to the Local Authority in April 2008<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> In 2005, these figures stood at 12.6 per cent in England, 12% in Wales, 8.3 per cent in Scotland and 19.9 per cent Northern Ireland.

<sup>2</sup> The percentage of young people with low-level or no qualifications in the UK compares unfavourably, for example, to France (all age ranges)

<sup>3</sup> Although there are some signs of a downward trend nationally (.See Participation in Education, Training and Employment by 16 – 18 year olds in England 2005 and 2006. DfES. 2007) and in the Swindon area in 2007 - 8

<sup>4</sup> Statistics from the Council of Europe Annual Penal Statistics Survey 2002. The prison population includes pre-trial detainees.

<sup>5</sup> At the beginning of the project, Connexions services in Swindon were delivered by staff employed by Wiltshire County Council (WCC) with a small team of staff employed by Swindon Borough Council. From 1<sup>st</sup> January 2008, WCC staff working in Swindon were transferred to Swindon Borough Council and responsibility for the full service will lie with Swindon Borough Council from April 1 2008.

The NEET strategy is being developed and monitored by the NEET sub group which includes the Learning and Skills Council, Connexions, Colleges, Schools, the 14-19 Development Team and Education Business Plus. A Connexions Strategy Co-ordinator has been recruited and took up post in December 2007.

In September 2007 Connexions, on behalf of the NEET sub group, appointed Hughes and Opie to carry out a research and development project to support the early identification of young people at risk of entering the 'Not in Employment, Education or Training' (NEET) group and to identify measures to prevent this. The NEET research and development project is funded by the Learning and Skills Council and managed by Connexions.

### **1.3 Project aim**

The NEET research and development project was carried out between September 2007 and March 2008 and involved liaison with schools, colleges, young people, Connexions, training providers and other agencies.

The aims of the project were to:

- Clarify early identification and prevention measures that need to be in place to effectively reduce NEET in the 13 – 19 phase
- Agree a framework for good practice regarding early<sup>6</sup> intervention and prevention of people becoming Young People Not in Employment, Education or Training (NEET)<sup>7</sup>.

### **1.4 Framework for good practice**

The Framework for Good Practice (Appendix 1 – Framework) has been produced through research with colleagues from across the Swindon area (see Appendix 2 – Contributors to the research) and through local and national research.

The key elements within the framework should support **all** young people to achieve their potential and will also help those in danger of becoming NEET.

The framework:

- outlines the key elements which need to be in place in order to prevent young people from entering the NEET group
- offers examples of good practice to support those working with young people

Dorcan Technology College, Kingsdown School and New College have confirmed that they will produce implementation plans for the key elements of the Framework. It is hoped that there will be a consensus to implement the key elements of the Framework by organisations across the whole of the Swindon area.

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<sup>6</sup> Early is used to mean either appropriate action as soon as there is the likelihood of someone entering the NEET group and / or at the earliest point in terms of age

<sup>7</sup> to effectively reduce NEET in the 13-19 phase

## 2 Outcomes of the NEET research and development project

The required outcomes of the research and development project were to produce:

- A framework for good practice regarding early intervention and prevention of NEET which can be implemented across Swindon <sup>8</sup>
- A report on the findings and recommendations arising from the research and development

The consultants have also:

- Identified common risk factors to aid and support the early identification of those at risk (see section 4.1)
- Identified good practice exemplars, particularly in the Swindon area <sup>9</sup> (See Good Practice section of the Framework)
- Produced a good practice self assessment checklist (Appendix 3 )
- Produced a NEET briefing paper identifying good practice in other areas (Appendix 4 - briefing paper)
- Organised and facilitated a half-day Swindon wide workshop to consult on the framework.

In addition

- Members of the group which supported the development of the framework have already produced organisational action plans and arranged to meet to develop the work further

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<sup>8</sup> including recommendations concerning how Plan-It and Individual Learning Plans can support its implementation

<sup>9</sup> Items of good practice included as appendices to the Framework include: a Partnership Agreement between a school and Connexions; a Flow chart for the identification and referral of students from Kingsdown School; Dorcan Careers Education Programme; the Better Information and Advice for Young People leaflet; the Engagement Programme Summary for 2007 and publicity to attract young people

## **3 Research methodology**

### **3.1 Ways of working**

The project began with an inception and planning meeting with the project manager to agree any revised or additional requirements, discuss methods, identify key contacts, clarify progress reporting requirements and confirm the detailed project work plan. (Appendix 5 – Work Plan).

The consultants then co-ordinated the research and development over the seven months' lifetime of the project. They worked with schools, colleges, training providers, young people, Connexions and a range of other partners. The approach taken by the consultants has involved:

- Active engagement with partners and young people
- Close liaison with a group of key colleagues as part of an iterative development process
- Research on national, regional and local developments<sup>10</sup>
- Information gathering via a range of appropriate methods (see 3.2 below) including the design and development of semi- structured questionnaires, checklists and aide memoires for facilitators assisting with focus groups and workshops
- The collation and analysis of data resulting from desk research, face to face interviews, email questionnaires, focus groups and events for partner organisations and young people.
- The identification of common risk factors and key areas for action
- Consultation and discussion with partners to develop a framework for good practice

Telephone and email contact have been maintained with the project managers throughout the process. Written reports have been submitted monthly and meetings held with the project managers to ensure that the project was developing to plan and timescale.

### **3.2 Research methods**

The consultants adopted a variety of research approaches to best meet the needs of the project. Methods used included:

- Desk and telephone research on NEET, particularly in relation to identifying common risk factors for NEET and to identify specific examples of good practice in relation to prevention from within Swindon and in other areas. A short report was produced as a result and a paper on personal and situational risk factors for young people. Both were presented to the Youth Support Forum in October 2007 and have been added to as partners have made additional contributions during the course of the research.
- Face to face, in depth, validated interviews with ten key organisations involving fourteen senior colleagues from: Swindon College, New College, the Learning and Skills Council, Kingsdown School, Dorcan Technology College, the Ridgeway School, St Josephs Catholic College, Connexions, the 14 – 19 Team and the Youth Service. Interviews established their perspectives on the early identification and prevention measures that need to be in place to effectively reduce NEET in the 13 – 19 phase. Information was gathered on, for example:

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<sup>10</sup> Including, for example, the findings from the NEET involvement work, Connexions NEET Report First Findings from Involvement Work 2008

early identification, action taken or needed by key partners, good practice and inclusion of PlanIt and ILPs in framework (Appendix 6 – Semi-structured questionnaire).

- The use of email questionnaires and telephone follow up with other agencies<sup>11</sup> to ascertain views on, for example, identifying those at risk, recognising existing good practice and clarifying the early action needed to prevent young people from entering the NEET group. (Appendix 7 – E-mail questionnaire and Appendix 8 - List of the organisations and agencies contacted).
- Active engagement with young people, through for example, attendance at activities such as the Choices event<sup>12</sup>, the use of surveys (Appendix 9 – Young people’s survey and Appendix 10 - Collated responses from 61 young people at the Choices event, incentives<sup>13</sup> and the organisation of seven focus groups comprising 44 young people<sup>14</sup>. These activities aimed to identify the views of young people, particularly in relation to possible preventative measures.
- Partnership activity (through attendance at existing meetings and / or workshops so as to maximise effectiveness and avoid additional work activity for the partner organisations). For example, both consultants attended the Swindon NEET Strategy Conference on the 3 October and acted as group facilitators. Both consultants also attended the Swindon Youth Support Forum Meeting on the 12 October and facilitated an information gathering session with the group.
- The organisation of workshop meetings with colleagues from key partner organisations, to take the work of the project forward. This group included: Connexions, Dorcan Technology College, Kingsdown and Ridgewood Schools, St Joseph’s Catholic College, Stepping Forward, Swindon College, New College, North Wessex Training and the Youth Service. The meetings focused in the first instance on the development of the framework, amending and adapting this over a three month period. The group then organised the consultative conference, adopting the roles of facilitators for the event.
- The production, over a four month period and through discussion with key partners, of a draft framework of good practice regarding early intervention and prevention of young people entering the NEET group
- The planning and organisation of a Swindon - wide consultative workshop attended by 35 delegates from a range of organisations to consult on and finalise the draft framework (Appendix 11 – Programme for and Appendix 12 - Feedback from the 28<sup>th</sup> February workshop)<sup>15</sup>
- The production of a draft and final report on the project

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<sup>11</sup> Seventeen agencies were contacted. Completed questionnaires were received from Connexions Intensive Service; Crowdys Hill; EBPlus; the Educational Psychology team; the Inclusion team Swindon Academy, Stratton Education Centre and the Clivey

<sup>12</sup> Both consultants attended the Choices event held at Swindon Oasis in October 2007 where 61 young people were interviewed, some of whom were already excluded from mainstream education.

