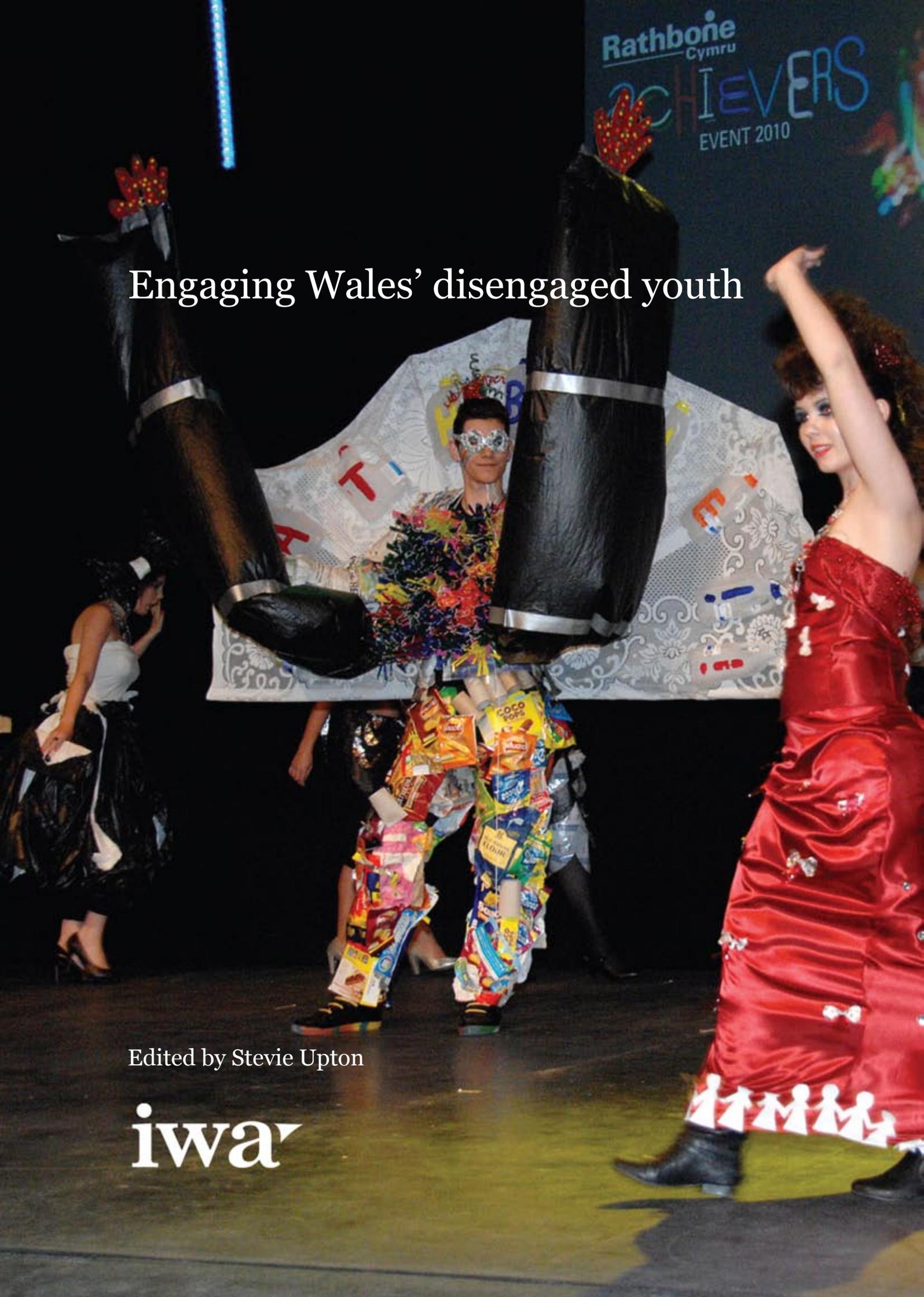


# Engaging Wales' disengaged youth



Edited by Stevie Upton

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Sefydliad Materion Cymreig  
Institute of Welsh Affairs

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Cover photograph, of the garbage fashion show at Rathbone Cymru's Achievers Awards 2010, by Richard Bosworth. Reproduced with kind permission of Rathbone Cymru.



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## Contributors

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# Introduction

In October 2009, the Institute of Welsh Affairs held a one-day conference, in association with the Welsh Government and Coleg Gwent, addressing the issue of young people not in education, employment or training – young people often labeled as ‘NEETs’. The 12% of 16-18 year olds, and 21.6% of 19-24 year olds<sup>1</sup>, in Wales to whom this label is applied experience many and varied disadvantages. Indeed, the decades of policy targeted in this direction attest to the lack of a simple solution, and the NEETs agenda has come to be seen as a particularly intractable policy ‘problem’.

Nevertheless, whilst no policy yet has provided a global panacea, existing initiatives often represent a vital lifeline to the individuals they help. Together with speakers from the education sector and from government, representatives of organisations engaged in supporting young people spoke at our conference about their experiences, their successes, the barriers encountered and the challenges to come.

This publication contains the contributions of a number of those speakers. In Chapter 1, Howard Williamson, Professor of European Youth Policy at the University of Glamorgan, discusses the NEETs agenda from the perspective of over thirty years as a youth worker and researcher. His concern that we remember ‘the human condition that lies behind the numbers and the policy debate’ sets the tone for a series of case study chapters that detail the efforts of a range of individuals and organisations to engage with Wales’ disengaged youth. Williamson has also cautioned, however, against romanticising these young people, many of whom exhibit outlooks and actions that are seriously at odds with societal norms. Indeed, he argues that we must learn to differentiate between the ‘essentially confused’, the ‘temporarily sidetracked’ and the ‘deeply alienated’ if we are to design and deliver effective solutions. The tangle of issues involved in reducing the numbers who are NEET is a recurring theme, and one that Mark Provis tackles in particular depth as he details, in Chapter 4, many of the factors that can contribute to the marginalisation of young people.

One risk factor, teenage motherhood, is addressed in Chapter 2 by Teresa Foster Evans and Charlotte Blackwell. Writing from the perspectives of service provider and service user, they explore the reasons behind the success of Cyfle, Wrexham’s pupil referral unit for young mothers. This is essentially a preventative service, working as it does to prevent young women from falling out of education, employment or training, but one that operates on two levels: in addition to providing education to girls who have already become pregnant, Cyfle has contributed to a reduction in teen pregnancy rates in Wrexham through the delivery of sex and relationships education in local schools. The

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<sup>1</sup> [www.statswales.wales.gov.uk](http://www.statswales.wales.gov.uk), Post 16 Education and Training, Key Education Statistics, Proportion of young people not in education, employment or training, 2009 figures.

authors are clear that key to the success of both strands is engaging young people in planning for their own futures.

The importance of giving young people a voice is a common refrain in the case studies described here, since it is central to the development of the self-esteem that ultimately fuels their enthusiasms and ambitions. As described in Chapter 3 by Richard Newton, Director of Rathbone Cymru, the process of getting young people to a point where they are able to consider gaining the qualifications that will set them on the road to employment can be a long one; many of the young people with whom Rathbone works first require support to develop their 'softer' social skills. Yet, as Mark Provis reminds us, this need for often long-term engagement is not without its tensions, introducing as it does the risk of over-dependency on support services. There is therefore clearly a need for considerable thought to be given to maintaining a suitable balance.

An alternative, but no less damaging, risk is for young people to become subject to revolving door syndrome, moving between various support programmes but benefiting from none. In light of this, the emphasis given to collaboration by both Newton and Provis is both significant and encouraging. Each acknowledges the value of using the strengths of different organisations – whether in the public, private or third sector – in concert. As public sector cuts begin to take effect, this can only become more vital. However, this funding squeeze will inevitably increase competition between these same organisations. Developing partnerships under these circumstances will require strong leadership, shared protocols and certainty that no financial penalty will arise from collaboration or referral.

In Chapters 4 and 5 further consideration is given to the process of developing such partnerships. Chapter 4 describes Torfaen County Borough Council's efforts to ensure that all young people are given access to mainstream education and training. In Chapter 5, Frank Callus discusses one element of the Heads of the Valleys regeneration partnership, the use of European funding to encourage longer and deeper engagement in education, employment and training by beginning the engagement process at age 11. Both cases illustrate the importance of organising around a set of shared principles and of focusing on a limited number of carefully targeted interventions. However, while both emphasise the potential benefits of joint working, each also implicitly acknowledges the complexity associated with bringing together different working cultures. If this holds true for collaboration within and between local authorities, then the complexity is still greater where other organisations are brought into partnership. Unless and until differing cultures and expectations are met head on, we will fail to provide the best possible services. How this is to be achieved at the same time as retaining organisations' individual strengths and responsiveness will undoubtedly be a significant challenge in the impending 'age of austerity'.

A more holistic approach, incorporating better cross-agency collaboration, is one of the core recommendations of a report published in October 2010 by the Enterprise and Learning Committee of the National Assembly for Wales. The report concludes that:

While the causes of young people not being in education, employment or training are complex, that should not excuse the extreme complexity of the current system for serving those young people<sup>2</sup>.

The Committee argues that the Welsh Government must move beyond its current model of multi-agency collaboration, by identifying a lead agency to coordinate work at the local level and by putting in place a minister with dedicated responsibility for oversight of this activity at the national level. The report further recommends the establishment of clear, multi-agency guidelines, to ensure the adoption of a consistent approach, and calls for consideration to be given to how best to extend and fund the good practice of programmes run by third sector organisations. As outlined above, each of the five chapters presented here echoes these concerns and, in adding weight to the Committee's recommendations, this is therefore a timely publication.

However, perhaps the most important question, raised by Howard Williamson in the first chapter, is also the most unsettling in the present climate. What are we preparing these young people for? Certainly some of them will have an inflated sense of what opportunities might be available to them, and so an important part of encouraging young people's voice will be to engage in a dialogue about realistic options. But if we are to be successful in reducing the number of young people who are NEET there will, of course, have to be options. Amid talk of the 'knowledge economy' and of recession it is, Williamson suggests, entirely possible that we will never achieve a best fit of sustainable employment for all. Rather than fob them off, should we instead take a closer look at alternative options – public works, social activity and subsidised personal enterprise?

The challenge to the Welsh Government is therefore this: if traditional employment routes are not available, what meaningful long-term opportunities will it provide for young people who are currently not in education, employment or training?

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<sup>2</sup> Enterprise and Learning Committee, October 2010, Young people not in education, employment or training.



# Chapter 1

## Delivering a 'NEET' solution: an essay on an apparently intractable problem

Howard Williamson

### Introduction

The challenge of how we respond to those young people aged 16 and 17 (or indeed 16-25) who are not in education, employment or training is itself about to come of age; it is some 16 or 17 years since the issue was formally brought to the surface and gradually gained political attention. Not that those closer to the ground were unaware of the 'problem' prior to that. There had always been 'drop-outs' from education, those who refused to participate in training opportunities and the 'dole technicians' who were unable or unwilling to find work, but these had, historically, been a fluid and cyclical group. The doorways to a return to education, training or employment had still been open.

Today, with the economic downturn, we are faced with a new generation facing the experience of being 'NEET' in the context of a very different labour market. Many of them, according to social demographers, are likely to be the children of those who struggled to make reasonably smooth transitions to the labour market in the 1980s, during the last recession. Some, therefore, will have the generational inheritance of being 'NEET' which arguably may produce some levels of resilience and emotional support; for others, it will be a new, and unexpected, phenomenon as anticipated pathways into education, training and subsequently employment are narrowed or blocked. Youth unemployment, as the 'NEET' population used to be rather more accurately described, is a prominent contemporary policy anxiety and challenge, however intractable its resolution may seem to have been over the past thirty years.

### Some preliminary observations

The characterisation of young people who are not in education, employment or training as 'NEET' is, in my view, dreadful, though unlike many, I understand its provenance. Rather like terms such as 'disaffected' (which I also loathe), it has been difficult to find the terminology to depict, with both accuracy and sensitivity, the group in focus and in question. My own term 'status zero', though purposeful and defensible when coined in 1993, was also contentious and, indeed, rejected when the 'original' report on what came to be known as the 'NEET' group was published. The terminology was in fact 'status 0', a technical term to differentiate this group from those in education (status 1), training (status 2) or employment (status 3) but, for the launch of the research study, references to 'status 0' were hurriedly searched for and replaced with 'status A' in the accompanying research report. Shortly before that final report was published, I had converted the technical description of 'status 0' into the idea of 'status zero': the intent had been to produce not only

a reasonably memorable and snappy title but also a metaphor for young people who appeared to count for nothing and seemed to be going nowhere. That term was, initially, also dropped in favour of the tortuous title of 'Young people not in education, training or employment in South Glamorgan', which had originally been intended as a sub-title. In some respects I still don't really care about the terminology so long as we remember that it is *young people* we are talking about, not some technical category: there is a human condition behind the numbers and the language, which I feel has often been forgotten. To square the circle, the term 'NEET' came into policy usage early in 1996. 'Status zero' had been partially rehabilitated during the debates that brought the issue to policy attention, but a senior civil servant recognised its limited value at higher levels of policy formulation; he invented and favoured 'NEET', which became the preferred language of political and policy discourse. Similarly, the wretched term 'disaffected' has persisted, though I have stubbornly objected to it, arguing for language that is less evaluative and has some positive mirror: hence my advocacy of 'disengagement' or 'exclusion', which allow for re-engagement and inclusion. Moreover, they describe the circumstances of young people who are not where we (or they, usually) would like them to be, without apportioning blame. 'Disaffected' suggests a bad attitude and alienation, which at times is far from the case. I came to loathe it when a senior German civil servant asked me, way back in 1997, why Britain was so obsessed with 'disinfected' youth!

The human condition that lies behind the numbers and the policy debate needs to be propelled to the front. I know that is not how policy is made, but it is a desperately sad indictment of a (still) wealthy advanced western society that we condemn so many young people to this predicament. These are young people whose adult futures are blighted from the very start. As a youth worker, I have always been deeply troubled when I have worked with young people whose primary preoccupation seems to be 'killing time'. Surely it is possible to find forms of purposeful activity that may not be directly or immediately linked to the labour market but which may provide motivation, 'occupation', interest and direction in these young people's lives. There may not be jobs, but there must be other things to do, although the development of such provision requires both careful listening and negotiation. It is not what most of these young people want – they want work, or education and training that leads to work – but they may be receptive to a more constructive use of their time rather than simply whiling it away.

