

Enterprise and Lifelong Learning

Literature Review of the NEET Group

York Consulting Ltd

Introduction

The literature review was commissioned to provide an overview of the difficulties facing those termed as 'not in education, employment or training', or the NEET group in Scotland. The study was carried out by York Consulting Ltd and contributes to a greater understanding of the needs of this group and policy effectiveness in addressing the risks and barriers faced by young people in the NEET group and its sub-groups.

Main Findings

- Scotland's NEET statistics have changed little since 1999. In comparison to English statistics, the NEET group is larger in Scotland (13.9% as opposed to 10.4% for England, among 16-18 year olds).
- Themes or risk factors across the NEET group which appear to be most prevalent are: deprivation; financial exclusion; low attainment; weak family and other support networks (such as peers); stigma and attitudes of others and debt-aversity.
- Most NEET-based policies in Scotland are employability-focused and there is a lack of evidence on the impact of these policies, particularly in terms of whether these translate into positive, longer term labour market outcomes.
- More recent 'holistic' policy interventions (such as the Beattie Inclusiveness projects, Get Ready for Work and Integrated Community Schools) appear to offer more targeted support for the NEET group and address the removal of risk factors and barriers.
- Other recent policy interventions such as widening choice at the pre-16 stage (e.g. through school / FE collaborations) and offering financial incentives (such as Education Maintenance Allowances) are offering early, positive signs for the NEET group and those at risk of becoming NEET.
- There appears to be a need to examine how individual policies combine to offer incremental and sequential support to the NEET group. There also appears to be further scope for the sharing of practice between Scotland and the rest of the UK, as well as understanding policy and practice beyond the UK setting.

About this Study

Research Methods

The study was undertaken through a literature review which included all relevant Scottish literature, as well as a range of English and UK documents relating to the NEET group. This review was guided by consultation with Scottish Executive staff and key contributors to the NEET group literature base. The study includes:

- statistics on the NEET group, detailing the size of the group;
- the characteristics, risks and barriers relating to each of the NEET sub-groups;
- NEET policy interventions and generic issues across these interventions.

The NEET Group and Sub-Groups

The NEET group is defined as 16-19 year olds who are 'not in education, employment or training'. Evidence shows that the wider NEET group comprises a range of 'sub-groups' who are, themselves, not homogeneous. These include:

- young care leavers;
- limiting long-term illness (LLTI);
- family disadvantage and poverty;
- substance abuse;
- young offenders;
- Additional Support Needs and educational disaffection.

Themes and Risk Factors

The most prevalent themes and risk factors occurring across the NEET group are:

- deprivation;

- financial exclusion;
- low attainment;
- weak family and other support networks (such as peers);
- stigma and attitudes of others
- debt aversity

The Nature of NEET Policy Interventions

Neet policies span a wide range of themes and government departments, including Scotland's economic strategy, social justice and social inclusion, and the wider education / learning agenda.

Until recently, most policy interventions have been designed from a more generic perspective; that is, not specifically designed to target the NEET group or the transition from 'NEET to EET'. As a result, policies have not paid particular attention to meeting the specific needs and issues facing the NEET group (or sub-groups).

Classifying Policies Which Support the NEET Group

This study has classified NEET-based policies under 5 key headings, in order to offer a clearer definition of the objectives of these policies. These themes are:

- employability;
- information, advice and guidance;
- financial support policies;
- removing practical and logistical barriers;
- widening access at pre-16.

The majority of these policies were not designed with the sole needs of the NEET group (or sub-groups) in mind, although the NEET group was intended to benefit from these interventions. Most NEET-based policies in Scotland are employability-focussed and there is a lack of wholly reliable evidence of how these policies support the removal of barriers and risk factors facing the NEET group.

Policy Provision for the NEET group

Scotland's national strategic framework includes several policies which address the needs of members of the NEET group:

- FEDS (1 and 2) Framework for Economic Development Scotland includes learning provision policy; for example, to address the development of skills of people marginalised within the labour market, programmes such as Education Maintenance Allowances.
- A Smart Successful Scotland (SSS) includes an aim to reduce the size of the NEET group. SSS also recognises the importance of including disabled, ethnic minority, older, disaffected and disadvantaged members. To this end, the Scottish Executive is developing an *employability framework*.
- Life Through Learning, Learning through Life. The reduction of the proportion of 16-19 year olds who are NEET is one of six high-level indicators to assess progress.
- The Beattie Report (Implementing Inclusiveness, Realising Potential). Thirteen multi-agency projects, managed by Careers Scotland, were funded to develop the key worker role and improve post-school transition processes for 16-24 year olds with additional support needs.
- Closing the Opportunity Gap. Key policies include creation of a Careers Scotland target of reducing 16-19 year olds in NEET.
- Social Justice Targets and Milestones. Key provisions includes a commitment to allow school leavers to leave with the maximum qualifications possible and also to halve the number of 16-19 year olds who are NEET

Policy Effectiveness

Despite the range of policy interventions in place, there is little evidence that the size of the NEET group is being reduced (based on stocks and flows and the size of the group at any given time). However, it has not been possible in this study to examine which particular interventions might work best with specific NEET sub-groups. This is because the NEET-based literature has not examined policy effectiveness from a sub-group perspective. There might be further literature which exists, which offers this type of focus (e.g. literature which is focused on the 'holistic' needs of particular groups), but this does not feature in the NEET-based literature. However, more recent policy interventions appear to have an increased focus on addressing the barriers and risk factors which exist (such as financial barriers) and are demonstrating early signs of progress with those individuals who are at risk of becoming NEET or who are NEET.

Recent NEET-based policy support

Key policies which appear to be most obviously focussed on the NEET group are the Careers Scotland key worker service, Education Maintenance Allowances And the Get Ready for Work programme. These policies are focussing efforts on the most disadvantaged young people and appear to place greater emphasis on risk factors than most established policy interventions. In addition, the recent School/College Review has placed significant emphasis on widening choices at the pre-16 stage, through the development of vocational qualifications and the school/college delivery environment.

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