<sup>13</sup> Alarm clocks provided through the assistance of the Connexions Service’ Involvement Officer, to encourage young people to take part in the survey

<sup>14</sup> Focus groups of young people were organised and held with the assistance of colleagues from Dorcan Technology College, New College, North Wessex Training, Close to Home and the Youth Service. Four focus groups were held with young people who are in learning and three were with those who are in NEET or are in danger of entering the NEET group.

<sup>15</sup> Feedback from this workshop and from partners involved throughout the project has been very positive.

### 3.3 Key questions

As indicated in 3.1 and 3.2 above the consultants used a range of methods including interviews, questionnaires, surveys, focus groups and workshops to ascertain the views of a range of partners and young people in the Swindon area.

In the initial stages of the research, key players were asked for their perceptions concerning:

- their organisation's and their own involvement with the NEET agenda
- the situational risk factors facing young people and the behavioural factors which might indicate young people were at risk of entering the NEET group
- processes to aid early identification of those at risk of becoming NEET
- barriers to young people's progression to education, employment and training
- the early intervention and support measures which, it was felt, were effective in relation to preventing young people from becoming NEET, including work with partner organisations
- the activities and actions they felt had been ineffective in relation to supporting young people
- protocols, agreements and strategies to help the early identification and prevention of NEET
- the key actions they felt needed to be taken in relation to this issue
- the ways in which PlanIt and Individual Learning Plans might be used to support the identification and prevention of NEET

The views of young people who were achieving and the perceptions of those at risk or en route to becoming part of the NEET group were also sought. Young people were asked about their current education, employment or training situation through the Choices event and through seven focus groups run with the support of partner organisations. They provided observations and insights on:

- the behaviour which might indicate a young person was at risk of leaving education early or not getting a job
- the age at which, in their experience, this behaviour began to occur
- other barriers which might affect young people's ability to continue in education or enter employment or training
- the ways in which their schools / colleges had supported young people to remain in education
- other organisations which provided support for young people
- the ways in which young people might support other young people
- the activities which did not work in terms of encouraging young people to stay on at school and in education
- the ways in which PlanIt and Individual Learning Plans might be used to support the identification and prevention of NEET

Partners and young people were also asked for their views and feedback on the developing framework for good practice. The framework was amended on an ongoing basis to include their observations and reflections.

## 4 Key findings

The data from the interviews, questionnaires, surveys, focus groups and workshops were analysed on an ongoing basis throughout the research and development process. The resulting findings include the perspectives of young people and key partners. They identify:

- common risk factors to aid and support the early identification of those at risk
- areas for action needed in relation to the early intervention and prevention of people becoming Young People Not in Employment, Education or Training (NEET).
- good practice exemplars, particularly from the Swindon area (see Framework Appendices)

### 4.1 Risk factors<sup>16</sup> for young people

The research identified a range of interrelated situational, behavioural and external factors which might indicate that a young person may enter the NEET group

#### 4.1.1 Situational / personal context

It was recognised that the following situational and personal factors *may* indicate that a young person is in danger of entering the NEET group.<sup>17</sup>

- Where there are 'home' issues, for example
  - one parent family
  - unemployment in the family
  - long term generational 'worklessness'<sup>18</sup>
  - parents / families' own lack of confidence / belief in education / qualifications resulting from their 'bad experiences' of 'failing' at school
  - absence of family / community models of achievement in relation to qualifications / education / involvement in learning
  - parental mental health, drug or alcohol problems
  - culture of low aspiration and lack of encouragement to take up activities / learning
  - bereavement
  - young carers - of own child / parent / not of own child
  - being looked after / in care
  - leaving care
  - housing

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<sup>16</sup> There are links here with the Common Assessment Framework (CAF). Awareness of such risk factors may assist with the completion of the CAF Checklist

<sup>17</sup> It is recognised that the NEET group is 'a moving cohort'. J Whitehead - Whiting at Swindon NEET Strategy Conference October 2007. Certain categories are NEET for longer e.g Young Mums. 40% had some GCSEs. Point in time research by J Whitehead - Whiting at Swindon NEET Strategy Conference

<sup>18</sup> Understanding workless people and communities: A literature review. Institute for Employment Studies, 2005 p 2 and 3. It is possible that the Swindon area may have some young people for whom there is an additional barrier of worklessness as a generational element. A recent report by the Institute for Employment Studies on behalf of the Department for Work and Pensions comments that 'It can be said that cultures of worklessness *may* exist in some areas, within which worklessness, in some cases, is intergenerational.' It also noted that 'that there are a range of groups that are disadvantaged in the labour market and have a higher risk of being workless and living in deprived areas. These include lone parents .. disabled people, carers, older workers, workers in the informal economy offenders and ex-offenders. Also see The geography of poor skills and access to work., Green and Owen, Joseph Rowntree Foundation January 2006

- SEN and Learning Difficulties and Disabilities (LDD) statemented<sup>19</sup>
- Physical disability<sup>20</sup>
- Complex health needs requiring time away from learning for, for example, appointments, hospitalization / unhealthy lifestyle (poor diet, obesity, lack of exercise)
- Lower literacy and / or numeracy skills and those with EAL / ESOL<sup>21</sup>
- Home educated<sup>22</sup>
- Young people returning from out of borough placements e.g residential schools
- Mental health issues
- Able but not stimulated by learning environment
- Supervision by the YOT
- Pregnancy
- Teenage mothers
- Refugee
- Asylum seeker
- Ethnicity
- Parents / carers not involved in options choices
- Lack of interested / involved / significant 1:1 support (parent/carer/teacher/PA/key worker)
- Repeated experience of 'failing' and/or labelled as 'thick' resulting in self fulfilling prophecy

#### 4.1.2 Behaviours

The research also identified that the following inter – related behaviours *may* indicate that a young person is at risk of entering the NEET group

- Late arrival / non attendance at school. college, training provider etc
- Loss of interest in studies / absence of homework / under / low achievement
- Not getting on with teachers
- Bullying<sup>23</sup> / being bullied
- Mixing with the 'wrong crowd'<sup>24</sup>
- Exclusion
- Drug, alcohol, substance misuse and increased likelihood of smoking
- Self harm
- Mental health issues
- Low self esteem /Lack of confidence
- Depression
- Anger / aggression
- Avoidance of/ non-engagement with out of school activities and/or 'helping'/statutory agencies
- Offending

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<sup>19</sup> Young people with special needs are statemented. All statemented young people have a transition plan and the Connexions PA has oversight of this though the school usually drives it. At the end of year 11 a Section 140 (requirement of Learning and Skills act of 2000) is produced and provides for, for example, support needed at college or out of county provision. A Transition Support Form is produced for others who have support needs.

<sup>20</sup> May result in low self esteem, bullying and be exacerbated by lack of support in school / college or workplace

<sup>21</sup> English as an Additional Language / English for speakers of other languages

<sup>22</sup> Such young people may not be 'picked up' by supporting agencies

<sup>23</sup> In the recent NEET involvement studies, bullying was cited, particularly by homeless respondents, as being one of the main reasons for dropping out. Connexions NEET Report First Findings from Involvement Work 2008.