We live in an age of promoting the youth voice. In Wales, in particular, there is a significant commitment in Welsh Government policy to youth participation, involvement in decision-making and active civic engagement by young people (though the young people we are talking about probably draw the shortest draw on these fronts, as with many others). Policies for children and young people in Wales are constructed within the principles of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. Article 12 of that Convention is concerned with the right of young people to have their voice heard on matters that affect their lives. I have argued, across Europe, that to really hear the voice of young people, we have to have both democratic and categorical representation. If the 'NEET' problem is so significant and so intractable, perhaps we need to make greater effort to hear their voice, as a distinct sub-

category of the youth population. Yet their voice is not the only voice that counts. And this can be the rub. Young people – all young people? – aspire to intrinsically rewarding and well-paid jobs, but not all will get them. Employers demand a range of qualities, competences and qualifications (both ‘hard’ and ‘soft’), and their voice also needs to be heard. If Sir Terry Leahy of Tesco is bemoaning the fact that, too often, his company is having to ‘pick up the pieces’ of poor educational preparation for the labour market, then we have to listen, if only to find alternative or counter arguments. But if young people want jobs in Tesco – and it is the UK’s largest employer – then they will have to recognise what they need both to get through the door and to remain employed. Young people who are ‘NEET’ may, regrettably, have both inflated aspirations and an inappropriate constellation of skills, attitudes and qualifications that do not ‘square’ with the demands of the local labour market. Finding a meeting of the ways may be the intractable problem, not the young people who are ‘NEET’ *per se*.

### **An international issue**

If we in Wales, and indeed in the UK, believe we have an intractable problem with percentage figures concerning young people who are ‘NEET’ (around the 12% mark, officially), then we should pause to think of the circumstances of other countries. The term ‘NEET’ has been successfully exported to many other places, including Japan, South Korea, Romania and South Africa. Yet their young people in this predicament face very different circumstances – both personally and politically – than do ours. Some are the first generation facing this challenge, having emerged from either the phenomenal job security of buoyant economies such as Japan or from the spurious job security provided by command economies such as Romania. There is little historical understanding of what it may mean to be ‘NEET’. At the other end of the spectrum, in countries such as South Africa, there have always been huge levels of ‘NEET’ status, though of course it was never referred to or thought of in those terms, until quite recently. At least the poverty-ridden townships had coping strategies of sorts – whether family support, alcohol use or violence – to deal with the issue. Now hope is vested in the state and proactive education and training (and labour market) policies which are not forthcoming, as they are not in the other countries mentioned. That the UK Government, a few years ago, tried to sell the idea of the Connexions Service, which was already in some jeopardy over here, to the Japanese as a solution to its ‘NEET’ problem demonstrates just how abjectly out of touch, if not downright morally bankrupt, some of the policy thinking has become. At least, there is some willingness to invest resources in addressing the problem, although there is little willingness to learn from the lessons of the past. As one bright Alec once said, if you are going to reinvent the wheel, please make sure it is a round one.

### **Some history**

As you get older, you probably become less of an innovator and more of an historian. That is how I feel with regard to young people who are ‘NEET’. I despair, sometimes, that the new kids on the block, now dealing with the ‘topic’ at a policy level (and I emphasise here that I am not criticising those in

practice, for they know the issues only too well), appear to have very little grasp of where things have come from. Indeed, sometimes you would think it was a new area of policy development.

Yet long before even 'status zero', attention was being drawn, albeit in a qualitative and somewhat ad hoc way, to a growing number of young people who were finding it more and more difficult to make the 'traditional' smooth transitions to adulthood through the stepping stones of further and higher education, apprenticeships and employment. As a youth worker, I became more and more aware of this as the 1970s progressed, even writing a short article entitled *Struggling Beyond Youth*, which drew attention to the fact that too much youth work was too focused on the 'acute anxieties of adolescence' and losing sight of the 'emerging chronic crisis of young adulthood'. My own research on *The Milltown Boys* incorporated the first generation of 'status zero' youth, though I did not know it, or particularly think about it, at the time. Born as they were in 1960, they were expecting to follow in the footsteps of their fathers and older brothers into local unskilled employment, work that dramatically and rapidly closed down in the mid-1970s, as they left school and reached adulthood. I then joined an academic team evaluating the Youth Opportunities Programme (YOP) and contributed to the development of the Youth Training Scheme (YTS) in 1983. Yet throughout these early policy responses to youth unemployment, there were always some who chose not to participate or dropped out precipitously or prematurely. Indeed, Claire Horton of Youthaid published a short book about these young people, with the telling and evocative title of *Nothing Like a Job*, focusing on the one in ten young people who were eligible for YTS but did not go on it. We must remember, however, that those who did not take the 'opportunity' or who dropped out had the fall-back position of claiming Supplementary Benefit (now Income Support, Job Seekers' Allowance, and other names). This was abolished in 1986 (and withdrawn in 1988) and replaced by the youth training guarantee: all young people aged 16 and 17 who did not go into education or find work would be guaranteed a place on the Youth Training Scheme.

And still young people dropped out, but they were not noticed, or were considered unimportant. They were not noticed because the numbers of 'unemployed' young people were indicated by the claimant count (and most could no longer claim). They were considered unimportant, because they could resolve any financial penury they found themselves in by re-joining the youth training guarantee group, thereby becoming eligible once more for 'bridging' benefits until full participation in YTS conferred on them the fixed allowance of £27.50/29.50 for 16 year olds and £35 for 17 year olds (which remained virtually unchanged for many, many years). Ianthe McLagan, also of Youthaid, produced an illuminating pamphlet called *A Broken Promise? The Failure of the Youth Training Guarantee*. It drew attention to the numerous scams perpetrated by government to keep the official numbers of 'unemployed' young people as low as possible; it also pointed out that had the youth training allowance kept pace with the increase in average wages during the 1980s it would by the end of the decade have exceeded £100.00 – a sum that most 'refusniks' said they would do almost any kind of work for!

The end of the 1980s witnessed considerable turbulence in the infrastructure of youth training provision. Funding was more contingent on output and achievement, making more 'intractable' young people less attractive to find and work with. The monolithic Manpower Services Commission became the Training Commission and then the Training Agency and was then disbanded in favour of more localised (and more responsive?) Training and Enterprise Councils (TECs). It was once said of TECs that they were born in a boom but had to grow up in a recession. Their birth in fact not only coincided with a buoyant economy but also with a declining youth population. Youth unemployment was not deemed to be too much of a problem. Employers were being cajoled to build stronger links with schools and to broaden their recruitment strategies to take into account those young people that previously, historically, they probably would not have considered. Instead, however, they turned elsewhere – to other sectors of the population such as women returners to the labour market, and to the over-50s. The youth labour market, if it did not collapse, remained stagnant: young people who previously faced disadvantage in the labour market continued to do so.

The national children's charities (such as Save the Children, Barnardos and NCH Action for Children) knew this only too well. They drew attention to the hidden population of young people aged 16 and 17 with no visible means of support, who were often engaging in 'survival offending' to get by. Even the British Youth Council made representations, about a group that was recurrently described as the 'forgotten' or 'lost' generation, which echo back at us today. Little notice was taken by the Conservative Government in power: it simply fell back on its 'we have a youth training guarantee' position. Estimates of the hidden population ranged from 30,000 to 100,000, numbers that eventually were corroborated by research.

The first of that research was conducted in South Glamorgan in 1993. Courageously funded with slippage money by South Glamorgan Training and Enterprise Council, the research attempted to produce both scientific estimates of the magnitude of the numbers of young people aged 16 and 17 who were not in education, training or employment and a qualitative insight into how some of those young people had got there, how they were currently getting by and what they anticipated for their futures. I have always commended the TEC for its courage: it was on a hiding to nothing – if we found little evidence of this subterranean population, then the TEC was obviously doing a good job and had wasted its money; if we found significant numbers below the waterline of the iceberg, then the TEC was manifestly failing in its task of delivering the youth training guarantee to young people who were in neither education nor work.

Our calculations were based on some complex analysis and some contestable assumptions. We tried to look at both the static and dynamic statistical profile of the group, namely those who seemed to be stuck in it and those who were moving in and out. We concluded as a headline figure that, at any one time, some 16-23% of the age group in question was not in education, training or employment. The headline was shocking and contentious, and it concealed many more nuanced arguments beneath it, such as the fact that some schools appeared to produce disproportionate numbers of young people who went

through this experience and that we had to make some rather big assumptions about those who were 'missing' from careers records and pupil destination surveys. Nevertheless, we stuck by our 20% position, which has never been forcefully rebutted since.

On the qualitative front, a modest sample of young people was contacted through snowball methods. There was no claim to representativeness, only to the illumination of different routes into 'status 0' and different experiences within it. I depicted young people who had always expected to end up in this situation and those for whom it had been inconceivable only a couple of years before. I portrayed (a subsequently predictable picture of) young people living at the margins, begging and involved in crime. But I also drew attention to those who were eager to 're-engage', though not unconditionally, and also to those who were determined to stay 'disengaged', for essentially political reasons: they despised the Tories and wanted nothing to do with their cheap labour schemes (scams). I classified these very different young people as Policy Possibilities and Policy Problematics, the former being those who had clear notions of 'acceptable' forms of training and employment, the latter being those who were currently getting by sufficiently well through crime, or those whose refusnik mentality meant that they would be challenging, if not impossible, to re-engage.

It was, ultimately, this qualitative work that captured the media's imagination and launched the 'status A' study into the political arena. Despite a reasonably high profile conference in Cardiff to present the research, no attention was really paid to it (beyond the employment at local authority level in some parts of Wales of a few 'status A' outreach workers) until Hamish McRae wrote a short piece in *The Independent*: *Too Young and Too Precious to Waste*. The article was seized on by a Liberal Democrat peer who raised questions about the 'status A' phenomenon in Parliament and convened a debate in the House of Lords, at which I spoke. Despite a cross-party audience, the Tory high command continued to challenge the research and proclaim that the youth training guarantee ('the only one in Europe') was a dependable instrument for mopping up those who dropped out of education and could not find work. Slowly, however, the opposition subsided and there was increasing political acknowledgement that there was a 'case to answer'.

The pivotal moment was, arguably, a couple of days in the middle of 1994, when two former Secretaries of State for Employment seemed to be on different planets with regard to young people not in education, employment or training. On the radio David Hunt said 'unequivocally and categorically' that there were no more than 144 such young people in England and Wales. It was strange, therefore, that the following day, in *The Guardian*, Norman Fowler conceded that some 76,000 such young people had 'slipped through the training and benefits net'. The newspaper article was called *The Abandoned Generation*, and it was then that I finally managed to get a handle on the absurd concept of 'status A': it stood for Abandoned! The figure of 76,000 was highly consistent with what those beyond the political stratosphere had been saying all along. Even before the House of Commons Education Select Committee concluded (in 1998) that the scale of the problem of what it was calling 'disaffected children' was 'not a residual policy problem but a

significant policy challenge’, the Conservative Government introduced programmes to combat disengagement: the Youth Access Initiative in Wales and New Start in England (later rebranded by new Labour as Relaunch). Once ‘new Labour’ was elected in May 1997, a huge fusillade of activity was directed at young people not in education, employment or training – now routinely referred to as the NEETs. Most of the early work of the Social Exclusion Unit was at least implicitly concerned with the group, the most explicit development being Bridging the Gap, launched by Tony Blair in 1999.

Bridging the Gap was formally only concerned with new opportunities for young people aged 16-18 not in education, employment or training *in England*, but the new Welsh Assembly Government was eager to produce some parallel policy development in Wales. Its vision, captured through what remained its so-called ‘flagship’ youth policy for over a decade, rested in Extending Entitlement, launched unanimously by the Assembly towards the end of 2000. Since then, in both countries there have been policies and strategies galore – spanning the careers service, school inclusion and curriculum development reform, youth services (youth work), youth support services, youth justice, and more – that have touched specifically or associatively on the ‘NEET’s. One might have thought that the phenomenon should have become less intractable yet, at the end of 2008 and in the early part of 2009, both England and Wales were producing yet another focused vision on how to ‘reduce’ the ‘NEET’s, within a framework of building skills rather more than the social inclusion philosophy that prevailed ten years ago, though no doubt politicians will claim that the two go hand in hand.

### **Tommy Butler and The Milltown Boys**

This is not some kind of skiffle band but two discrete, though overlapping, pieces of work I have done over the years, one grounded in some tough empirical realities, the other a complete figment of my imagination! Tommy Butler was an invention on the day Tony Blair launched Bridging the Gap. They have the same initials. Tommy could be Tammy and is a fictitious and flexible character. My paper about him, based on different ‘Tommys’ born at the beginning of each decade since 1940, suggests that he has largely behaved in the same way throughout that time: poor background, school refusal and absenteeism, relatively petty crime, and so on. The problem for Tommy is that the world has changed around him. When I wrote his story I concluded with a speculative piece about the ‘Tommy’ born in 1990, who theoretically should have been the beneficiary of all the initiatives established in London and Cardiff under the stewardship of a Labour administration:

Tommy is 10 and will soon start secondary school. Ahead of him lies a raft of possibilities, some already in place, some being developed in practice, and some still awaiting formulation at policy level. His transition to adulthood will be a rocky road, with plenty of obstacles along the way, but he has been told already that there will be people there to support him and to guide him on the way. Tommy has already learned some skills for survival. Growing up in a ‘poor neighbourhood’, he sometimes thinks that ‘signing on’ is what everybody does. He lives with his mother, an older brother and two younger sisters (his dad left

when he was seven, and he only sees him occasionally). His mother is on benefit, but does a cleaning job. His older brother has offered him a 'spliff', but he wasn't interested. Mind you, he thinks he'll give one a go soon. His mother's much younger sister lives round the corner. She had a baby when she was sixteen, and is proud to be a young mother; the alternative was possibly mind-numbing factory work at the local electronics plant or, more probably, nothing. Tommy ponders that such an option is not open to him. Tommy doesn't think too much about the future. He enjoyed attending a summer learning programme this year, which was a bit like school (but more fun) and it has helped him to improve his reading. He's mischievous and cheeky, quite capable of holding his own in his environment (he's adept at nicking sweets from the local shop, which stands him in good stead with his pals), but he's not alienated from learning. In fact, he displays a curiosity that serves him well with his teachers. They rather like him; sure, he's a bit of lad, but he's also got potential. Sadly, they're not convinced it will be realised.

When Tommy goes to secondary school, he will be doing 'citizenship' education and will be supported by a Personal Adviser from the Connexions service or, if he lives in Wales, through local Young People's Partnerships. If he starts going off the rails, there should be a person to provide both direct and indirect support, putting him in touch with those who can help him best. Tommy may, of course, not be persuaded that he needs their 'help'. He may well encounter the new Youth Offender Panel which, if he gets into trouble, will frame a 'programme of activities' to divert him from crime. There will be a greater focus on preventative intervention, following the public resources allocated for work with children and young people as a result of the powerful analysis of the reasons for 'social exclusion' by a governmental Policy Action Team on Young People. In school, he may access an 'alternative curriculum offer' instead of being thrown out. Young people are a key strategic priority for a new Drugs Strategy (a substance misuse strategy in Wales); substance misuse education will be part of his PHSE curriculum and treatment services will be more readily available if he moves beyond experimental and recreational drug use into more dependent routines. Tommy will have the possibility of a variety of routes to achievement in learning; work is currently being developed around the concept of 'Graduation', first mooted in *Bridging the Gap*, which will enshrine not only academic and vocational qualifications but also attention to key skills, community involvement and personal development. He will be encouraged to engage with extra-curricular activities and volunteering.

How will Tommy respond to all this? Much depends, of course, on his character and circumstance. Certainly this framework of public policy carries the prospect of far fewer young people slipping to the edge, but it fails to acknowledge that motivation to participate (to stay on board) is secured largely by the strength of certainty about the destinations that are likely to be reached. Today's globalised world carries little certainty, and the research evidence tells us that retention in learning and the acquisition of qualifications is the best protective factor against all the indicators of exclusion (teenage pregnancy, criminality, drug misuse,

psycho-social disorders). But Tommy is not interested in the research evidence. He will try to make sense of these ‘opportunities’ in the context of his subjective realities. The power in the messages from his local culture and community (however misguided and misinformed) – about what’s the point of education, the exploitative nature of government training schemes, the need for a ‘live for today’ mentality (for the maintenance of psychological well-being), the suspicion of professionals, that volunteering is a cunning ploy to get you to work for nothing, the fact that there are other ways to ‘get by’, and so on – must not be overlooked. It is how Tommy Butler weighs such information against that provided by the battalions involved in public policy initiatives which will determine the extent to which he connects with the inclusion, achievement and citizenship agenda or opts for something else.

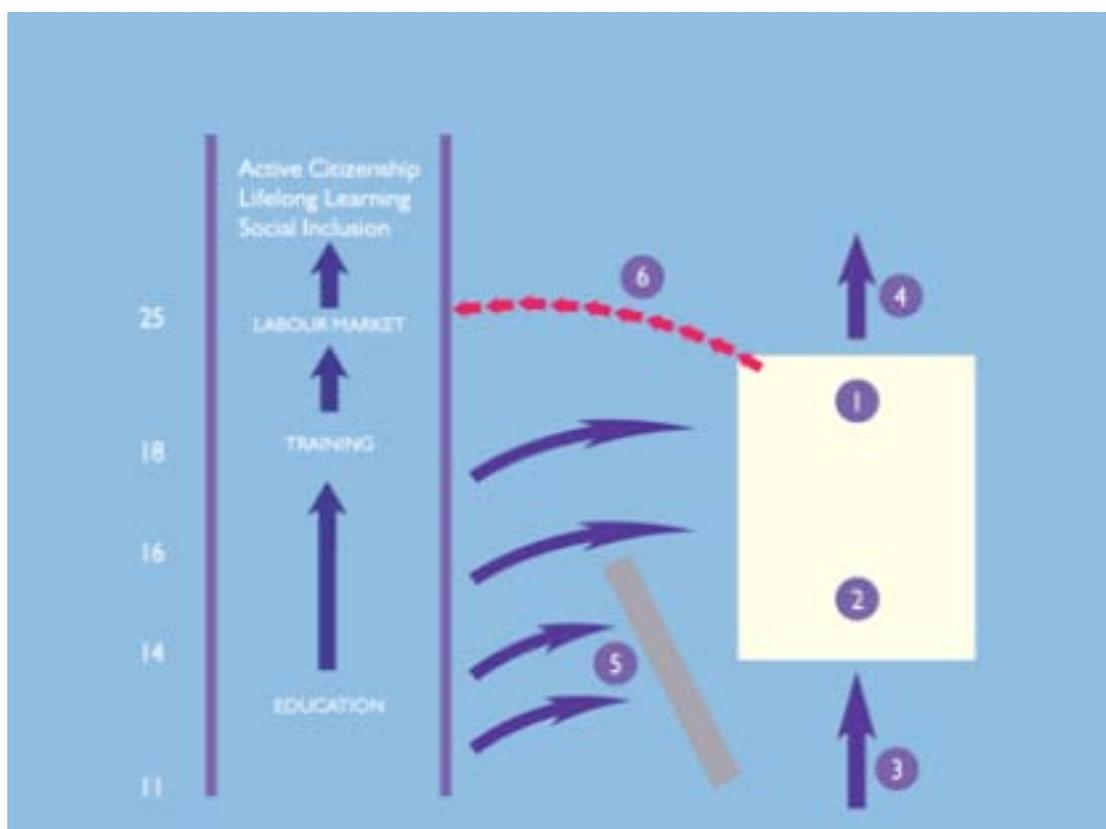
At a more grounded level, my lifetime study of The Milltown Boys demonstrates quite clearly that what turned out to be the first generation of ‘status zero’ youth had very mixed subsequent life course trajectories. The overall picture was probably not as gloomy as some might have predicted: this was a group of young men who left school with no or very few educational qualifications and often substantial criminal records. So, as I have recorded, it is a testimony to their resilience that some made it through into adult working life, family life and personal agency in a reasonable and sometimes impressive manner. Conversely, however, more succumbed to their vulnerability and the endemic risk in their circumstances, with some dying prematurely, many suffering from mental health problems, most facing significant health problems through overuse of both legal and illegal drugs, and many experiencing separation from partners and loss of, or limited, contact with their many children. Those who ‘came through’ have children whose own children will have little conception of where their grandfathers grew up, but for many more the generational cycle of disadvantage, marginality and exclusion remains all too stark and evident. Of course, none of this can be ‘blamed’ directly on experiences of ‘status zero’, but the connections in a loose form are now well established in a substantial body of research.

### **Six critical questions for research and policy**

In my work on ‘status zero’ young people and wider aspects of social exclusion, I slowly developed a set of six questions, paired in threes. These have been utilised across different youth and other policy areas and at different levels of governance and policy implementation. They are easy questions to ask, but very tough questions to answer.

The first pair of questions (numbered 1 & 2 in the following diagram) concerns the scale of the problem and the calibration of differentiation of issues within it. These are clearly a matter both of inquiry and of judgement and perspective but it is important preliminary work. We have to be sure that the issue in focus is a ‘significant policy challenge’ and not a ‘residual policy problem’ (1). Clearly the ‘NEET’ phenomenon is. However, we then need to think hard about how we want to classify or categorise those within this category (2). They are not all the same, and their differences will require a differentiated response. Unless we take some care with the calibration, we will be directing

policy in the wrong way to the wrong sub-group. We can invoke different criteria, of course, and it may be necessary – or useful – to slice into the cake in different ways, simply in order to understand it better.



Approaches are rarely mutually exclusive and more likely to be overlapping. One approach I hazarded in front of the Select Committee in 1998 drew on my practice experience. I suggested that the ‘disaffected’ fell into three groups, two of which were not in fact ‘disaffected’. These were the ‘essentially confused’ and the ‘temporarily sidetracked’, the former very willing and ready to re-engage so long as the right support and encouragement was present, the latter needing some understanding and patience while they dealt with what they considered to be more important matters in their lives right now. Neither group in my view was fundamentally alienated from participation in the mainstream. In contrast, the third group, the ‘deeply alienated’, had switched off, either completely or because they had switched on to something else. There were the purposeful, who had discovered ‘alternative ways of living’ within the informal and illegal economies, and there were the purposeless, who had given up and were whiling their lives away under the influence of alcohol and illegal drugs. Neither of these groups would be easy to persuade to return.

The second pair of questions relates to causes and consequences. Obviously it is helpful to have some understanding of the factors that may contribute to becoming status zero, if such factors can be discerned (3). Family breakdown, school exclusion, and involvement in offending are strong candidates, but

there are almost certainly other factors at play. How can, or should, these be isolated, while simultaneously recognising their interconnection with each other? At the other end of the tunnel, or on the other side of the box (4), is the matter of the consequences of having been status zero. Without broad-based longitudinal data, this is also difficult to determine. Our best evidence in the UK currently is the 1970 Birth Cohort Study but this only picks up those young people who were 'NEET' in 1986 and 1987. Nevertheless, we are told that they are disproportionately likely to experience a range of pathologies around family breakdown and unemployment later in their lives. This has huge implications for the Exchequer and provides a powerful lobby in support of earlier intervention, namely in the prevention of young people becoming 'NEET' in the first place.

The third pair of questions are policy concerns about barriers (5) and bridges (6). Ideally, we are seeking to discover the most effective practice and mechanisms to promote and maintain young people in constructive pathways within education, training and employment. That was, indeed, the primary objective of the early Youth Access Initiative in Wales. Some young people, however, will slip through the net (though hopefully not as many as Norman Fowler conceded all those years ago). For them, we have to find the right bridges at the moments when they are motivated to cross them.

### **Some key policy issues**

It is relatively easy to produce maps and diagrams that endeavour to depict the issues. Academics are routinely criticised for such conceptualisation that appears devoid of practical value. My only defence is that I have also tried, as a practitioner, to work on these issues. Through both research and practice, I wish therefore to advance what I consider to be some critical ingredients that, too often, have been missing in the policy rhetoric.

First there is the question of reach. The late Children's Commissioner for Wales Peter Clarke proclaimed in 2005 that the Welsh Assembly Government was 'all flagships and no fleet'. His concern was that the commendable policy aspirations expressed through a range of documents remained just that – laudable intentions. There were no systems, structures and human resources to make anything stick. Even when there has been activity on the 'NEET' front, it has often been left to relatively raw professionals, when skill and experience is essential if a real practice of tough love is to be applied: pressing on the brake at times, seizing every moment to press on the accelerator. My conception of 'advanced skill drivers' is one that I hold to if the more intractable of the 'NEET' population is not only to be reached but is also to be supported effectively in moving back towards the mainstream.

For reach to be effective, there needs to be meaningful differentiation of the 'NEET' group. Some could, with the right contact and credibility, be 'turned around' relatively fast, while others will need more protracted attention, intervention and patience. Their lives are imbued with mistrust and scepticism and they will need time to work through to the idea of engaging with a constructive 'cycle of change'. And there is also the question of

destinations: meaningful destinations have to be identified and conveyed to young people, otherwise ‘what is the point’?

If there is no concerted and concentrated focus on the whole ‘NEET’ group, with all its potential calibrations, there will be a ‘natural’ drift towards the easy targets, in my classification the ‘essentially confused’ and the ‘temporarily sidetracked’. They produce relatively quick wins and are attractive propositions in a target-driven culture. But the whole project ultimately ends up hitting the target but missing the point.

### **No guarantees**

Much was made during 2009 of the credit crunch, political commitment to young people who are ‘NEET’ and the role of the New Futures Fund. Jobs (or training) will be guaranteed to all who are unemployed for a certain length of time. The then Prime Minister, no less, promoted this promise. But we have had ‘guarantees’ before; the unanswered questions revolve around the kinds of jobs (and the kinds of training) that will become and be made available. They may not be those that young people are happy or willing to take up. Does that matter? The answer is mixed. We have to understand what young people really want and, at the next level, what they are willing to consider as a ‘trade off’. What they really want is an intrinsically satisfying job that pays well. Many will not achieve that.

We have then to emphasise, in policy, the need for contact, engagement, dialogue and judgement about the *range* of vocational, educational and cultural possibilities and opportunities that might be made available. Many young people will be receptive to some such options, even if they are not really what they want. But they will consider them if the basis of participation provides them with different benefits: relationships with supportive adults, meaningful activities and so on. That observation derives from a lifetime of practical youth work, including work with the young unemployed in the early 1980s. Young people who are ‘NEET’ will be interested in different, not new, deals – perhaps in the labour market, but also in community and youth, and indeed personal, projects. These need to be constructed so that they represent ladders and stepping stones towards eventual economic autonomy and labour market participation, even though that journey may be, and at times should be accepted as, a long one.

### **Final questions**

The new ‘NEET’ reduction strategies, both for England and for Wales, say many good things, but they remain at the level of rhetoric. The track record of effective policy implementation on the ‘NEET’ agenda is a poor one. In economically precarious times, a past history of political indecision coupled with an unwillingness to free up professional autonomy is a powerful cocktail for complete inertia. Two sides – those on the side of the market, and those on the side of young people – drift along in their time-honoured ways, with little communication or dialogue. The youth advocates want opportunities in the labour market that are often quite unrealistic. The labour market exponents

don't really want the 'NEET' kids at all. Somebody has to make the call on the relationship between labour market need and youth aspiration: who is that to be?

Once such a call has been made, policy development and implementation is possible. What will be critical here are the mechanisms for producing the best possible fit between, crudely, supply and demand. That will demand some mix of incentives and sanctions, on both sides. Who will take the responsibility for what will, in some quarters, be unpopular, even unpalatable ideas and action?

It is a very difficult thing to say but, having mooted the point already, there is an argument that, in the aspirational 'knowledge-based economy' that is the Europe of the future, the young people who are 'NEET' will struggle to find any place in private (and perhaps even public) sector arrangements. The 'fit' referred to above may rarely be achievable. Should we now bite this awful bullet and think much harder about how we might give those who are 'NEET' (or at risk of it) some alternative hope for their futures through what might be called, drawing on the substance misuse field, a 'harm reduction' model (or public works, social activity and subsidised personal enterprise)? It may ultimately be better than trying to fob them off with poor and temporary work and training experience that may be more of a revolving door than a clear point of entry into permanent and sustainable employment.



## Chapter 2

# Preventing NEET status among young mothers in Wrexham

Teresa Foster Evans and Charlotte Blackwell

### Overview

In the late 1990s and early 2000s Wrexham had the unenviable reputation as one of Wales' teen pregnancy hot spots. Wrexham's under 18s conception rate peaked in 2005 at 62.2 conceptions per 1000 girls aged 15-17 years (152 individuals) compared with a national rate for Wales of 43.6 and for England & Wales of 41.4<sup>1</sup>. Furthermore, the number of under 16s becoming pregnant in Wrexham was also one of the highest in Wales, at 30 individuals for each of the years 2004-2006 – rates of 11.9 to 12.3 per 1000<sup>2</sup>. The social and economic problems associated with early parenthood are clear to see on many of Wrexham's housing estates. The number of young women who are not only economically inactive but also solely dependent on benefits is a clear indication of the problem.