<sup>24</sup> This was cited as the second highest reason for dropping out in the same research. Connexions 2008

### 4.1.3 External factors

External factors such as the following, were seen as exacerbating the problem <sup>25</sup>

- Lack of person centred approaches
- Lack of action by/support from staff to prevent young people leaving education/ training
- Insufficient access to IAG
- Limited access to positive out of school activities
- Absence of appropriate placements
- No suitable / lack of available courses(s) at school / college
- Over emphasis on exams
- Lack of finance for study
- Problems with enrolment
- Lack of support in the learning context
- Lack of suitable equipment / clothing
- Insufficient / no access to quiet space for study
- Lack of access to a computer
- Lack of transport
- Lack of appropriate and flexible formal / informal<sup>26</sup> routes to accreditation
- Limited employment opportunities / employment market - e.g for Level 1 young people
- Lack of support in the workplace
- Lack of sustained funding for initiatives
- Institutional sounding titles of statutory agencies e.g 'Youth Service'

Research with partners and young people in Swindon indicated that it was often possible to recognise at a young age, sometimes even in primary school, those in danger of entering the NEET group, and that it was vital to take action promptly as soon as young people indicated signs of being at risk. The first findings from the NEET involvement work<sup>27</sup> indicate similarly that:

- The average age that the young people in the NEET group stop 'trying at school' is between 14 and 15 and that more help with deciding options, along with other support and interventions need to be provided earlier
- Young people in the NEET group are far less likely to have a supportive home environment and are more likely to be struggling with emotional and mental health issues
- Young people in the NEET group are unlikely to be involved in after school activities or have a positive educational experience.

However, almost 50% of those in the NEET group who contributed to the involvement study were happy with their situation. It was therefore felt that the 'sales pitch' to attract such young people to consider education, training or employment needed to acknowledge this as the starting point.

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<sup>25</sup> For example those with physical disabilities may lack of transport, access to positive out of school activities, support in the learning context, suitable employment opportunities, support in the workplace etc

<sup>26</sup> Concerns were expressed by some of those interviewed in relation to the accessibility for young people of both the New Qualifications Framework and links between accreditation and progression to further learning

<sup>27</sup> Connexions NEET Report First Findings from Involvement Work 2008. This included a combination of work undertaken on two 3-day workshops with groups of young people in Salisbury and Swindon (18 participants) and an Involvement Questionnaire completed by 183 young people across Wiltshire and Swindon. (65% of the NEET sample were from Swindon) It was also informed by the findings of the Lifestyle Questionnaire undertaken with young people who had experienced homelessness.

## **4.2 Key areas for action identified in the research**

The consultants' analysis of the data from interviews, questionnaires, surveys, focus groups and workshops identified 16 key areas for action in relation to the early intervention and prevention of people becoming Young People Not in Employment, Education or Training (NEET). These are detailed below.

### **4.2.1 Demonstrate senior staff commitment to the importance of NEET**

The first area of action related to the importance of senior staff commitment to the NEET agenda both within Swindon Borough Council and within education and training establishments across Swindon. Without such commitment, it was felt that the NEET issue would not be addressed as a major issue within each organisation. Those attending the February consultative workshop also reaffirmed the importance of senior staff involvement and in particular the need for senior staff to develop and emphasise a culture of raised expectations about staying in learning.

Several of those interviewed emphasised that the NEET issue needed to be addressed in organisational, as well as in area wide strategic plans and that these should be regularly reviewed at intervals each year. It was suggested that NEET should be seen as a whole organisation issue, that it should be established as a regular agenda item for management level meetings and that commitment needed to be long term. In addition, it was recognised that staffing and resources, within the pastoral care system for example, were necessary to address the NEET issue.

### **4.2.2 Establish strategic and operational partnerships**

Collaborative approaches were seen as vital. National and local research has also indicated that multi –agency approaches and collaborative working with local businesses,<sup>28</sup> the voluntary sector and community projects<sup>29</sup> should be used wherever possible. The Neighbourhood Support Fund (NSF) found that partnerships are vital for: sharing facilities, referrals, reducing duplication, identifying potential progression routes and supporting transition. In some cases partnership agreements or protocols have been established between agencies (for example, a partnership agreement between a school and Connexions<sup>30</sup>) setting out agreed joint plans and contributions to meet mutual aims and objectives.<sup>31</sup>

It was felt that informal partnerships can also play their part. One school has proactively developed close working relationships with the Educational Psychologist, the Police Community Support Officer and the local Youth Offending Team, through liaison meetings once a term to discuss the needs of students who are potentially at risk. College staff also commented that they

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<sup>28</sup> For example, the Royal Bank of Scotland Group is working with The Prince's Trust, to help young people gain qualifications, enterprise skills and work in the UK's poorest areas.

<sup>29</sup> For example, the Young Adult Learners Partnership – a National Institute for Adult and Continuing Education / National Youth Agency / initiative is also developing approaches to help young people who may become, or who are, in the NEET group.

<sup>30</sup> Examples of good practice (GP) are provided in the appendices to the Framework – see partnership agreement between a school and Connexions

<sup>31</sup> This aims, for example, to provide 13-19 year olds with the help and support they need to prepare their progress to further stages in education, work and adult life; offer impartial advice and guidance on learning and career options as well as access to broader personal development opportunities; raise aspirations and motivation to greater achievement; identify and address potential problems before they become major barriers to learning and help young people overcome existing barriers to participation. (from Implementing Connexions in schools, CSNU 2001)

aim to work collaboratively rather than competitively. The importance of effective working relationships between college staff and Connexions advisers and of links with other partners in the network, particularly with the Youth Offending team, to try to address the problem of recidivism, were also stressed.

It was noted too, that it is vital to ensure cross agency updating and communication. This could be effected through, for example, holding partner liaison meetings of those involved in supporting individuals at risk such as: community police; Primary Mental Health Teams (PMHT); Youth Offending Teams (YOT); Education Welfare Officers (EWO); education psychologists; those offering work experience; Trident for Edexcel; education providers; training agencies; voluntary sector projects; housing agencies; Connexions; Drug and Alcohol teams; the Youth Service; Disability Services; Teenage Pregnancy Support; Education other than at School providers (EOTAs) and Pupil Referral Units (PRUs).

External funding can further support these partnerships. A Widening Participation Project has facilitated closer working between further education, the local schools<sup>32</sup> and disadvantaged communities. The project has appointed consultants for this work who have targeted two groups<sup>33</sup> of students in particular, those who are NEET and those who are currently underachieving.<sup>34</sup>

#### **4.2.3 Recruit and develop appropriate staff**

Those contributing to the research noted that it was vital to recruit people with the appropriate skills and personal attributes such as 'soft' skills and information, advice and guidance skills, to support young people. Young people also commented that:

*'Some people are better with younger people'*

*'You need someone who will listen and understand the issues that we are going through'*

Students who were still attending school commented that they felt that staff needed to be 'qualified' have experience of different kinds of work, be able to communicate well, have patience and a sense of humour but also be firm so that you can 'get on with lessons'. These students also felt that they would prefer to gain help from someone they knew rather than someone they did not know.

*'The best teachers are funny, warm, laid-back. non-judgmental and good listeners. The right staff can make a huge difference'.*

Recent findings from the Swindon and Wiltshire involvement work similarly indicate that young people feel that:

*'Teachers need to have better understanding and relate to students'*

The same report indicates that:

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<sup>32</sup> Including special schools

<sup>33</sup> Target of 330 young people - 30% New College and 60% Swindon College

<sup>34</sup> Through for example, workshops designed to accommodate up to 45 young people at each session, with an incentive - a free lunch box. Participants' names are then recorded and the consultants conduct follow up interviews at school to guide young people through the college application process

*'55% of the NEETs (taking part in the involvement activity studies) believe that the school could have done more to prevent them leaving and that for 65% of the EETs teachers had an impact on their decision to stay in education.'*<sup>35</sup>

It was felt that organisations should support staff to gain further awareness of the NEET issue and develop the appropriate expertise, knowledge and awareness, to assist young people in danger of entering the NEET group. These skills would also assist staff to help all young people in their care<sup>36</sup>.

It was suggested that Continuing Professional Development (CPD) activities and sharing of good practice could address, for example: the importance of the early identification of young people at risk of entering the NEET group; the processes involved in referral; awareness of young people's priorities; training on PlanIT and informing staff about the Connexions Service and how partners can engage with it. Some training has already occurred. For example the Connexions Assistant Operational Manager who is working on CEG / 14 – 19, has run training sessions on Plan It and other resources with schools in the area.<sup>37</sup>

Young people also felt that all tutors should have some training about, for example, post 16 options and the grades needed. Some interviewees, including those who attended the consultative workshop, also felt that appointing staff 'champions' might enable particular institutions to be able to support colleagues to work with the NEET group.