### Key Statistics

- In 2007 42,918 girls under the age of 18 became pregnant in England and Wales<sup>1</sup>
- 4.49% of all 15-17 year old girls in Wales become pregnant<sup>3</sup>
- In Wrexham 111 under 18s fell pregnant in 2007<sup>1</sup>
- 13 girls aged 16 or under gave birth in Wrexham in 2007 (local data)
- 84% of teen mothers are NEETs<sup>4</sup>
- The additional cost of being a NEET is approximately £97,000 over a life time<sup>3</sup>
- Approximately 66% of Cyfle's students continue in education or training beyond Year 11

Over the same period the number of young people leaving Year 11 in Wrexham who were NEET has been amongst Wales' highest, at 8.1% in 2006 compared with a national average of 6.9%<sup>5</sup>. Data on the number of these young people who are young mothers is not available but the following chapter outlines the work that has been undertaken in Wrexham such that whilst the number of "general" NEETs across Wrexham continued to rise to a peak of 8.9% in 2007,

the rates of under 16 and under 18 conceptions fell to below Wales' national average for the first time in 5 years. Furthermore, empirical evidence from our own tracking of pupils leaving Cyfle shows that approximately 66% of those very young women who become parents when still of compulsory school age go on to some form of education or training within one year of the end of Year 11. This is in contrast to national data which suggest that up to 84% of teen mothers are NEET<sup>4</sup>.

### **Provision in Wrexham**

Wrexham Local Authority recognised that there is a significant problem with the level of risky behaviour and lack of aspirations in its young people. Cyfle was set up in 2001 in an effort to help address the high level of teen pregnancies and the concomitant drop out of education amongst Wrexham's very young women. Cyfle opened in spring 2002 with just one part-time teacher for two days a week offering minimal tuition to two students under Wrexham's EOTAS service.

Cyfle has evolved over the last 8 years to maximise the educational entitlement of Wrexham's youngest mothers so that they are not disadvantaged nor discriminated against due to their parenting role. Prior to 2002, pupils who had babies were only entitled to 5 hours a week home tuition for 18 weeks and then were expected to return full-time to mainstream education with no help with childcare. This was in line with the Welsh Assembly Government guidelines<sup>6</sup> at the time. As Cyfle evolved, its policies and procedures were designed in consultation with the LEA and the midwifery service. At the same time Cyfle petitioned the Welsh Government to improve the minimum requirements for young parents in education and a new set of guidelines<sup>7</sup> was published. As Cyfle's policies were being designed it was decided not only to follow these new guidelines but also to treat the young mums as though they were pregnant adults within the 1974 Sex Discrimination Law and the relevant maternity laws<sup>8</sup>.

An admissions policy was devised such that the pupils are only able to start their "maternity leave" from mainstream school at or beyond 28 weeks pregnant in line with adult maternity entitlement. Absence from school is only permitted with a valid medical reason backed up by a midwife or doctor. She will be permitted 14 days' "normal" leave on delivery of her baby in line with the legal minimum maternity leave permitted for a woman in employment. However, in line with the Education Act<sup>9</sup>, which states that "*parents must ensure their children receive a full-time education suitable to their needs*", as soon as the young mum is physically able and medically fit she is expected to return to Cyfle for her education. The midwifery service have been happy to support Cyfle in this policy and will co-operate closely with us to ensure that whilst no girl is expected to return to Cyfle before she is medically fit, likewise no pupil is permitted to use recent childbirth as a reason to extend her absence from education. If she is fit enough to walk around shops she is deemed fit enough to attend for education. Any pupil refusing to attend is referred to the Education Welfare Service and there have been a couple of

successful parental prosecutions for failing to ensure the education of their daughters.

On the pupil's return following her maternity leave, she brings her baby with her. Cyfle is fortunate to have a free, onsite crèche that is fully registered with CSSIW and is inspected on an annual basis. The new mothers are encouraged to bond with their babies and breast feed. The babies are only placed in the crèche when the mother feels ready and she is able to go in and see her baby whenever she wants during the school day. The young family remains at Cyfle for several months, with usually a minimum of no less than three months before her return to mainstream, provided this is in her best interest. In many instances the pupil will remain at Cyfle, with her baby, until the end of her GCSEs. Pupils are actively encouraged to apply for FE courses and training at the end of this time and help with identifying childcare placements is given.

### **Summary of Cyfle Provision**

- School discovers pregnant pupil and refers her to Cyfle for support *or* referral by family, midwife, social worker *or* self-referral
- Teacher from Cyfle does home visit to explain Cyfle's services to family
- Pupil continues at mainstream school until 28 weeks pregnant
- At 28-36 weeks pregnant pupil transfers to Cyfle for her education
- Attends Cyfle 4 days a week plus Mums2B for an afternoon a week
- Pupil delivers baby
- Pupil and baby return to Cyfle after 2 weeks to complete her education or until reintegration to mainstream.

Cyfle Pupil Referral Unit (PRU) underwent a full ESTYN inspection<sup>10</sup> in March 2007 and was assessed as one of Wales' best PRUs with a full set of Grade 1s across all seven Key Questions.

Cyfle PRU now offers (approaching) full-time teaching of GCSE and Level II qualifications by specialist teachers to any and all young women from Wrexham's secondary schools who find themselves pregnant or new parents whilst still of compulsory school age. Any girl who finds herself pregnant whilst still at school is immediately referred to Cyfle for support. Cyfle works closely with the teenage midwifery service to ensure all pregnant pupils receive dedicated specialist antenatal care. The pupil is expected to remain attending her mainstream school, full-time, until she is at least 28 weeks pregnant. Cyfle works closely with the school to help support her attendance and ensure a smooth transfer to Cyfle towards the end of her pregnancy. Cyfle

also arranges referrals to other agencies to ensure the pupil has access to any benefits or financial/housing advice she may be entitled to.

When the pupil reaches between 28 and 36 weeks pregnancy she transfers to Cyfle for her education. It is also expected that she starts to attend the integrated specialist teenage antenatal clinic, Mums2B, run by the local hospital. One of Cyfle's teachers attends the clinic to help support the midwife in her delivery of the parenting course and to help promote the educational opportunities to all of the young expectant mums who attend Mums2B, regardless of whether they are still of compulsory school age or not.

On transfer the pupil is expected to attend Cyfle four days a week on a regular basis. She is given free taxi transport to and from the centre. She is expected to attend Mums2B and arrange any routine medical or other appointments on the fifth day. Cyfle does not accept pregnancy as an illness and neither is it an excuse to avoid education. There is a robust attendance policy and Cyfle works very closely with the midwifery team to monitor the pupils' fitness to attend. Whilst at Cyfle the pupil continues to study all of the GCSEs that she started at her mainstream school. In the case of a pupil transferring to Cyfle at the start of Year 11 she also starts studying for the Welsh Baccalaureate Qualification.

A pupil will continue to attend at Cyfle for as long as she is medically fit to do so, often until the day before she goes into labour. On the delivery of her baby the new mother is given 2 weeks' maternity leave and then returns with her baby to complete her GCSE courses. If she has undergone a long or complicated delivery then her return will be delayed until her midwife declares her fit.

### **Approaches to support**

- Young people offered intensive, specialist support
- Non-judgemental approach which respects them as adults even when they don't always behave like adults
- Constant reiteration that pregnancy is no reason to abandon education
- Persistent re-affirmation that the young person is worth our time and can achieve if she puts the effort in
- Small group work which focuses on teaching the young person in a way that works and inspires her
- Tough-love approach – care about their situation but don't let it become an excuse to fail
- One size does not fit all

Whilst at Cyfle the pupils are continually encouraged to view education as a lifelong process which extends from their formal GCSEs/Level I/II courses to the process of learning parenting skills and becoming good role models for their own child. They are treated in a more adult fashion than would be expected in a mainstream school whilst being given the highest quality of education. The girls are encouraged to value themselves and aim to provide the best possible opportunities for their own child. This is achieved by constantly promoting the idea that they should work towards training and employment goals which would make them financially independent and able to provide for their child.

This is a complex and time consuming process and requires dedicated, patient staff who will spend long hours getting to know the pupils and their families. Nonetheless, it has proved successful. Over 70 young women have been supported in this way over the last 8 years. Whilst success in the early years is hard to gauge, Cyfle's own data indicate that over two thirds of the pupils who have attended Cyfle in the last four years have gone on to further education, training or employment. A large proportion of the remaining pupils have moved in with the fathers of their babies and taken a year out, whilst their partners have provided for them with no, or minimal, benefits claimed.

### **Case Study 1**

- N became pregnant at 15 by her 17 year old boyfriend
- Was unaware of her pregnancy until 24 weeks pregnant
- Eldest of her mother's children but part of a very extensive and complex family
- Pregnancy occurred at same time as mother's marital difficulties with new partner
- Very poor attendance history at mainstream school
- Of average intelligence
- On transfer to Cyfle attendance improved markedly
- Became very dependent on Cyfle and the other pupils for support
- Delivered baby just before her GCSE exams
- Completed 8 GCSEs
- Requested Year 12 placement at Cyfle to re-sit GCSEs but was advised that best option was to transfer to an access course at FE; however, she faces difficulties with child care
- Has now enrolled on a series of access courses and is working part-time
- Has applied for FE full-time course next year to study for BTEch in Child Care
- Continues to have contact and support from Cyfle and her fellow pupils

### **Case Study 2**

- C became pregnant at 15 by her 21 year old boyfriend
- Was unaware of her pregnancy until over 20 weeks pregnant
- When boyfriend discovered pregnancy he abandoned her
- Youngest by some 13 years of a family of three

- Parents work long hours at own business and pregnancy coincided with difficulties at home
- Almost zero attendance at school before pregnancy due to unresolved bullying issue
- Above average intelligence
- Referred herself to Cyfle and applied to resit GCSEs as soon as she received her exam grades
- Had to take a significant period of absence following serious complications with pregnancy and premature delivery of her baby including starting labour whilst in a science lesson
- Since her baby's health has improved C's attendance is almost 100%
- Is currently attending Cyfle, enrolled on an evening counselling course and working part-time in her parents' business
- Has already applied to FE for a course next year with view to becoming a Social Worker
- A very vocal and determined pupil who is Chair of Cyfle's Pupil Council

C is a very keen advocate for and supporter of Cyfle's additional work on promoting good quality sex and relationships education (SRE) in schools and raising the profile of the potential of young parents across Wales. In the next section of this chapter she tells her personal story.

### **Charlotte's Story**

*When Teresa first asked me to come along to the NEETs conference I didn't have a clue what a NEET was. When I found out information about NEETs, my first thought was "that's not me". But in actual fact I was very close to becoming one without realising it. I hated school and I got bullied which didn't help matters. I was in with the wrong crowd in school and I was out every night. I didn't know where my life was going and I didn't really care either. I didn't know I was pregnant when I sat my Year 11 exams. And I didn't know what I was going to do in the future.*

*If I hadn't had Caleb I wouldn't have done anything with my life; I would be at home now doing nothing and getting drunk and probably fighting. But my son Caleb gives me the motivation that I need to get up and do something with my life. I am very fortunate that I live in Wrexham and that there is Cyfle because I don't know how else I could have got this far. I have received help for my education as well as pastoral and emotional support. I get treated like an adult at Cyfle, not like a silly child. I am given respect and valued at Cyfle, staff get to know us as individuals, not just as another kid in the class, and they care about our futures, not all the paperwork that goes with it. At Cyfle we communicate with each other on a level that I never did at school. We have fun at Cyfle as well as our education. We are treated differently and every person's individual needs are fulfilled.*

*When I came to the conference at Pontypool, I was very grateful that I had the chance to speak out as a young person as well as a young mother. It meant the world to me to express my feelings on something that a roomful of*

*people were also interested in. I felt that they valued my opinion and my recommendations on how to approach a young person in my situation.*

*I now have plans for my future and I would like to become a social worker. I am going on to college next year to do health and social care and then I will proceed on to higher education to do a degree in social work. I really want to become a social worker because I feel that everybody has a right to a second chance in life and deserves a good education and the support that they need to succeed.*

### ***Golden rules I would recommend when talking to us!***

- 1. Remember, any girl can get pregnant*
- 2. Your job is to support me; please don't judge me*
- 3. Treat me with respect*
- 4. Please talk to me – not my mum!*
- 5. We are selfish – make sure I know what's in it for me!*
- 6. If you patronise me I'll switch off and may even tell you where to get off!*
- 7. Give me direct instructions: I understand them better than suggestions*
- 8. Keep choices simple*
- 9. Be friendly but don't try to be my friend*
- 10. And above all – be yourself. We can smell bull a mile off!*

### **Preventative Work**

At Cyfle we believe that prevention is better than cure. We have an additional role to that of supporting young women once they are already pregnant – we support the teaching of high quality sex and relationships education (SRE) in Wrexham's mainstream secondary schools. The format that we use in such delivery is based on that recommended by IAG<sup>11</sup> and uses the "Delay"<sup>12</sup> principles. Each year Cyfle commissions and arranges for a Theatre in Education company to perform a drama called "What am I Going to Tell Mum?" in front of every Year 9 pupil in Wrexham LEA. This is backed up with further support in Years 10 and 11 for those schools that wish to take us up on the offer. The drama is a hard hitting portrayal of two 15 year olds who embark on a sexual relationship together but for very different reasons. The girl becomes pregnant and it focuses in on the emotional turmoil experienced

by both parties and her friend as they come to terms with the pregnancy. It is full of raw emotion but also humour.

This method of delivering SRE has proved so successful and popular that not only is it about to enter its fifth year of production but both our local faith school and our special school are also happy to allow their pupils to see it. Estyn featured it as an example of good practice in their 2007 survey<sup>13</sup> on personal and social education (PSE) in schools. This work, along with other projects that have been developed by both Cyfle and other agencies, has had a dramatic impact on the rate of underage conceptions in the county. As mentioned previously, in 2007 Wrexham's under 18 conception rate dropped to below the national average for the first time since 2002. Yet it is still too high. Provisional data<sup>1</sup> for 2008 show that, whilst Wrexham's under 18 teen conception rate should still be below the national average, we may see a slight increase and so this work needs to continue and develop further.

But it is by tackling the whole issue around the young person – their self-esteem, feelings of self value, views of the wider world and ambition – that we can encourage them to take a more active role in their future and move away from the trap of social exclusion that so many of our vulnerable young people fall into by becoming NEET. Much research has been carried out into this problem and McFarlane<sup>14</sup> stated that “having ambition ... is identified as a powerful contraceptive for young people”. Feelings of self-worth and high aspirations, in other words giving a young woman a reason NOT to have a baby, are most likely to be effective at preventing a young woman from choosing to delay becoming a productive, well educated member of society because she has become a mother before her time. It is also more likely to break the cycle of repeated early parenthood in which children are being brought up in families where none of the adults has any higher qualifications and no-one is in regular employment.

## References

- <sup>1</sup> Office for National Statistics (2008) Conception rates for under 18s 1992-2007, Data Set 2008
- <sup>2</sup> Stats Wales (2008) Conception rates by UA 2004-2007
- <sup>3</sup> Godfrey, C. et al. (2002) Department for Education and Schools sponsored report RR346 - Estimating the Cost of Being NEET at 16-18
- <sup>4</sup> Millennium Cohort Survey, April 2005
- <sup>5</sup> Stats Wales (2008) Reports 003805 and 003810
- <sup>6</sup> Welsh Assembly Government Guidance on Inclusion and Pupil Support – Circular 3/99
- <sup>7</sup> Welsh Assembly Government Guidance on Inclusion and Pupil Support – Circular 47/2006
- <sup>8</sup> The Maternity and Parental Leave etc. Regulations (1999) Statutory Instrument No. 3312
- <sup>9</sup> Education Act for England and Wales (2002) section 53
- <sup>10</sup> ESTYN inspection report on Cyfle (Wrexham) Young Mothers' Unit (2006) [http://www.estyn.gov.uk/inspection\\_reports/Cyfle\\_PRU.pdf](http://www.estyn.gov.uk/inspection_reports/Cyfle_PRU.pdf)
- <sup>11</sup> Independent Advisory Group on Sexual Health and HIV (IAG) (2007) Sex, drugs, alcohol and young people – a review on the impact drugs and alcohol have on young people's behaviour
- <sup>12</sup> Jo Adams and Associates (2006) "Let's Leave It Till Later": a training manual on supporting young people to delay early sex
- <sup>13</sup> ESTYN (2007) survey on The Delivery of SRE Across Schools in Wales [http://www.estyn.gov.uk/publications/Sex\\_and\\_Relationships\\_Guidance\\_2007.pdf](http://www.estyn.gov.uk/publications/Sex_and_Relationships_Guidance_2007.pdf)
- <sup>14</sup> McFarlane, A. (2007) as reported in IAG 2007 (see endnote 11)



## **Chapter 3**

# **A flexible, voluntary sector approach to engagement: Rathbone Cymru**

**Richard Newton**

### **Introduction**

Rathbone is a UK-wide voluntary youth sector organisation providing opportunities for young people to transform their life-circumstances by re-engaging with learning, discovering their ability to succeed and achieving progression to further education, training and employment.

Rathbone Cymru supports 2000 young people each year, all of whom are either not in education, employment or training, or at risk of becoming so. Our portfolio of work enables us to support those aged between 11 and 25 with a range of programmes which are flexible enough to meet both individual and community needs. These fall under three main areas of work:

*Youth Engagement* – Seeking to engage some of the most disengaged young people in communities across Wales, this work centres on providing street-based youth work outside of mainstream hours (including evenings and weekends). Working on a 1-2-1 and group basis within the environments that are familiar and non-threatening to young people, we seek to build up trust, aspiration, direction and ambition whilst also working with the young people to remove the barriers that they face to engagement, be these perceived or actual.

*Preparation for Life and Work* – Rathbone Cymru offers a number of programmes in this area which seek, through both formal and non-formal learning, to prepare a young person for independent living and work. Rathbone has developed a range of learning experiences, which focus on basic and key skills, vocational direction and experience, along with wider life and employability skills.

*Pre-16 Learning* – Working in partnership with the statutory education system, Rathbone Cymru offers a range of curriculum options to support young people who are facing difficulties engaging with, and achieving in, the mainstream education system. These seek to broaden the options available for young people in the statutory education system, allowing a greater level of intensive support where needed, or a progression into vocational learning at an earlier age for those for whom traditional school learning is not suitable.

### **Our approach**

Rathbone Cymru believes that to be successful in achieving positive results with the NEET cohort there is a need for flexibility in the approach that is taken. Key to success is recognising that each young person that we deal with

has reached his or her current life position due to a unique set of circumstances. Additionally, no two communities in which we work are the same. As such, a cross-cutting theme of our work is the fact that Rathbone Cymru's programmes are not prescribed or rigid. Whilst we work to ensure that we hit qualitative performance indicators, in turn we also respect the role of partner organisations, the local environment and the individual's own circumstances.

We also believe that key to 'solving' the NEET problem is ensuring that services are available to all, through mediums, times and environments that are attractive to all. Obviously as one size doesn't fit all, this necessitates an array of activities from 1-2-1 to group work, outreach to in-reach, and including activities embracing a range of elements from sport to ICT to arts-based activities. When looking at the NEET cohort as a whole it is also important to recognise the diversity of this cohort. Some of these young people are NEET by choice – a year off, a few weeks off between jobs. Others, whilst NEET not by choice, are likely to be NEET on a short term basis, for instance whilst they actively look for a job. Then there are those who are long term NEET, for whom a job or further training seems alien and impossible. This is the group that portrays many of the extreme characteristics associated with the NEET cohort, including poor health, lack of ambition and aspiration, potential involvement in crime and low education levels amongst other things.

Recognising these traits and the level to which an individual is NEET is important when developing a solution. So many projects looking to support NEET young people are established within the school estate, within careers offices or community based centres. Whilst these are valued projects, and have a role in preventing some people from becoming NEET or supporting those where a small level of intervention is required, these projects fail to support the 'long-term' or 'hardcore' NEET. When we at Rathbone Cymru start to build relationships with this group of young people it is done within the local environment – on street corners, in bus shelters, in the park or outside the cinema for instance. The first positive outcome for us in dealing with these young people is gaining a level of engagement, the first spoken words or a level of eye contact.

For these young people the thought of engaging with 'the system' is beyond their comprehension. Do they feel able to enter a school when they perceive that they (and perhaps their parents and grandparents) were failed by the education system? How would you feel entering a Job Centre or careers office and having to admit to the fact that you couldn't read or write? (Two thirds of the young people that we support have a Basic Skill Level less than Level 1.)

At Rathbone Cymru, we always seek to progress and challenge the young people we support. As such, whilst a relationship with a young person may start within a street-based context, we are keen to develop this and will start to ensure that the young person begins to meet us within our own training centres, or a careers office or similar; in doing so we start to remove some of the stigma associated with these environments.

Whilst our staff are experienced as learning coaches and youth workers, in providing information advice and guidance and as teachers, we don't have the solutions to all the issues we encounter. What is important, however, is that we are able to build a relationship with a young person that recognises that there may be, for instance, a mental health issue, a drugs issue or a housing issue – and that we have referral networks in place (with statutory and voluntary sector partners) to address these issues. Equally, we don't remove support for a young person because of these issues – we work their individual learning plans around the support that they need, endeavouring to ensure that we as an organisation remain a constant in what for many has been a chaotic and turbulent life. In line with the same thinking is that much of the work that Rathbone Cymru undertakes should *complement* mainstream provision, particularly in our youth engagement and pre-16 portfolios: a successful outcome includes a return to mainstream provision. As such, partnership is key to success, ensuring that young people are supported by a provider who is best suited to meet their individual needs.

The role of Rathbone Cymru as a voluntary sector partner is crucial. By many of the young people whom we seek to support we are seen as independent and autonomous from 'the system'. In reality this is often not the case, as we frequently operate in partnership with statutory providers, working with comprehensive data-sharing agreements and service-level agreements; however, we are seen by the young people as being one step removed from organisations as diverse as youth offending teams, colleges, Careers Wales and Job Centre Plus. This makes us (or one of the other voluntary sector partners who undertake similar work to us) more attractive to many NEET young people as a first point of engagement. There is less of a fear that we will enforce, or that we could use information about the young person in a 'negative' way.

Equally, for our partners that commission our services there are benefits to working with a voluntary sector organisation. We believe that we can be more responsive to demand, we benefit from bringing national specialisms and quality support networks whilst being able to be reactive to local needs, and sub-contracting of work to the voluntary sector is a cost effective and legacy free way to deliver activity for many of our partner organisations. Furthermore, as a charity there is an opportunity to add value to revenue funding, through attracting further donations or the securing of volunteer support.

This can be illustrated through Rathbone Cymru's own experiences of working in partnership with both Careers Wales and Connexions in England; we have, through our engagement work, identified many young people who are NEET, yet not on the NEET register as they are not engaging with the agency responsible for collating the NEET figures. In one area in the UK, Rathbone was actually asked to slow down our engagement work: we were increasing the NEET figure as we made contact with these young people, reducing the numbers on the 'not known' list as we determined that they were actually NEET.

## **The need for coordination**

It is critical that one organisation should take the lead in monitoring and tracking the NEET figures in an area. For this to work it is essential that mechanisms are in place to ensure that all young people are accounted for in these figures, so that NEET figures do not represent just those who are in touch with the lead agency – otherwise you end up with a service planning and commissioning structure which is not reflective of the true need.

Commissioning and funding needs to change to reflect some of these points. It is proper, and more so than ever in today's funding climate, that partnership working is encouraged and duplication is avoided. However, funding also needs to recognise that many of these NEET young people are a long distance away from gaining any qualifications – and that the initial soft skill development that needs to take place requires appropriate remuneration to be effective. This for some of the young people is the crucial part of the journey to engagement. Without developing these soft skills, and assessing and removing obstacles to engagement, a young person is more likely to fail as they enter education and training. This work requires time and specialist staff support to be effective.

We also must not ignore the revolving door syndrome. The revolving door syndrome refers to the cohort of young people who move from programme to programme with different providers, benefiting from none but utilising funding in the process. Effective partnership working will help to eradicate this. A proper joined up approach and collective case-working should help prevent this happening and reduce the amount of referrals and diagnostics that a young person may face – surely something that in the long term will stop them from coming forward to other providers? Equally, comprehensive knowledge of all of the opportunities available in a certain area, shared amongst all of the stakeholders and referring agencies, coupled with no financial disincentive to refer a young person to an alternative provider, may ensure that young people reach the provider most relevant to their needs in the first instance.

## **Working towards further progression**

We know, from our research and that of others, that these NEET young people, despite being classed by many as the 'ASBO / Hoody Generation', actually want the same as their peers. Long term goals such as a decent home, a stable job and establishing a stable family are within their aspirations. They simply do not know how, or to whom to turn to reach these goals. As such it is always important to be realistic about goals and achievements, and to ensure that there is a purpose and a sense of value to activities that young people are undertaking. When we deliver our Moneyskills units at Rathbone Cymru we are honest – for instance that it will require a salary of x amount to buy a car – and we develop skills that many require in managing their own benefit entitlements.

Rathbone Cymru was started by Elfrida Rathbone, an educational philanthropist; as such we attempt to ensure that there is a recognised

educational benefit to all the activities that we offer. A football workshop may actually result in a qualification in Coaching or Communication; a juggling workshop may deliver a key skill in Working with Others. Whilst for many the qualification may be the secondary reason for taking part, the young people gain significantly from having their efforts accredited and rewarded, and gaining a qualification removes some of the stigma associated with learning and makes the person feel valued. Giving a sense of purpose to activities, not just through qualifications but by providing opportunities to improve local environments or to offer a voice for young people, is paramount to making people feel valued and respected.

This value and respect feeds through to the way that at Rathbone Cymru we ensure that young people are given a voice in the way that we operate. We have a very active and real young people's participation policy. This ensures that young people are consulted on a number of areas of our operation, including the quality of our services, buildings and programmes. Giving young people a voice has seen some real changes in the way we operate – and has empowered young people to take action to improve the facilities that are on offer to them, through planning and fundraising for additional facilities in young people's common areas. We also consult young people to inform us on our responses to government consultations and in development of new initiatives and marketing campaigns. The young people we seek to support are our clients, our consumers, and it is vital that we work with them to ensure that our services are credible and relevant to them. Furthermore, involving young people to this level builds up further their respect and trust for us as an organisation.

Once a relationship is built with a young person it is important that they are supported in their development and progression. For many, attachment issues may develop with organisations such as Rathbone Cymru whereby, having found a trusted partner, the young people are reluctant to take those steps away to another provider. Whilst there are significant benefits to providers having a wider curriculum that allows for progression within that provider (such as we have at Rathbone Cymru, where a young person may first come in contact with the organisation through our street based youth engagement and then continue through to Preparation for Work and ultimately Skillbuild) it is also important to recognise that when the time comes there is a need to progress a young person on to alternative provision. There are challenges here which are not easily solved: for instance, at Rathbone Cymru we commence new relationships with young people every week of the year; however, at times we work with the young person and identify development opportunities that, whilst suitable, simply are not available in a timely fashion. Trying to retain motivation in a young person who has identified mechanics as their passion but who will have to wait seven months before progressing onto a course – simply because that is how academic terms operate – is not an easy task.

For the hardest to help young people this transition can be a traumatic time, as they feel that they are losing trusted and established relationships. Key to success here is partnership working between providers, enabling a smooth transition and induction into a new environment. Equally, more joined up data-sharing and case-working will enable a young person to make a smoother

and more stable transition without having to undertake a barrage of initial assessments and diagnostics.

## **Future considerations**

Much has rightly been made of the economic and social cost of not addressing the NEET issue. Millions of pounds have been channelled into this area for a number of years, yet the numbers of NEET young people remain largely stagnant and need to be reduced.

The present round of European Social Fund monies is seeing a further increase in funding available, but we do have to question a number of issues.

1. Are all these monies being targeted at the correct cohort? Much of the funding is being designed to provide extended and wider curriculum within the school estate or similar. This is very important and will, I am sure, retain some young people within the education system who may have failed in a traditional classroom setting. But should a bias of funding go to re-engaging those who have made a conscious decision to be NEET, those who are not going to cross a school gate or pass through the door into the careers office where there are hubs of activity to support them? And will they access these in mainstream hours when they live almost nocturnal lives, as per some of the young people that Rathbone Cymru comes into contact with?
2. Does the funding system support the engagement of the hardest to help? A number of charities undertake similar work to that of Rathbone Cymru in taking the first steps towards engagement of some of the hardest to help young people. However, the majority of the funding for this work seems to come from the charities' unrestricted income, or that income that is restricted by a private sector partner. Ascertaining return on investment of public income is at its easiest when looking at hard outputs – qualifications, progression into employment and so on, but is this the correct funding model for all cohorts of the NEET group? With many of the hardest to help young people that we support, the real investment in time and resource starts well before you register this young person for a qualification. It is reflected in the time and effort that is spent developing a young person's soft skills and addressing particular support needs, to get them to a point where they actually believe that they are worthy and capable enough to consider obtaining a qualification. Can the funding system be adaptable enough to cope with recognising and rewarding individual distance travelled in terms of soft and personal skills?
3. Joined up working is essential and has correctly become much more the norm within the education system, and in the development in particular of the 14-19 pathways. These partnerships need to develop further to allow smooth transition of beneficiaries between delivery partners. But in turn these partnerships need to be wider; we still frequently witness large multi-agency projects developing out of education services which lack representation not just from non-

statutory and voluntary sector bodies, but also from key statutory services such as Youth Offending, Community Safety, the Youth Service, Housing and the Primary Healthcare Trust. When we identify the characteristics of NEET young people it would seem that they would become service users of these agencies – so shouldn't we ensure these agencies are embedded in the solution?