#### **4.2.4 Establish pro-active early identification and assessment processes**

Contributors to the research emphasised the importance of identifying those at risk as early as possible (in year 7 and before – some suggested the Primary or Pre-school stages) and of continuing to identify those at risk at the start of and during each year through, for example, meetings with tutors.

The use of a range of assessment processes, tools and approaches was suggested to assist these processes.<sup>38</sup> These included: weekly tutorial groups; making use of new technologies to consistently monitor and assess attendance and behaviour, and the recruitment of (additional) Student Experience Managers and Retention Officers.

Several respondents commented that all teachers needed to be made aware of and be regularly reminded about the risk factors of becoming NEET. Staff also needed to be encouraged to look out proactively for clues, to remain on the alert and to act quickly.<sup>39</sup>

*'The tutors are on the alert for disruptive behaviour and will try to identify reasons for this through the SENCO and will access the school support system if they need help'.*

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<sup>35</sup> Connexions NEET Report First Findings from Involvement Work 2008

<sup>36</sup> For example, interventions to develop young people's own coping and self-management skills

<sup>37</sup> One school noted too that it had developed a two hour pre – programme for students to go through prior to using PlanIT.

<sup>38</sup> For example, APIR 'assess/plan/implement/review'. For example, ASSET The Asset Languages assessment scheme is for language learners of all ages and abilities: from primary school through to further, higher and adult education

<sup>39</sup> Some organisations used traffic light RAG red amber green systems to identify young people in need of support

This may mean that the NEET issue needs to be placed higher on the teacher training curriculum and continually brought to the fore at ongoing staff development and CPD days.

It was felt that students with learning or health disabilities, which can remain masked until a late stage, were particularly at risk as were those for whom English was not their first language and students on Level 1 and Level 2 courses at colleges. Some commented that assumptions that those in the NEET cohort are exclusively from disadvantaged backgrounds or of low ability, should be challenged. For example, colleagues noted that some high achieving young people might also be at risk of entering the NEET group and that staff needed to be alert to this.

Young people also recognised the importance of identifying those at risk and taking action promptly:

*'You need to sort problems straight away'*

*'It can get worse if you leave it and don't deal with the problem'*

*'I think there should be an assessment period when any possible problems can be identified and resolved.'*

*'Young people who are rebellious get angry because they don't understand the subject, instead of being punished their particular issues should be identified and action taken.'*

One school looks closely at groups of learners to identify potential problems and aims to separate some from others in the cohort. However, this is not possible where subjects are 'setted' by ability.

A group of school students thought that it was helpful to have an extra helper in the class to assist those who were finding things difficult. However, while they were sympathetic to those who were having difficulties, they also felt that young people:

*'should be punished if they are bad'.*

Some felt that: *'naughty kids just miss lessons and are sent to another room'*

and that this meant that bad behaviour was sometimes, unhelpfully, rewarded.

It was recognised by partner organisations that it was vital to alert Connexions promptly in relation to statemented students and others in need of support. It was also noted that key information needed to be readily available for Connexions staff when they visited the learning provider and that the young people should be ready to see them.<sup>40</sup> In addition, engagement with the Local Preventative Groups and the use of the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) was seen as being increasingly vital.

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<sup>40</sup> Rather than the PA having to find them, thus wasting valuable time

#### 4.2.5 Ensure effective arrangements for transition at key points

The importance of establishing effective arrangements for transition at key points has been noted by the Social Exclusion Unit<sup>41</sup>. Contributors to the research also commented on the importance of developing good working relationships with feeder and receiving organisations, for example at the primary to secondary transition<sup>42</sup>, at the secondary key stage transitions, including transitions for young people going to alternative provision, and at secondary to college and / or work transitions.

Contributors to the February workshop felt that the transition from KS4 to further education was particularly challenging. They emphasised that sometimes support was available, but not necessarily within appropriate timescales. It was suggested that perhaps pilot projects could be set up which enabled a member of school staff, already working with young people at risk in the institution they were leaving, to continue to support them in their early days at college.<sup>43</sup>

It was seen as critical that appropriate information was exchanged and transition paperwork easily understood agreed and used by all the organisations and colleagues involved. Young people felt that this was important because:

*'then we don't end up saying the same information over and over again.'*

Both colleges felt that they had strong school liaison teams. Colleges and school staff agreed that some Year 10 as well as Year 11 students benefited from a more vocationally oriented curriculum. It was felt to be crucial that ongoing communication was maintained between the receiving organisation and the young person to maintain their involvement and momentum and build their understanding of the course they have chosen. This was seen as helping prevent young people from dropping out because college is:

*'not what they expect'.<sup>44</sup>*

It was suggested that this could be done through the use of, for example, incentives, competitions, 'bridging' visits and attending or being taken<sup>45</sup> to college / training provider open evenings. While one young person was:

*'happy to go on my own to visits'*

Several commented that:

*'It is hard going somewhere new'*

*'People get scared or worried about meeting new people'*

One young person commented that:

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<sup>41</sup> Office of the Deputy Prime Minister - Social Exclusion Unit. The impact of Government Policy on Social Exclusion among Young People. 2004

<sup>42</sup> The excellence cluster, a group of five primary and five secondary schools, worked together to raise standards and aspirations and to support effective transition from primary to secondary provision. [swindonten@churchfields.org](mailto:swindonten@churchfields.org)

<sup>43</sup> It was also suggested that perhaps information from the Common Application Process could be fed back by colleges to the respective heads of year 11

<sup>44</sup> Connexions NEET Report First Findings from Involvement Work 2008

<sup>45</sup> In some cases staff from the young person's current learning organisation took them to the potential new provider

*'Organisations need to work together closely as transitions can be difficult: schools need to work with Connexions'*

Young people thought it particularly important that schools should organise speakers to come in to see them.<sup>46</sup> It was also thought that:

*'Young people would benefit from help in how to survive at college, through courses on study skills or learning styles.'*

It was recognised as essential to ensure systems, processes and initiatives were in place to ease and support transition. This might include making use of, for example, Widening Participation Projects targeting those at risk of not making a positive transition and working with young people individually to provide support in the final term at school and the first term at college<sup>47</sup>. It might also involve, for example, providing college early enrolment at the beginning of the summer, ensuring that programmes and timetables are 'up and running' before students arrive in a new training venue<sup>48</sup> and supporting young people to move back to college from work as well as from college to work.

#### **4.2.6 Establish appropriate and timely referral within and outside organisations**

It was noted that formal internal and external referral processes needed to be in place, with clear criteria as to when referral options might be considered. Referral criteria might include, for example, specified attendance<sup>49</sup> and achievement levels.

Appropriate and prompt action was then needed. One school had established a transparent referral process shown in a flow chart (see Identification and referral of students flow chart<sup>50</sup>). This includes identification of 'focus students' who might need additional support and specifies the staff with responsibility for action. It also indicates the other staff and agencies which might need to be involved and outlines the formalised systems for work with Connexions, through, for example, a Connexions management team which meets monthly to monitor the 'focus students'. Many colleagues felt that their internal systems were working well with good partnership work in one college between subject area tutorial staff and across directorates.

However one group of young people commented that:

*'Staff don't always know about the full range of support available to young people.'*

Another group of young people felt it was particularly important for staff to identify and support students who might be depressed.

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<sup>46</sup> Members of this Focus Group also asked that there should be more information about possible future study destinations so that going to a college, for example, wouldn't be 'scary'

<sup>47</sup> One college has set up a range of incentives to maintain students' momentum in the long period between the application process in January/February and the start of the autumn term.

<sup>48</sup> If timetabling is not completed by the beginning of the academic year, some young people may not be effectively engaged for the initial few weeks which can cause problems such as a loss of motivation and commitment

<sup>49</sup> So that when, for example, attendance falls below 90%, a referral process should be implemented

<sup>50</sup> Examples of good practice (GP) are provided in the appendices to the Framework - see flow chart, Kingsdown School

#### **4.2.7 Involve young people in the planning design and delivery of provision**

Key partners and the young people who took part in the research and development project emphasised the importance of Involving young people in a real and sustained way<sup>51</sup> in the planning and design of provision and seeking their involvement in the delivery of activities. Young people might, for example, be involved in after school clubs, youth and sports clubs and work with primary schools and work to support transition.