At Rathbone Cymru we don't believe that we have a universal solution; however, we do believe that through delivering a range of learning opportunities, which are tailored to both individual and local environments, which recognise partnership opportunities, and which provide a stimulating yet non-threatening and accessible service for young people, we can really make a difference to the lives of some of the hardest to help young people in Wales.



## **Chapter 4**

# **A local authority perspective on engaging *all* young people: Torfaen CBC**

**Mark Provis**

### **Introduction**

This chapter sets out the ways in which the education service within Torfaen County Borough Council is working with other services and partners to create a comprehensive, systemic approach to engaging *all* young people in education, employment and training. Such a systemic approach sets out to ensure that all children and young people are fully engaged in learning from their early years through to, and beyond, the point at which they leave school.

### **The processes that lead to rejection or marginalisation**

In the public sector we readily reorganise our services in order to react or respond to a perceived problem. Equally we create additional funding streams in the form of special grants to address particular perceived needs or problems. However, the greatest improvements may come from examining our own processes and considering how these are contributing to young people's difficulties.

### **Rejection of the different**

For a variety of reasons young people may present themselves in mainstream settings in ways that are unexpected, different and sometimes challenging. For example, young people experiencing emotional or physical abuse at home are likely to enact some of the experience of this in school settings. When this happens mainstream settings may tolerate such behaviour in the short term, use sanctions against the young people in response to the behaviour that they are exhibiting, and ultimately construe the individual as being 'the problem' instead of as someone who is experiencing problems and requiring help and support.

### **Failing to adjust approaches to meet need**

Young people's individual circumstances may mean that they lack the resilience to cope in certain situations and lack the skills to manage some interactions. If a school is aware and staff are not asked to adjust their interactions in order to respond to the young person's needs then this suggests a lack of appropriate pastoral care and concern for students. Still worse, an individual may have been asked to adjust their approach to an individual student but may refuse to compromise their stance – clearly this would suggest a lack of professionalism.

One effect of such a culture or attitude in an organisation may be that from a very early stage the young person becomes distanced from the professionals in the school. The result is that the very people who might provide the first line

of support, and the initial gateway to lasting help, never provide the opportunity for the young person to share or offload his or her difficulties. This is not to suggest that schools are the answer to all of a community's difficulties, nor that teachers should be quasi-social workers. Rather that, with appropriate continuing professional development, form tutors, learning coaches, pastoral staff and leaders in schools might secure an early effective response for a student in difficulty, sustain his/her place in mainstream activity, and save the individual from the risk of marginalisation.

### **Failing to own the issue**

At a time of reducing public sector resources there is a major risk that all public sector services focus upon their core activity, just as the voluntary sector too is struggling for resources. Young people whose needs lie at the boundary between two services may fall through the gap and be marginalised into social exclusion and unemployment because no one service takes the lead on the matter.

In the next two to three years the risk of this happening will rise. More than ever there will need to be a focus upon joint planning, training and intervention by services to ensure that early, low-cost engagement prevents lasting long term costs to the individual and to society. The Children and Young People's Plan now becomes a crucial vehicle for ensuring that services act in tandem to provide the most coherent services for young people at the margin. By working closely together and sharing data they may be able to streamline their delivery and better target those in greatest need.

### **Failing to challenge unacceptable behaviour or performance**

Young people at risk of acquiring NEET status have often drifted into 'marginal' provision such as a Pupil Referral Unit, a heavily adapted Learning Pathway, or some form of access programme before they leave school. By bringing together young people with difficulties, we risk creating exceptional and unusual settings in which it is challenging to function effectively. In such settings it is not uncommon for performance and behavioural expectations to be substantially adjusted. Whilst reducing expectations to a level at which the young people can secure some success can be positive, this can all too easily drift into a situation where norms become far removed from those of the mainstream. Once they try to regain a place in the mainstream they are likely to discover that their performance and behaviours are at a level that the wider mainstream will not accept or tolerate.

The task in any support setting must therefore be to focus upon challenging young people's attitudes to themselves, to their peers, to staff, to authority figures and to what they expect of themselves in terms of work and behaviour, so that they can regain their place in mainstream education, employment and training at the earliest opportunity.

A group of young people in school at perhaps still greater risk includes those who internalise their difficulties. Withdrawing inside themselves, they distance themselves from their peers and reject any social interaction or engagement with others outside of the school day. In a bustling school,

delivering a hectic and demanding curriculum, there is a grave risk that such individuals are missed.

### **Failing to coach or shape change with young people**

Liking young people who are in difficulty can be hard. Seeing past their lack of co-operation, their resistance to engagement and their behaviour can be very challenging. Those who can achieve this are to be commended, but it is only a first step in engaging with young people. Equally critical are the skills, competence and drive to help young people realise when their performance and behaviour are neither acceptable in the mainstream nor a route to success. The National Behaviour and Attendance Review recognised that this was a key concern for all of those in education who engage with young people in difficulty. We await some indication that sufficient investment will be made in continuous professional development to secure a step change in our capacity to respond to young people's needs.

### **Failing to ensure young people's access to mainstream services**

Loss of access to mainstream services – including, but not limited to, schools and youth clubs – puts a young person at ever greater risk of acquiring NEET status. Instead of posing the question as one of:

‘How can we create a wider range of segregated services for young people in difficulty?’

we need to ask:

‘How can we design our services so that they work in ways that secure and sustain young people's entitlement to mainstream services?’

We need to ensure that young people in difficulty can access the best teachers, the full curriculum and the widest range of opportunity. It requires a shift in attitude, behaviour and culture, from seeing young people as victims of their circumstances to working wholeheartedly to convince them of their potential and to enable them to succeed. The result would be many fewer young people drifting to the margin.

### **Failing to test the impact of the provision we make**

Often an idea developed for all of the right reasons can have unexpected detrimental consequences. Attempts in England in the late 1990s to meet the needs of young people in difficulty resulted in a substantial expansion of Pupil Referral Units. This expansion was welcomed by many educationalists and initially seemed to have an impact. However, within 3 years many of these pupil referral units were full, prompting loud demands for a further substantial expansion of provision.

At a whole system level there was a failure to properly specify the problem; as a result, the *symptom* of ‘young people exhibiting behavioural difficulties in school’ was addressed through the removal of a cohort of young people from school. Because too little emphasis was placed upon how such settings would work intensively to return young people to the mainstream, they quickly filled up and choked. At the same time the mainstream settings were not made better equipped to make effective interventions with young people in

difficulty. This resulted in mainstream settings unable to cope with young people in difficulty that expected young people to be moved elsewhere. Demand grew for still more segregated provision, enhancing the risk of even more young people acquiring NEET status.

In Wales we have the opportunity, as a small country, to work closely together to ensure that we plan systemically to ensure that our approach does not have such adverse consequences for young people.

### **Planning an effective local system**

The terms ‘multi-professional engagement’ and ‘integrated professional practice’ appear in many government policy statements and best practice frameworks. The challenge of creating a culture where an education welfare officer, an inclusion officer, an educational psychologist and a school improvement adviser all know how to use their separate and collective skills in achieving the best for children and young people is a major one for education services in Wales. Many professional teams operate in isolation and in ignorance of the skills and contributions of other specialist teams within their own services. However, if connecting up delivery within the context of one service is challenging, it is far greater when we consider the task of connecting up *all* services. Nevertheless this is the task we need to accomplish if we are to meet the needs of vulnerable young people and ensure that their risk of acquiring NEET status is reduced to a minimum. The diagram illustrates the range of connections required.



The need for the development of integrated practice has been signalled by the arrival of the Single Integrated Plan for Children and Young People (CYPP). In systems terms it is important that the CYPP is seen as the plan that embraces all services for children and young people. This means that universal services for all young people and targeted services for young people with vulnerabilities are subject to the same planning process. Through the CYPP we have the opportunity to ensure that *universal* services are designed to accommodate vulnerable young people, and that *targeted* services are designed to focus upon sustaining young people's mainstream opportunities or, at the very least, to secure their earliest possible successful re-engagement with the mainstream. If and when we organise and deliver our collective services in this way we will have substantially reduced the risk of young people acquiring NEET status.

In essence, the shift needs to be from 'how do we deliver an effective service?' to 'how do we deliver the most effective services *together*?'. This requires investment in joint planning, training, design and development of services. There is, however, one cautionary note: such activity needs to be done with purpose and focus, to ensure that key staff and substantial resources are not drawn into unproductive talking shops.

### **Torfaen's integrated service**

In Torfaen we have taken a systemic approach to the redesign and redevelopment of our service. We are seeking to ensure that all of our provision meets the needs of all children and young people, but particularly of the most vulnerable. To secure this shift in our approach to service delivery we have agreed to prioritise four processes in all that we do:

#### **Safeguarding**

We are committed to keeping all of our children and young people safe. There is an expectation in all of our frontline services that professionals will look for change in children's appearance, demeanour and behaviour to ensure we can identify children and young people in difficulty. We have begun to embed this approach as a priority in everything that we do.

#### **Inclusion**

Children and young people need to be able to access the same opportunities as everyone else. We are working to ensure we make every effort to enable young people to participate in mainstream opportunities. We accept that at times individual needs may be too great or our own skills base and resources too poor to ensure that successful inclusion can be achieved upon every occasion. However, we are committed to keeping to a minimum the number of young people lost to mainstream learning.

#### **Integrated Practice**

As outlined above, coherent and consistent practice by a range of professionals working together provides the best support for children and young people in difficulty. We have reorganised our central services to ensure that all of our schools experience effective, coherent, joined-up support for their work with children and young people. This means creating integrated

multi-professional teams in which professionals from a range of disciplines share their views and concerns at a whole school, whole class, group and individual learner level.

This approach requires a balance to be struck: the team must develop the capacity to work together effectively, whilst retaining the specialist skills of each professional discipline. This requires a 'matrix management' approach that balances the development of an effective integrated team with continuous professional development and supervision for those with specialist expertise.

### **Effectiveness and Improvement**

Whatever the nature of the task, or the child or young person's needs and difficulties, we are committed to securing improvement in our own performance so that they in turn can fulfil their true potential. At times this may mean challenging our perceptions and assumptions.



### **A focus on 5 core strategies**

We are at the very beginning of embedding these four processes in all of our policy development, planning, service delivery and performance management. We are already beginning to see the ways in which the joining-up of our practice can reduce the likelihood of young people being lost to mainstream learning and thereby becoming at still greater risk of acquiring NEET status. The agreement to embed the four processes into all that we do has brought sharper focus and refinement to our thinking and practice.

We appreciate that the process of acquiring NEET status can begin very early in life. We are therefore aiming to provide better targeted **Early Years**

**delivery.** We now aim to reach out to the most disengaged and disadvantaged. This means identifying those who do not currently use our services and facilities and actively drawing them into involvement in early years play, participation and parenting activity. In doing so we aim to enable all children to be equipped with the skills to participate in learning by the time they reach school age.

Both at pre-school level and in schools we are now focusing upon ensuring, at a whole-school level, that all children and young people achieve better levels of **language, literacy and thinking**. By doing so we aim to equip many more students with the skills to be successful in their comprehensive schools.

In a very positive step, Torfaen's secondary headteachers have asked for a continuous professional development programme for their staff so that they can meet the needs of the students in their care more effectively. This **Enhancing Skills Programme** at secondary school includes a focus upon responding to and managing young people's behaviour effectively, complemented by a programme aimed at developing the skills of pastoral managers to work with young people in difficulty and with their parents and carers.

Within the school system, the Pre-VENT programme announced at Key Stage 3 and anticipated at 14-19 provides us with the opportunity to **identify young people at risk of acquiring NEET status, track and monitor their progress** through school, and intervene early and intensively should the risk levels they encounter warrant it.

The critical element in completing this picture is the broadening of **the 14-19 Learning Pathways** so that students identified with particular needs can receive a tailored curriculum and support as they move through their transition from school into college, workplace training or employment. We recognise that we have much to do here in turning the rhetoric of the Learning Pathways approach into a meaningful, relevant and effective response to young people's needs.

All of these elements are key components in reducing young people's risk of acquiring NEET status, but will only be successful if delivered through our four key processes of safeguarding, inclusion, integrated practice, and effectiveness and improvement.

### **1. Early Years – Flying Start and Sure Start**

It is now evident that inequality and reduced opportunity begins for young people in their very earliest years. In our Early Years provision we run the risk of confusing being busy with being optimally effective. We need to look beyond who comes and uses our early years provision and target those who do not attend.

We need to link closely with health to ensure that early screening by clinics and health visitors alerts Early Years services as to who might be experiencing difficulties. This does not just mean those families with children with overt needs, such as those with additional learning needs, but also those families

where the parent is socially isolated, depressed and failing to stimulate and develop his/her children to an optimum level.

The issue is not just one of identifying the families with children who could be at risk but also of examining what it is that inhibits such families from engaging with our services. What form the barriers in terms of access, travel, and psychological accessibility? Often we inadvertently deter some people in the ways in which we invite them to participate with us. The classic case is where letters of enquiry and invitations are sent to homes where the adults have too little confidence in their own literacy skills. We are now focusing upon how we can identify and reach out to such families in ways that they can understand and accept. It is a skilled and challenging task, as we must ensure that we neither patronise nor alienate.

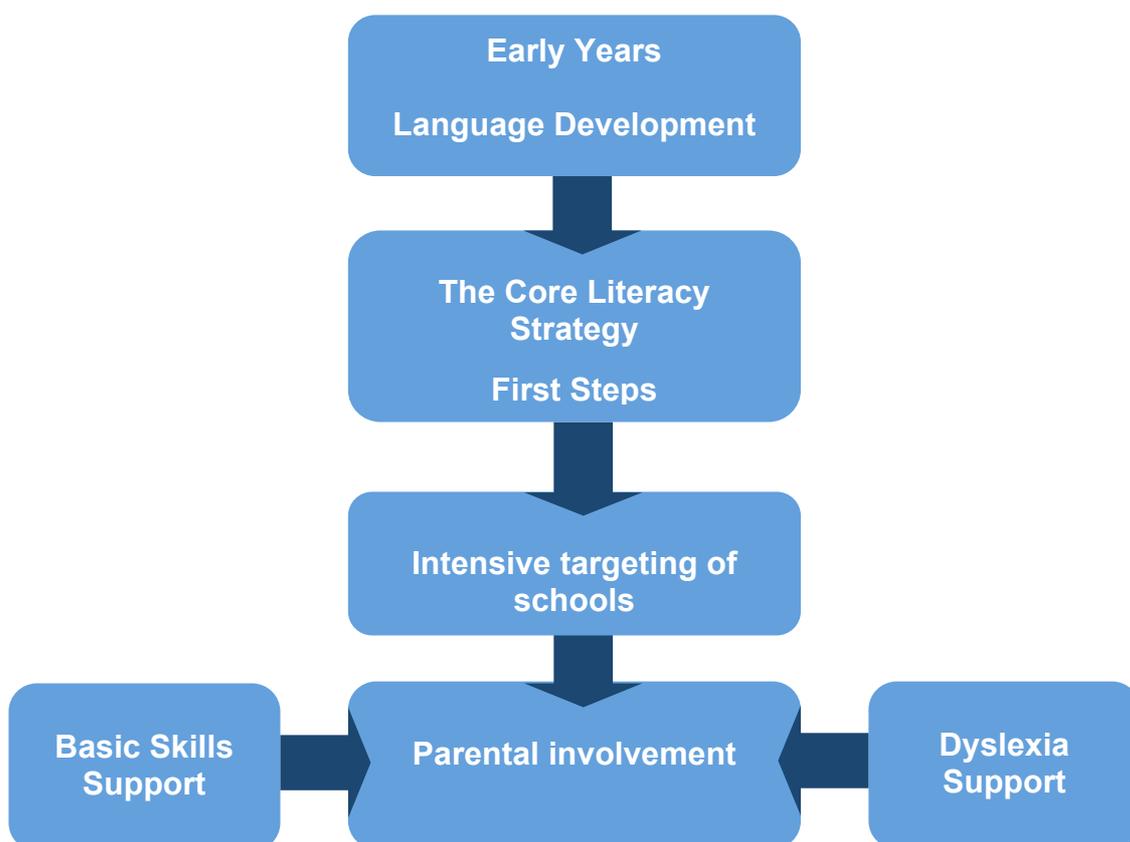
By drawing in both the infants who are at some risk and their parents, we will be making a considerable contribution to reducing the risks of the children becoming marginalised in both their learning and social experiences. The engagement of both the children and their parents forms a pivotal moment in the child's learning career. From the outset our engagement with the parent needs to communicate that they have a significant role that they *can* and will *want* to play in supporting their child's development right through school. They may need help to appreciate how the nature of their engagement and support will evolve over time, how it might move from prime provider of a baby's learning, through that of co-tutor for a primary age pupil, and on to enthusiastic supporter of the learning of their child whilst at comprehensive school. From the outset we need to be setting out the ways in which parents can help throughout their child's school career and where they too can turn for advice, guidance and support. In short, we need to be planning to build sustained partnerships with the parents and carers of our most at risk children and young people.

## **2. Language, literacy and thinking**

Key to preventing young people from acquiring NEET status is ensuring that they can access the learning opportunities provided to them in school. Following on from the language development programme in the Early Years, it is essential that we enable learners to become independent readers and writers. In Torfaen there is a need to raise the literacy levels of individual pupils and to continue to improve the performance of all schools, targeting particularly schools where a significant step-change in achievement is needed.

To this end Torfaen has selected 'First Steps' as its literacy strategy of choice. The selection of this methodology was based upon reported evidence of its efficiency. However, even with a good research evidence base, it was felt important to pilot the methodology. The outcomes from the pilot projects have been remarkable and the sought-after step change in performance has been achieved. The task now becomes one of applying the methodology across other schools. Although the temptation is to roll the programme out across all schools, the key to any such intervention is to ensure that the core methodology is delivered in full, ensuring that the outcomes from the pilot project are achieved in the roll out. The programme is quite intensive and requires significant external facilitator time to ensure the methodology is

securely delivered in schools. We have therefore found it important to define the level of available expert facilitation, before targeting this resource upon as many schools as is possible without risking any dilution of the programme. This means that the methodology cannot be offered to all schools at the same time. By targeting the programme upon those schools where it can achieve the greatest impact, we are ensuring that the programme is focused upon those learners at greatest risk of acquiring NEET status.



There is no magic wand that will enable all learners to become successful readers. Even with an effective use of ‘First Steps’ some learners will fail to make age and stage appropriate progress. These learners are likely to need the help of more specialist providers, such as those who deliver basic skills tuition and specialist dyslexia teaching. Practitioners in both the Basic Skills and the Dyslexia Teams need to have a clear understanding of what the ‘First Steps’ strategy involves. These specialist teachers need to be providing complementary tuition that enables the learners to make effective progress. Their intervention therefore needs to be designed in a way that shows a complete awareness and understanding of how the child is taught in his/her classroom, using the ‘First Steps’ programme.

The final element in securing children and young people’s literacy is securing their parents’ involvement. When parents provide supportive listening to their children by reading together for only ten minutes each day, they provide them with daily practice and help sustain their understanding and literacy skills.

We recognise that by developing an effective partnership with parents from the earliest years it is much easier to sustain their involvement through the more formal phases of their children's education.

Taken together, the implementation of an effective literacy strategy, the targeting of schools in greatest need, the tailored support for the minority of children and young people who struggle to become effective readers, and the involvement of parents in daily support of their children's reading development, all contribute to learners acquiring the skills needed to cope in school. Without such skills there is a marked risk that learners may acquire NEET status.

### **3. Enhancing staff skills at secondary level**

Some young people can be difficult and challenging in school. Without the necessary insight and skills some teachers may take such challenges personally and so needlessly escalate the interaction. All teachers need the opportunity to learn to understand that some challenging behaviour may be an expression of the difficulty a young person is having with school on a daily basis. This is particularly true of a young person whose behaviour changes and starts to decline. At such moments it is important that young people have the opportunity to be understood and listened to by a responsible adult.

Where teachers have the skills to identify a young person 'at risk' and to appropriately refer him/her for help within school, they need to feel confident in the pastoral and support staff. These pastoral staff, Heads of Year and Heads of Key Stage, need the skills to work effectively with the young people and, as importantly, with their parents. Without such skilled practitioners in school, young people in difficulty can be inappropriately punished or sanctioned when what they really need is help and support. This can lead to young people drifting to the margin of school and on into social exclusion.

Unfortunately there have been far too few post-qualifying and continuous professional development opportunities for teachers to acquire these necessary pastoral skills. Local authorities need to close this gap in provision by working with their schools to support training in these skills and to continue their development over time. Torfaen secondary schools have agreed to work in partnership with the local authority to develop their teams' competence in these essential skills.

Once such skills exist in schools, multi-professional integrated school support teams can work in partnership with schools to respond to young people at risk. Torfaen Education Service has reorganised its practitioners into integrated multi-professional teams. We aim to ensure that professionals from different disciplines – educational psychology, education welfare, inclusion, and school improvement – can work together effectively and can engage with school-based expert practitioners.

### **4. Additional and exceptional support**

A proportion of young people acquire NEET status without any prior warning or expectation that they would not engage in education, employment or training. However, many of the young people who go on to acquire NEET

status can be identified as at risk in the earliest years of comprehensive school.

In Torfaen the local authority is working in partnership with its schools to identify those young people who are at risk of acquiring NEET status. Once identified, schools are tracking the progress of these young people and monitoring their exposure to risk. When the monitoring demonstrates that the young person is at enhanced risk we need to intervene early and intensively to reduce the risk around him/her. Such interventions need to be well targeted, intensive and time limited.

Intervention services need to be designed to respond to individual needs. They may, for example, begin at lunch time in school and continue through the afternoon and on into the early evening. Practitioners in such services can:

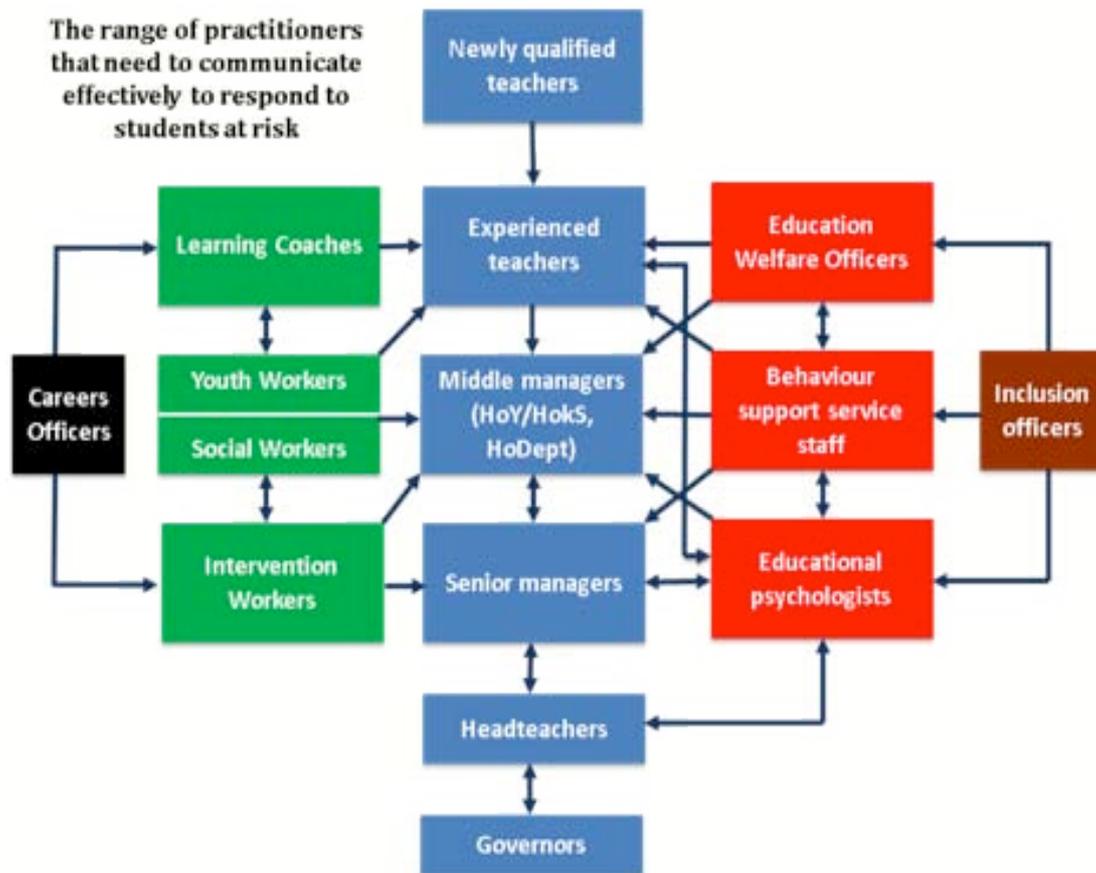
- support change in the individual's behaviour in school;
- secure change in the individual's behaviour at home;
- enable access to community-focused school activity;
- support young people's access to youth and leisure facilities;
- divert young people away from 'risk activity' and high risk groups;
- challenge mainstream provision to deliver the individual's entitlement to services.

Such intervention requires clear communication within schools and between the school and external support services. The chain of communication can be complex and challenging, as the diagram below illustrates. It is essential that each professional depicted in the diagram understands the roles and responsibilities of each of the others and how to engage with them effectively.

In Torfaen we are clear that the delivery of such services needs to be in a manner that promotes young people's personal autonomy and avoids them becoming dependent upon this support. A key element of this approach is one of securing positive change for and with the young person and then planning to withdraw support at the very earliest opportunity.

The issue of prompt withdrawal is a key component in the effective delivery of support services for young people at risk. Continuation of service delivery beyond the point at which it is no longer essential risks fostering a dependency relationship and thereby reducing the young person's likelihood of continuing on into education, employment or training after they leave school.

A small proportion of young people 'at risk' may not have their difficulties resolved. It is important that the workload of the intensive intervention team does not become skewed by having to deal with ongoing, long-term cases. Where young people have ongoing needs that require longer term support, for example in order to acquire adequate essential skills in literacy and digital media, then we commission this input from the third sector at a time, place and in a manner that best meets the young person's needs.



### 5. 14-19 and the Learning Pathways

Post-16 the development of meaningful, engaging, relevant Learning Pathways for students is crucial to success. This requires a high trust partnership between schools, FE colleges, Careers Wales, workplace training providers, higher education and the local authority. Legislation and guidance to provide such rich opportunities for young people is well established. However, much work remains to be done in:

- further strengthening the partnership;
- broadening the menu of opportunity for young people;
- prioritising young people's needs and wants ahead of institutions';
- using ICT to extend choice and meet minority subject & interest needs.

All of these factors will contribute to a greater level of engagement for young people and a growing sense of opportunity and momentum. Of course as we enter what has been deemed by some as the 'public sector winter' of the next 3 to 5 years of reduced funding, the challenge will be to maintain and extend opportunities. It will be important for the Learning Partnership to continue to act together as budget reductions bring new challenges. Partners must not protect their individual institutions at the expense of maintaining choice for young people.

## **Concluding remarks**

It will be critical to our success in meeting the needs of *all* learners, and especially of those who are at risk of acquiring NEET status, that we continue to:

- broaden the menu of opportunity;
- raise young people's aspirations and those of their parents;
- continually match their aspirations with the choices on offer;
- prepare and position them for success;
- expand the digital media opportunities for young people to learn anywhere, any place, any time;
- develop flexible boundaries between academic, vocational and applied skills and workplace training;
- support all young people through 'moments of risk' just as we do at KS3 and KS4.

This systemic approach to meeting the needs of all learners, with a clear focus upon how we ensure we do not lose young people into social exclusion, has been planned over the course of a year. Some elements of this approach have come together quickly and are already embedded. Others are underway but their impact is not yet measurable. In some areas we are still reorganising our practice to create more coherent and better co-ordinated services to support schools and to meet the needs of individual learners. Some aspects of this systemic approach are awaiting grant or funding decisions.

However, we have a clear vision of where we want to move to and of the need to take every opportunity to shape our delivery to achieve that end. Some things happen quickly, some are longer term. Some things can unexpectedly race ahead or stall. Flexible, responsive strategic management is an essential element in maintaining a focus upon the overall goal.

It is far too soon to suggest that this approach is yielding firm results, but Torfaen CBC is relentlessly focusing upon these issues. Despite some setbacks and delays there is already some evidence of impact. Through monitoring learners' progress, highlighting those at risk and engaging with them, we have already reduced the number of young people leaving school with no educational qualifications. Torfaen has moved from being conspicuously weak in terms of the number of young people leaving with no qualifications to becoming an authority whose performance is significantly better than the Welsh average. Whilst all credit must go to the schools and the team that have achieved this improvement, this is not a moment of self-congratulation. It is rather a recognition that even a small shift in focus can make a significant difference for young people at risk. We have had some success. We now face the greater challenge of securing lasting change for young people at risk right across our system.