Young people commented on the usefulness of former students talking to current students, about the education, training and employment choices they had made. An ex- student from their school could they felt:

*'tell you what it's like and how you can improve.'*

Another young person commented that

*'Young people who have dropped out should come back to school to show us what a mess they have made of their lives'.*

Young people and individuals from a range of agencies also commented on the potential effectiveness of establishing peer mentors and mentoring and coaching programmes, where, for example, older students worked with younger students to support them in relation to academic and personal issues. However, young people in a year 11 school focus group commented that in general they would prefer a mentor to be

*'an older person who is qualified and takes it seriously'.*

One person in this focus group said she would like to be a mentor. However, the majority felt that it was important to build up trust and they were not sure whether they would want to have a young person as a mentor, or be a mentor themselves, as

*'another student might not take you seriously'.*

Another young person similarly felt that getting young people involved in planning activities would only work if the teacher was firm enough to stop them *'taking the mickey'*.

#### **4.2.8 Raise young people's aspirations and build self esteem and confidence**

A key aspect of working with young people raised by young people themselves and by colleagues from partner organisations, was the importance of 'unconditional positive regard', that is, respecting and valuing all young people<sup>52</sup>, including those who may not achieve academically.

Young people all felt that raising self esteem was important:

*'No one wants to be told they are bad at something. It can provoke them to prove them wrong but mostly you just start to believe what people are saying'*

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<sup>51</sup> For example Stepping Forward's Hear by Right initiative and St Luke's School Council

<sup>52</sup> Avoiding , for example, negative labelling

*'Building self esteem is very important, it will help with everything from qualifications to job interviews.*

*'Young people often feel they have no ability.'*

They felt that self esteem and confidence could be improved through, for example, staff simply telling young people that that they had done well. Cards could be sent home in the post commenting on their good work or activities. End of year trips to the cinema or theme parks for say the 'top 50' students could be organised.

Young people also thought that the opportunity to talk in small groups (as in circle time in primary schools), to attend courses to, for example, help them work on their own or get better at team building, extra mural sports activities<sup>53</sup> and a chance to see how college or university might benefit them in later life<sup>54</sup> would all be beneficial.<sup>55</sup>

Contributors commented on the importance of maximising the use of initiatives such as Aim Higher (particularly in communities where it is regarded as the norm not to be in work or education), offering presentations and activities for parents and students from Year 7 onwards to raise aspirations, considering mentoring<sup>56</sup> and e-mentoring<sup>57</sup> schemes and taking part in the KS4 Engagement Programme.<sup>58</sup> It was noted that the latter programme was working well. For example, the proportion of those at risk entering the NEET group diminished to the same proportions as for those not in at risk groups, for those who had taken part in these Programmes.

It was also recognised that it was important to offer opportunities for young people to mix across the ability range so that that the NEET group is not isolated or part of the 'wrong crowd'<sup>59</sup> and to provide positive role models.

A couple of colleagues mentioned however, that some young people feel they will be able to access good jobs in Swindon without qualifications. These staff felt that many young people may have unrealistic aspirations<sup>60</sup> and that schools and colleges needed to help them be positive but realistic about their options.

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<sup>53</sup> For example after school self defence classes

<sup>54</sup> Through role models and University 'residential' such as those organised by Aim Higher

<sup>55</sup> Suggestions made by focus group members Dorcan Technology College

<sup>56</sup> Mentoring is a one-to-one relationship between two people over a prolonged period of time. One person provides consistent support, guidance, and concrete help as the other goes through a difficult or challenging situation or period in life. The goal of mentoring is to help a person gain the skills and confidence to be responsible for their own futures.

<sup>57</sup> E-mentoring uses electronic means to enable communication between the two people to achieve the same outcomes, rather than meeting face-to-face. This has the advantage that geography is no longer an issue. Examples can be seen at [http://www.youthactionnetwork.org.uk/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=36](http://www.youthactionnetwork.org.uk/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=36) and <http://www.e-mentoring.net/>.

<sup>58</sup> For example Crowdys Hill provision

<sup>59</sup> The involvement work indicated getting in with the wrong crowd as the second highest reason for dropping out.

Questionnaire returns indicated that for 60% of the EET group friends or mates had some or lots of influence on their decision to stay in education. Connexions NEET Report First Findings from Involvement Work 2008

<sup>60</sup> To, for example, do 'glamorous' jobs such as being a model or a footballer

#### 4.2.9 Encourage the ongoing involvement of and contact with parents and carers

Recent first findings from the Swindon and Wiltshire involvement work indicates that young people feel that their parents have the biggest impact on their decision to stay in education.<sup>61</sup> Those involved in the NEET research and development project, whilst emphasising the importance of ensuring that parents, foster parents and/or carers are involved as much as possible, recognised that this could be a challenge. Parents needed to be encouraged to contribute to decision making, action planning and referral, through for example individual reviews and parents evenings. Action was also needed to develop positive views of education amongst parents, foster parents and carers<sup>62</sup>.

Some year 11 students were keen that parents should be invited into school and felt that letters should be sent home about their progress. However other young people were more circumspect:

*'we don't want parents to be too pushy.'*

Some felt that

*'Parents and carers can interfere.'*

*'Parents hold you back if they don't agree with what you want.'*

However, many young people felt that parents could help young people with choices

*'Parents want what's best for you – they don't want you to make the same mistakes.'*

Colleagues noted that it was important to work with other statutory and non statutory agencies and initiatives involved in supporting families<sup>63</sup> and in line with the local authority's Parenting<sup>64</sup> and Family Support Strategy.<sup>65</sup> This might include making use of 'non professional resources' including activities established and supported by families, communities and young people themselves. A couple of respondents felt that there should be learning interventions for parents, particularly young parents<sup>66</sup> on effective parenting and healthy lifestyle topics. Another suggested that parents in general might also benefit from 'NEET awareness' sessions.

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<sup>61</sup> Connexions NEET Report First Findings from Involvement Work 2008

<sup>62</sup> Any programme aimed at promoting education and training could for example also be directed at parents / carers.

<sup>63</sup> including for example, the Family Welfare Association (FWA), the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC), Surestart and Family Centres,

<sup>64</sup> There is a Swindon Parenting Strategy in place. In the Parenting Support guidance published by DfES in October 2006 the Government asked local authorities to develop a strategic and joined-up approach to the design and delivering of parenting support services, ideally through a parenting support strategy that informs the Children and Young People's Plans and take account of parents' views; see support for parents as a continuum, from early intervention and preventative services through to the use of enforcement measures where appropriate; and identify a single commissioner of parenting support services, and commission parenting programmes.

[http://www.dfes.gov.uk/pns/DisplayPN.cgi?pn\\_id=2007\\_0020](http://www.dfes.gov.uk/pns/DisplayPN.cgi?pn_id=2007_0020)

<sup>65</sup> [http://ww2.swindon.gov.uk/moderngov/Published/C00000683/M00002985/A100012211/\\$parentingx1.docA.ps.pdf](http://ww2.swindon.gov.uk/moderngov/Published/C00000683/M00002985/A100012211/$parentingx1.docA.ps.pdf)

<sup>66</sup> Who may themselves be in the NEET group

#### 4.2.10 Maintain contact with young people and awareness of their progress

It was considered important that organisations should consistently monitor and track young people's progress. Behaviour, attendance and grades can be monitored through, for example, the use of IT/MIS systems, to identify when young people are at risk and to take appropriate and timely action. College staff felt it was particularly important to maintain contact during the long summer breaks when some young people are at particular risk of abandoning their courses. Young people agreed with this in principle, with the proviso that:

*'the right staff were involved so that it doesn't feel like you're being pursued'.*

It was recognised that different approaches need to be taken with different young people and that some young people<sup>67</sup> do not wish to maintain contact with local authority (or any) agencies. However, it was noted that this was a statutory responsibility for organisations such as Connexions in relation to young people up to the age of eighteen and up to 25 (for those with special educational needs). It was felt that young people beyond these ages should have the chance to state that they do not want to be contacted.

Within organisations it was considered vital to hold regular meetings with key staff<sup>68</sup> to consider students' progress and take action. For example, LSC funded retention officers posts have been created in New College and Swindon College. Their role is to follow up students who do not start courses, to alert the organisation and Connexions when a student<sup>69</sup> is not attending, and therefore at risk, and to help students to re-engage by accessing additional support.<sup>70</sup>

Collecting and monitoring destination data was also seen as being vital in terms of clarifying progression beyond a particular learning provider and identifying what 'works'.<sup>71</sup> It was suggested that post-16 progression targets might be established for schools, providing measures which indicate the extent to which they support transitions to positive outcomes.

There was a feeling that maintaining contact was particularly important as the NEET cohort is not static and young people move in and out of being in this situation. It is therefore essential to support those who have newly re-entered education or found a job in order to prevent their return into the NEET cohort.

#### 4.2.11 Provide ongoing 1:1 personalised support and pastoral care

Concern was expressed that the curriculum currently focuses too much on academic achievement. Research reinforces the importance of providing support from as early as year 7 through Personal, Social and Health Education (PSHE), citizenship, and personal development<sup>72</sup> programmes. This includes the use of resources to develop young people's social, emotional

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<sup>67</sup> It was also noted that there is an 'invisible population' of young people who remain outside 'the system'

<sup>68</sup> For example, between the year head, tutors and SENCO staff and, for example, through case conferences for all those on particular course in FE

<sup>69</sup> For example, one college uses an orange slip sent by subject tutor to the personal tutor. New guidelines require Colleges to let Connexions know within five days if someone is not in college

<sup>70</sup> Swindon Academy emphasised weekly monitoring and the need to focus on students with additional needs

<sup>71</sup> For example, Connexions' work on the September Guarantee

<sup>72</sup> All Diploma students are encouraged to develop personal, learning and thinking skills like teamwork and self management as part of the course.

<http://curriculum.qca.org.uk/personaldevelopment/index.aspx> and

[http://yp.direct.gov.uk/diplomas/diploma\\_details/what\\_can\\_i\\_learn/engineering/compulsory/](http://yp.direct.gov.uk/diplomas/diploma_details/what_can_i_learn/engineering/compulsory/)

and behavioural skills<sup>73</sup>. It was noted that an effective curriculum that supports personal development is a key way in which organisations can address the five key components of Every Child Matters (ECM) and demonstrate their contribution to the ECM outcomes.

It was also considered important that the opportunity for ongoing 1:1 'enhanced' support from a trusted member of staff should be offered. In some schools a tutor will remain with the same group throughout their school life. In others, 'student advisers' or 'learning mentors', members of staff who are not necessarily teachers, see those students identified through the monitoring process as needing support. They are able to provide a quick response to emerging problems and issues and may offer counselling.<sup>74</sup> Young people who took part in focus groups indicated the importance of the availability of one to one, confidential help.

*'I feel that this should be done with extreme privacy'*

*'You can see a mentor'*

NEET involvement work in the Swindon and Wiltshire area also indicates young people need:

*'Support in and out of school'*

Peer mentors or advice groups were seen as being helpful in providing:

*'more support to help with bullying issues'*<sup>75</sup>

However some did urge caution:

*'Counselling and mentoring have become buzz words and we must be careful not to become too trendy and offer these as the answer to all problems'*.

Some young people felt that:

*'being in a supportive group is what really helps'*.

The school nurse or the organisation's counsellor were also mentioned as being important, as was the chance to have a choice between a male and a female counsellor. Young people felt that these staff would put the young person in touch with others who could help. Some felt though that it would also be useful to have contact numbers over the summer so that students could continue to access support during holidays if it were needed.

Partner organisations interviewed noted that providing support through Intensive Connexions PAs for young people assessed as having multiple barriers to learning or stated as vital, as was continuing to provide support for excluded students who were 'between institutions'<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> The SEAL publication, currently for primary schools, has been developed as a result of work over the last two years pilot. [http://www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/primary/publications/banda/seal/pns\\_137805\\_get\\_started.pdf](http://www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/primary/publications/banda/seal/pns_137805_get_started.pdf). Two local primary schools already using SEAL are Lainesmead and Mountford Manor

<sup>74</sup> Other organisations have, for example, a pastoral team with student managers for each year group. Also, some have Pupil Support Mentors.

<sup>75</sup> Connexions NEET Report First Findings from Involvement Work 2008

<sup>76</sup> For example through the Youth Offending Team (YOT) mentoring project

#### 4.2.12 Offer IAG in relation to Education and Career Choices

From April 2008 local authorities will assume overall responsibility for the quality of young people's IAG, with new standards of quality and impartiality. From this date, the standards will help local authorities to secure high quality IAG provision for young people in their area as part of an integrated Youth Support Service. The Young People's Information, Advice and Guidance Team at the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) has issued a leaflet<sup>77</sup> about this and a user guide<sup>78</sup>.

In the light of the new standards and as a result of awareness of existing good practice, some interviewees noted that it was important to ensure that organisations, particularly schools, work closely with Connexions Personal Advisers (PAs<sup>79</sup>), have a 'Guidance Review Team'<sup>80</sup> and consider completing a Careers Education Framework audit.

Many of those taking part in the research stressed the importance of providing a career education programme (CEP), during key stage three and key stage 4, as part of the PHSE programme, and particularly from year 9, to ensure that young people made aspirational but realistic choices.<sup>81</sup> Such programmes needed to be developmental, supporting individuals' differentiated needs, with appropriate time and resource allocation. One school has produced an outline of its annual Career Education Programme indicating the activities and topics each group will focus on month by month throughout the year to support its young people to consider and make appropriate choices.<sup>82</sup> A recent report also notes the importance of:

*'more support when choosing options'*<sup>83</sup>

Many also stressed the importance of communicating up to date and accurate information in an appropriate format about the labour market locally to young people. It appeared that many of the young people at risk of becoming NEET had little grasp of current reality both in terms of what competencies are required by employers, and of the careers that were feasible locally for them:

*'If you don't know what you want to do then you need information to help you decide.'*

*You need help from someone who knows'*

Some young people thought that careers education should begin in year 8, as starting early might help students focus on the relevance of getting GCSEs. Some indicated that they liked options carousels where they could find out about education, training and specific jobs from

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<sup>77</sup> Examples of good practice (GP) are provided in the appendices to the Framework - see Better Information and Advice for Young People (DCSF) leaflet

<sup>78</sup> <http://www.info4local.gov.uk/documents/publications/530687>

<sup>79</sup> One to one key worker support has emerged as an effective model. Wales: Towards Full Employment 2007. It would seem that personal advisers' roles are best filled by well-trained professionals who may combine youth work, teaching, counselling and brokerage skills and treat young people courteously and as equals within agreed disciplinary codes. There is evidence that targeted PA support has made the biggest impact on helping to reduce NEET groups Preventing and re-engaging young people NEET in London. Research as Evidence 2007.

<sup>80</sup> See A Guide and Framework for 14-19 Self-Evaluation in Wiltshire Schools. Wiltshire County Council and Connexions

<sup>81</sup> Including, for example, 'clinics' and open access at breaks re for example applying to college and college carousel with colleges, Army and Connexions presentations

<sup>82</sup> Examples of good practice (GP) are provided in the appendices to the Framework – see Dorcan Careers Education Programme

<sup>83</sup> Connexions NEET Report First Findings from Involvement Work 2008

outside speakers. Others thought outside speakers coming into assembly to talk about different careers would be useful. One also commented that:

*'You can go into the library and go on the Internet and you can speak to a Connexions adviser'.*

Others also mentioned that they had access to computers at home and could get onto their college websites from there.

Young people in schools also wanted to know about support available at college and further progression routes.<sup>84</sup> It was thought that personal development lessons, access to a careers adviser, Connexions interviews, work placements and part time jobs all helped their decision making. In addition, several interviewees from partner organisations commented on the importance of teaching young people how to use PlanIt and supporting them to view it as part of their wider<sup>85</sup> personal planning process.

Connexions was mentioned positively by just under half (27) of the 61 young people interviewed at the October 2007 Choices event as an organisation which could provide help young people to succeed in education, training or work.

#### **4.2.13 Widen access to flexible / innovative / inspirational curricula and teaching styles**

It was recognised during the research that providing alternative curricula could help young people to remain in education. Alternative curricula might include, for example replacing one option at GCSE,<sup>86</sup> personalised timetables, flexible pathways, variable timing, including putting on courses that start in January, bite-sized activities<sup>87</sup> and behaviour support programmes designed to ensure that young people remain in / are reintegrated in education.

In addition, it was thought important to inform young people proactively about new learning opportunities, such as Diplomas, and about informal accreditation options and qualifications to develop key skills and life skills<sup>88</sup>. It was also thought that providing opportunities to involve young people in a range of activities, including sport, music, art trips, social events, after school clubs and projects, such as school / college shows was an effective way of encouraging them to remain in education and training<sup>89</sup>.

Those working with young people, and young people themselves, commented on the importance too of using a range of appropriate teaching styles and methods<sup>90</sup> and of ensuring that the mainstream provision is flexible and fluid enough to re-admit students if they take up their studies once again. Some of those interviewed also commented that widening the curriculum to include courses in self-management skills and coping skills for example might be

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<sup>84</sup> Some young people in year 11 had already visited each of their potential post 16 learning providers.

<sup>85</sup> In response to Progress Files initiatives, some Connexions, schools and further and higher education institutions have developed their own electronic systems, such as PlanIt, for Personal Development Planning (PDP) and Individual Learning Plans (ILP) that support the student in the processes of personal development planning

<sup>86</sup> Within one school arrangements have been made to provided an alternative curriculum which replaces two of the options. This concentrates on improving the students' literacy and numeracy skills and co-exists alongside the mainstream curriculum. Another option is to, for example, replace two options at GCSE with personal effectiveness

<sup>87</sup> As a long term course and full qualifications might be too big a jump

<sup>88</sup> Such as ASDAN programmes.

<sup>89</sup> Young people often indicated that they find sport, art and music classes supportive and / or interesting

<sup>90</sup> For example Malmesbury School using the 'Thinking hats scheme' to develop young people into keen learners.

useful. One colleague commented that s/he felt that these are honed most successfully through group delivery, facilitated by a trusted adult / professional

Young people also commented on the importance of having a variety of subjects and varied short tasks to complete in lessons. One commented that:

*'Everyone has different ways to learn'*

Another felt that, where possible, for example in practical lessons perhaps:

*'We should be allowed to listen to music when we work!'*

A high ability focus group member commented that:

*'some teachers keep on teaching in a dry academic way which can turn people off'*

However, another sounded a note of caution, commenting that while:

*'Routine can be boring but too much change is confusing'*

Several indicated that they would like more workshops and practical subjects<sup>91</sup> as

*'You see it being done and you understand'.*

#### **4.2.14 Provide access to alternative provision and initiatives**

It was generally thought that offering access to a range of alternative initiatives through the summer, autumn and through the year<sup>92</sup> could help maintain young people's engagement. Such initiatives included: Positive Action for Young People (PAYP); Summer Challenge; New Challenge initiatives: 'Young mums to be' courses; FLEX; ABC2 and SMASH – a Mentoring Scheme for vulnerable young people.

In addition, the majority of those interviewed felt that it was important to have the opportunity to make use of alternative provision as appropriate which might prevent young people from leaving education or entering the NEET group.<sup>93</sup> Such provision was seen as including: The Riverside Centre<sup>94</sup>; Pupil Referral Unit facilities such as those at Stratton Education Centre PRU<sup>95</sup>; Swindon Creative Education Project<sup>96</sup>; Stepping Forward<sup>97</sup>; Hillside and Close to Home<sup>98</sup>.

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<sup>91</sup> For example PE, engineering, technology, IT and science. One person also wanted to study languages more.

<sup>92</sup> Examples of good practice (GP) are provided in the appendices to the Framework – see Engagement Programme Summary

<sup>93</sup> There were 26 permanent exclusions in 2005-6. Of these 50% occur in year 9. An assessment of the needs of Swindon p 139 SBC website or [contactlmcdermott@swindon.gov.uk](mailto:contactlmcdermott@swindon.gov.uk)

<sup>94</sup> It provides education outside the mainstream school system for 14 to 16-year-olds who have had to cope with traumatic experiences such as bullying and bereavement.

<sup>95</sup> Stratton is a Special School in Stratton St Margaret, Swindon

<sup>96</sup> SCEP offers alternative provision for students in their final year of compulsory education who are deemed as disaffected and, consequently, not progressing in their learning

<sup>97</sup> This accredited education programme is for young people who are excluded or on the verge of being excluded from mainstream education. It offers substance misuse education, anger management and outdoor adventure activities.

<sup>98</sup> Run by the Youth Service at the Oakfield Campus

However, some delegates at the consultative workshop felt that there was insufficient provision to meet the needs. The point was also made that such provision needed to be evaluated on a regular basis to ensure 'value for money.' In addition, concerns were expressed about the labelling of young people who had attended such provision and the barriers to their return to mainstream.

Young people commented that:

*'School is not right for everyone. If you don't learn well in school you should have the option to go somewhere else'*

*'For excluded pupils, there should be options to do something. If they don't get on in school and it doesn't suit them they should have other options'*

Focus group members also felt that accessing another option should be offered on a temporary basis as some students would then come back into school and be able to get on with work<sup>99</sup>.

However, several young people commented that:

*'There is a danger that the naughty ones appear to have all the fun and are allowed to go off and try all sorts of different activities and are as if rewarded for bad behaviour.'*

*'why should they be rewarded for bad behaviour, what makes 'them' think they would be different in another place?'*

Some of those from partner organisations who contributed to the research felt that it was important to offer the possibility of exchange of students,<sup>100</sup> particularly before year 11 when it was felt to have a greater likelihood of success. One school has used new buildings to teach young people at risk of becoming NEET separately from their class while still remaining at the same school.<sup>101</sup>

Colleagues contributing to the research also commented that it was useful to make linkages with Youth and Community provision and with voluntary agencies so as to access locally provided activities in young people's own communities.<sup>102</sup> It was noted that management information could be used to target provision for particular areas and communities

#### **4.2.15 Make use of work-related provision**

Young people and their parents' understanding / perceptions of work and learning were seen as perhaps providing barriers, for example where work contexts have changed but perspectives of the workplace remain unchanged. It was therefore considered vital to ensure, where possible, that young people are job ready through a range of work related initiatives, including, for example, job coaching training<sup>103</sup> and work experience.

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<sup>99</sup> However, they also said that when some students leave it means that the rest of the group may be able to concentrate more on work in class. Focus group members Dorcan Technology College

<sup>100</sup> Perhaps through schemes such as Managed Moves, for example.

<sup>101</sup> This had been tried at The Ridge

<sup>102</sup> This might include for example, offering parenting classes to support young parents in the NEET group; provision to support the parents of, for example, teenaged children, and courses on dealing with problem behaviour

<sup>103</sup> North Wessex Training currently offer Job Coaching support for some of its trainees

Enrichment days, involving a collapsed timetable which includes, for example, enterprise experience and interviews with local employers, could also assist young people to be [more](#) job ready. Access to work based programmes including Resolve, E2E (post 16) and Apprenticeships could also help young people to understand the world of work.

Young people themselves felt that they needed help with information and advice about applications, mock interviews and work experience. Some young people were concerned that, although work experience and related activities were a good idea, the time should not be taken out of lessons as there was then too much pressure to catch up. They suggested that sessions should be run after school and those who wanted to attend.

It was recognised too that helping young people understand the world of work involves close liaison with local employers to ensure that education and training providers are aware of their needs, particularly in relation to, for example, literacy, numeracy and soft skills.

It was therefore seen as important to consider action to ensure that employers are brought 'on board' to support young people by, for example, helping them to have positive and realistic perceptions of young people and informing them about new curricula such as Diplomas. It was noted that effective relationships need to be forged with local employers, some of whom may perceive a mismatch between their requirements and the skills and attitudes of the pool of young people looking for work. This is a particular challenge as employers may need to be convinced that they will benefit from investing their energy and time in this<sup>104</sup>.

In addition it was felt that work experience<sup>105</sup> can be useful but that it has to be well thought out. Colleagues at the consultative workshop stressed the vital importance of thorough preparation for work experience in order to enhance both the young person's experience and the commitment of employers to such initiatives. Many young people felt that two weeks was not a long enough period for work experience and would have liked to have had perhaps a month in each of year 10 and year 11 so that they could:

*'try out different work areas' and*

*'get to know what a job involves and if there would be career progression if you went in to that field'*

Many colleagues felt that accessing the the labour market in Swindon is particularly difficult for young people who are NEET. Swindon is currently buoyant but many jobs require high level skills, attributes and qualifications. Many openings are 'knowledge-based', in the IT, financial and public sectors. Swindon is also an easy 'travel to work' destination for large numbers of people in the West Thames valley and the affluent rural hinterland. A labour pool enlarged by migrant workers exacerbates the problem further as does the fact that many young people in the NEET cohort may not be 'work ready' in terms of skills and qualifications, attitude or behaviour. Cost of travel and transport is another issue and many young people may, as indicated earlier, have unrealistic expectations, based on images and messages conveyed by the media.

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<sup>104</sup> In addition, it was noted by some workshop delegates that large employers with centralised national training departments are not always responsive to the training needs of their young workers.

<sup>105</sup> An online system is being developed to support extended work experience. Much work experience activity is funded by the LSC.

#### 4.2.16 Produce effective PR, marketing and information resources

The research indicated that it was important for co-ordinated information on education, training and work options to be available for staff and students<sup>106</sup>. Young people taking part in focus groups commented that they did not know where to get the information and were concerned that they did not know how to contact or gain support from agencies. One suggestion they made was that each school tutor should have a tutor section on a wall display to advertise organisations and agencies offering help for young people and /or folder with contact information in it. Other suggestions included the provision of a cross Swindon activity brochure<sup>107</sup>, on all available schemes and initiatives and the eligibility criteria for each. It was suggested that this should be held at a central (or virtual) site.<sup>108</sup>

Staff from one college commented on the need for high profile activities to maintain students' motivation during lengthy periods away from college such as during the long summer break or to maintain the momentum between the entrance interview in February and the start of term in September. These 'Mind the Gap activities' include competitions<sup>109</sup> with prizes such as free driving lessons.<sup>110</sup>

It was suggested that organisations needed to consider a range of different media<sup>111</sup> to reach young people. It was also considered essential to involve young people in the process of branding and publicity to ensure that the messages and mediums used would actually reach young people.<sup>112</sup> It was recognised that word of mouth and 'peer to peer' marketing can be invaluable. Promotional material designed by young people can be very effective.

It was also noted as important to establish different branding for different activities and groups and to avoid institutional names and jargon which would have a detrimental effect on young people's willingness to attend the provision. In addition, provision need to be presented as being open access and avoid using language which categorises people as NEET

Finally, it was thought important to publicise positive stories about what young people are achieving as so much of the coverage of young people's activities was negative in tone.

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<sup>106</sup> Young people, teachers, managers and parents all requires a different marketing focus

<sup>107</sup> Such as the Engagement Programme Summary - See examples of good practice (GP) provided in the appendices to the Framework

<sup>108</sup> Another suggestion was that leaflets could be posted to their home addresses by, for example, Connexions, colleges and work places.

<sup>109</sup> For example, a Happy Holiday competition. Students are given a card to attach a photo of where they have been – the most inventive picture wins an I-pod for the photographer.

<sup>110</sup> To take part, students enter a prize draw and send their updated details to the College with mobile numbers and suggestions as to what additional courses the college should be providing.

<sup>111</sup> Including, for example, SMS messaging though text messages were not seen by young people in focus groups as providing a useful way of sending them information as they might get 'stolen or lost'

<sup>112</sup> As, for example, with the Sexual Health Advisory Group and the Media Group.

## 5 Conclusion

Research in Swindon and elsewhere has indicated that many promising approaches are effective because they:

- Recognise that there are multiple risk factors which require multiple component interventions
- Build on an understanding of what may contribute to young people becoming NEET and what stops this
- Are created from the perspective of young people, including the most marginalised
- Provide co-ordinated multi-agency approaches, which “join up” different professions (sometimes outside the Government’s traditional scope), which matter to young people
- Are planned and persistent, with early intervention and intensive action at key transition points and with ways back offered to those who have gone off track.
- Are underpinned by proper training and resources
- Use local data and knowledge to target action and to monitor progress
- Target causes, not symptoms
- Are innovative and proactive, making use of “non professional resources” e.g families, communities and young people themselves
- Link with other key strategies and developments<sup>113</sup>
- Focus on longer term developments, sustainable planning and action<sup>114</sup>
- Understand that support will take time and effort<sup>115</sup>
- Involve a cultural shift amongst all service providers so that structures, processes and activities operate together to enable young people to realise their full potential.

Those who contributed to the project almost unanimously emphasised the importance both of proactively identifying and taking immediate action and of working collaboratively to prevent young people entering the NEET cohort, rather than addressing the problem ‘after the event’.

The draft framework is intended to provide an initial resource, which can be further developed and amended by partners and young people over time, to support these approaches and develop good practice in the Swindon area.

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<sup>113</sup> Such as 14 – 19 developments

<sup>114</sup> Several people commented that short term funding and schemes which lack continuity sometimes built up hopes which were not then realised, so compounding problems

<sup>115</sup> For some disengaged young adults, the support needed to help them get a job, or to consider re-engaging with education, may be substantial. In these cases it will be essential to measure the progress, or ‘distance travelled’, on the road to employment or education.

## 6 Key recommendations

It is suggested that partners in the Swindon area:

- Adopt the Framework as a working document to aid good practice across the Swindon area
- Review and evaluate the framework through the NEET sub group and with key partners across Swindon on a regular basis
- Encourage and support key organisations to produce implementation plans based on the framework
- Use these implementation plans as models to encourage and support others to adopt the framework
- Carry out a series of collaborative<sup>116</sup> development activities<sup>117</sup> to support the further development and implementation of the framework.

## Appendices

1. Framework for good practice for the early intervention and prevention of NEET
2. Contributors to the research
3. Good practice self assessment checklist
4. NEET briefing paper
5. Work Plan
6. Semi structured questionnaire for use in face to face interviews
7. Email questionnaire
8. Organisations and agencies contacted with email questionnaire
9. Young people's survey at Choices event
10. Collated responses from young people at the Choices event
11. Programme for the February 28<sup>th</sup> 2008 Swindon-wide consultative workshop
12. Feedback from the Swindon-wide consultative workshop

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<sup>116</sup> Responsibility for organising and convening sessions could lie with one organisation while the delivery of sessions could be shared amongst partners

<sup>117</sup> These could include for example sessions on: the sharing of good practice, the identification of young people at risk of entering the NEET group and the development of the skills required to support young people.

**Sources of information include:**

Young Adult Learners Partnership NIACE and National Youth Agency  
[http://www.niace.org.uk/information/Briefing\\_sheets/YoungAdults2.htm](http://www.niace.org.uk/information/Briefing_sheets/YoungAdults2.htm)

Connexions <http://www.connexions.gov.uk/partnerships/>

Department for Children, Schools and Families  
<http://www.dfes.gov.uk/>

Office of the Deputy Prime Minister Social Exclusion Unit  
<http://www.neighbourhood.gov.uk/page.asp?id=630>

The Prince's Trust <http://www.princes-trust.org.uk/>

Fairbridge – a voluntary organisation which aims to build confidence among disengaged young people in disadvantage urban areas.  
<http://www.fairbridge.org.uk/>

Renewal.net - these web pages look at barriers to education in deprived neighbourhoods  
<http://www.renewal.net/>

Campaign for Learning <http://www.campaign-for-learning.org.uk/>

Skills and Education Network <http://www.dfes.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SKN/index.shtml>

Teachernet <http://www.info4local.gov.uk/documents/publications/530687>

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Swindon Children and Young People's Plan 2006 - 2009

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