## **Chapter 5**

# **Pre-VENT: an education initiative in the Heads of the Valleys**

**Frank Callus**

### **Introduction**

In recent years, there has been a significant emphasis on developing initiatives to improve the delivery of public services in Wales, and on the need for increased collaboration across local authority boundaries in order to achieve this. The public sector is required to demonstrate its capacity to meet client demand and to achieve against indicators including value-for-money. This commitment is now encapsulated in the Welsh Government's 'Making the Connections' policies.

At the same time, challenges and opportunities are arising through the Convergence Programmes of the European Social Fund (ESF) and the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF). In July 2007 Gretel Leeb, Programme Director at the Welsh European Funding Office (WEFO), addressed a conference in Swansea. Her appeal was firstly for a series of proposals for funding from the ESF that were not just collaboratively managed but which had been collaboratively planned. She reminded delegates that there was a world of difference between the two. Secondly, she noted that the European Commission was prepared to support strategic proposals that impacted on the life chances of young people below the age of 16. This has been taken on board by Cardiff Bay, which has moved to support pupils from the age of 11 years, a major departure from previous ESF programmes and one not replicated in any other national programme in the European Union. Thirdly, Leeb noted an imperative to identify preventative strategies as opposed to remediation, to develop work addressing causes and not just effects. The emphasis, she argued, needed to be on identifying the causes of disengagement and providing support to address these barriers to learning and further commitment.

Following these developments, five south Wales local authorities – Blaenau Gwent, Bridgend, Caerphilly, Merthyr Tydfil and Torfaen – came together in October 2007 to begin planning a collaborative initiative aimed at supporting young people who are at risk of falling out of education, employment or training. This initiative, known as Pre-VENT KS3, targets pupils in Key Stage 3 (aged 11-14). Recognising the importance of the new skills-based curriculum introduced in Wales in 2008, both for pupil engagement and for employment prospects, the five local authorities have worked to ensure that the activities planned as part of Pre-VENT KS3 play a supportive role.

## **The guiding principles of Pre-VENT**

The first and most critical factor in the development of the Pre-VENT initiative was the agreement of seven principles on which the local authorities would work together. These principles were:

1. A recognition that closing the gap and raising the bar were of equal importance to the success of any intervention. Our first priority consists of two themes, targeting both the low attainment of some learners aged 11-19 and the low aspirations of some of these learners compared to others within the UK. The focus of this priority has been twofold: improving the achievement of young people and increasing the potential of a larger percentage of learners.
2. That the preventative approach needed to act as a catalyst for the developments planned for the 2008 Curriculum and the Skills Framework. The increased emphasis on functional literacy and numeracy had to be central to the capacity of young people to improve their capacity to learn. This learning was not just an end in itself but was to be focused on the need for a future workforce with the capacity to improve future productivity.
3. That the proposal must be based on a step change in the **what** and the **how** of delivery. The proposal had to change the way in which young people were prepared for the advantages of the Learning Pathways 14-19 agenda. This needed to include a concentration on emotional intelligence that was beyond the normal remit of the National Curriculum.
4. That there was a critical need to engage with other agencies that had a remit for working with disaffected young people. A number of organisations with a depth of expertise in helping disengaged young people have worked with the five local authorities. They are now key partners in the development of Pre-VENT 14-19, which follows on from Pre-VENT KS3.
5. That the skills required to access vocational learning had to be at the heart of the work of this intervention. Our commitment to developing taster vocational sessions will allow young people aged 12-13 to discover the opportunities for learning within a range of vocational areas that will help to shape their future options for employment. The opportunity to provide a context for Basic Skills is key to improving this aspect of young people's learning.
6. That there was a commitment to achieving a legacy from this proposal – the changes that Pre-VENT introduced must become embedded in the work of partner schools. The joint sponsors were anxious that there would be: longer-term benefit; improved delivery of Basic Skills; development of staff to deliver programmes in self-confidence; and increased awareness of the opportunities in science, technology and engineering.

7. That evaluation must assess benefits against cost. As evidence emerges of the benefit of specific elements of the programme, there will be an impetus to adapt current funding methodologies.

The agreement of these principles ensured that Pre-VENT KS3 would be developed in a way that recognised the primacy of the local authority. Whilst sub-regional planning helps to provide strategic ‘weight’, local delivery secures impact at the level of the individual participant. In terms of understanding the interface of management and governance this distinction is particularly critical; the purpose of planning across a number of authorities is to achieve economies of scale and improve effective and efficient collaboration. It is not to undermine or replace local accountability.

### **Pre-VENT KS3**

Pre-VENT: A Key Stage 3 Intervention was approved by WEFO in January 2009 and launched by the Deputy Minister for Skills in the following month. It exists as a programme because we believe that with sufficient support, appropriately targeted, many young people will be better prepared to access the opportunities afforded by the 14-19 Learning Pathways agenda. If we are to address the issue of those not in education, employment or training, then we need to be providing the kind of support that will ensure longer and deeper engagement by young people.

At the heart of some disengagement is a lack of confidence, a sense of low self-esteem that has a corrosive effect on learners and their ability to access learning opportunities. Pre-VENT KS3 will assist the development of programmes in each authority to provide support for young people in improving their capacity for self advocacy. This is important not only for those with low levels of self-confidence but also to raise the aspirations of others – to improve not only the potential of learning but also the potentiality of outcome. In this we are delivering on the first of our seven principles – that closing the gap and raising the bar are equally important in lifting educational attainment in south-east Wales. In total nearly 7000 young people will benefit from the introduction of these programmes over three years.

The development of the Welsh Government’s paper on Skills that Work for Wales has helped to shape the work of the joint sponsors of this proposal. The economy of this part of south-east Wales has undergone huge changes in the recent past. The skills that were required in the 1960s are now obsolete. The workforce of the future will need to be more flexible, more adaptable, and more mobile than ever before. Pre-VENT KS3 recognises the new demands that are likely to come from the science, technological and engineering sectors and there is a commitment to supporting over 1400 young people in discovering the opportunities that are likely to exist in these areas in the future. The announcement by the Deputy Minister for Regeneration of the Low Carbon Programme for the Heads of the Valleys area, including the installation and maintenance of 40,000 micro-generation units in social housing, is just one example of the critical needs of this sector that we have to address. The Welsh Government has determined to accept “Sustainable Development as the central organising principle of the Welsh Assembly

Government and of the public sector in Wales”, and we need to recognise the centrality of this principle in the development of learning programmes in the future.

Pre-VENT KS3 consists of a matrix of support, in recognition that the key indicators of future disengagement should, themselves, be the trigger for increased assistance. Central to the programme will be increased support for Basic Skills – not just for the individual participant but as a means of improving the effectiveness of other learning strategies. Over 1700 young people across the five authorities will receive additional intensive support in Basic Skills in the next three years.

The programme will also provide early taster sessions in vocational learning for young people aged 12 and 13. This will be to ensure that they develop a better perception of the opportunities for gaining accreditation in a range of diverse areas. This process was trialled a few years ago in Blaenau Gwent CBC to positive effect. It will help to stimulate interest in some areas of vocational learning and will provide an opportunity to engage with third sector organisations that are able to develop the interest and enthusiasm of young people for work in areas as diverse as retail, business administration, and environment.

Specific activities supported by the ESF-funded project include the Motivate Project at Tredegar Comprehensive School. This was a three-day event for Year 9 pupils utilising a number of providers from the local community and is a further development of similar events undertaken by the school over several years. A substantial part of the week was devoted to a Pacific Institute package designed to contribute to and improve levels of self-confidence and motivation. It was targeted at adults and children in the community, teaching them many new life skills and helping them look into the future with more optimism.

The event was full of activities and included participation from a range of local organisations and charities, including Fusion, Catapult, British Red Cross/St John Ambulance, and Gwent Police. Benefits of the event included:

- Improved interaction with cohorts
- Respect for others
- Improved motivation and active participation
- A greater display of independence

At St Alban’s School, Pontypool, pupils in Year 9 received additional support through a Raising Aspirations programme, provided by an organisation called Sustained Success. The programme involved a series of workshops with facilitators: these involved a set of team-building exercises including a ‘swamp’ exercise, a ‘post’ exercise and transporting ‘radioactive’ material, all designed to get young people to think of the skills and attributes of working as part of a team. The evaluation of the three-day programme by the Pre-VENT project team identified important gains by a number of young people in terms of soft skills. Equally importantly, the materials produced for this programme

have been made available to other schools that are part of the Pre-VENT project.

Bridgend County Borough Council's Education Department are planning to introduce programmes to support emotional intelligence and improve access to science, technology and engineering. The initial thrust of their work, however, has been to secure enhanced support for those with additional Basic Skills needs. The Catch Up programme, developed by Oxford Brookes University, helps to support pupils' literacy, while the Spotlight programme provides support in numeracy. An innovative feature of the work in Bridgend is the Student Assistance Programme (SAP). It is now in place in every Comprehensive within Bridgend. SAP offers student support groups which meet weekly, during the school day, with the groups being facilitated by trained staff members from both the schools and the Pre-VENT team.

### **Pre-VENT 14-19**

Pre-VENT KS3 is not an end in itself. It is a programme that helps to prepare young people for the benefits and advantages of vocational learning and ultimately for an active role in the wider social economy. As project sponsors we are conscious of the need to support these young people through the next phase of their learning, aged 14-19. The development of the proposal for Pre-VENT 14-19 will help to ensure the continued commitment of joint sponsors to transforming the life chances of young people in a way that is both robust and consistent. The key elements of this project will help to instil the young learner with an increased understanding of the values of science, technology and engineering, as well as raising aspirations for remaining in education beyond 16 and 18.

Pre-VENT 14-19, with Bridgend County Borough Council as the lead sponsor, builds on a commitment to underpin the advances that we expect to make in the Pre-VENT KS3 programme. The five local authorities, as well as their FE partners, have committed themselves to supporting a common strategy to address the issue of those deemed to be NEET. They do so because they believe that the support for those not in education, employment or training is central to how we ensure a socially and economically inclusive society in the future. The investment in remediation has to make way for an investment in social inclusion. Many of our economic competitors have invested more in education and training in the past – our future will depend on closing *that* gap and investing in an inclusive society rather than subsidising exclusion.

Pre-VENT 14-19 is committed to improving the employability of young people. They need to acquire the skills that will be required by employers in the next generation. The major curricular advance of the last twenty years has been from an emphasis on teaching to recognising the primacy of learning – the key signal from the Future Skills Wales report was that the workforce of the present, and even more so in the future, will be critically dependent on a capacity to continue to learn.

The Pre-VENT KS3 programme will have introduced young people to the opportunities afforded by learning programmes in science, technology,

engineering and mathematics. This work will be developed further in Pre-VENT 14-19, working with the First Campus team to support activities that encourage young people to consider Higher Education. First Campus is the programme by which young people in areas of relatively low participation in higher education are given support to consider applying to university. This demonstrates, again, the commitment to the dual principles of Priority One – closing the gap *and* raising the bar.

At the same time, the joint sponsors of this proposal are committed to supporting the work of encouraging an enterprise culture within the area. The Department for the Economy and Transport has successfully applied for European funding to support a Youth Enterprise Strategy through the development of the Dynamo materials and the use of enterprise champions. The notion of enterprise needs to be seen not as the principal model for encouraging self-employment, but rather as fostering a deeper sense that employment is dependent on meeting and matching customer satisfaction. In this it supports the Welsh Government's aspiration to create a customer-focused public service, as set out in the Making the Connections document:

...the continual improvement of public services aimed at embedding the imperatives of efficiency and citizen-centred services...

The development of strategic initiatives, though, is a continuum. Throughout the time that the local authorities have been working together, we have had to recognise the need to adapt to and, at times, influence the development of policy. The publication of a NEET strategy in April 2009 by the Department for Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills reflects much of the debate that has been ongoing within the authorities, and has helped in the shaping both of the policy drive and its development into practical activities. The development of a Financial Inclusion Strategy by the Department for Local Government and Social Justice has an Action Plan to which the work of the local authorities and other agencies is also beginning to bend.

### **Employment in the Heads of the Valleys**

The launch of the Heads of the Valleys Programme, as a model for the Strategic Regeneration Areas, in 2006 gave a strong impetus to local authorities to fashion holistic responses to the regeneration of the area. The solution to ingrained problems of social disadvantage was to be found in addressing the multiple causes of deprivation rather than remediation that was singular and disconnected. The development of the One Wales agenda, underpinned by the work of Deputy Ministers with a remit to encourage cross-departmental work, has helped to embed this commitment to holistic responsiveness.

There are points where education and training on the one hand and employment on the other share a common need. This is particularly true of Basic Skills and qualifications to support improved employability. The development of programmes to support these elements is the responsibility of a sub group of the Heads of the Valleys Lifelong Learning Group. Young

people will need to recognise the value of qualifications that support them into employment and employers are increasingly looking for evidence of work readiness. This has become the fertile territory for collaboration around support for those likely to become NEET.

A significant element of the work of the Heads of the Valleys Programme has been to draw people from economic inactivity into work, which has been undertaken through the Strategic Programme for Employment. This includes a City Strategy Pathfinder programme, undertaken on behalf of the UK Department for Work and Pensions, which aims to address worklessness through improved partnership working and shared priorities.

In addition, the JobMatch initiative has, since the start of the Heads of the Valleys Programme, engaged with over 2000 young people aged 16-24 and drawn 1300 into employment. The process of supporting some young people directly into employment requires recognition that the world of work provides a context for further learning; JobMatch is underpinned by training that specifically relates to an individual's employment route and, as such, bridges the gap that many young people see between the world of school/college/study and the world of work.

In the 2009 Budget, the Chancellor announced that the need to draw young people into employment was critical as the economy started to slow. To this end, the Future Jobs Fund has been created. This is a £1 billion programme to engage and support young people aged 18-24 into employment. In the Heads of the Valleys area Merthyr Tydfil CBC is the lead sponsor for this initiative, which brings together an opportunity for extended work placement with a training budget.

### **The imperative for a multi-disciplinary response**

The development of strategic programmes that cut across departmental portfolios within Government will need to be carefully managed, but the potential benefits cannot be over-estimated. Low educational attainment, inadequate housing, poor health and economic inactivity are not distinct outcomes of specific life-choices but the inevitable result of multiple deprivation. The problems are complex and so are not likely to be resolved by simplistic solutions.

The Welsh Government's aspiration is for a programme that "links the different strands of regeneration funding – physical infrastructure and community regeneration, in an enhanced and targeted programme of change". Its decision to establish pilot programmes for an Integrated Family Support Team reflects the need for multi-disciplinary responses to the issues of deprivation, and is likely to enhance the work that is underway in the Strategic Regeneration Areas in general and the Heads of the Valleys in particular.

The challenge for our Government in the next few years will be to develop budget monitoring capacity to recognise this new reality. As Local Service Boards start to recognise the need to "ensure an effective whole system response to the needs of citizens by pooling resources" we will need to match

cross-departmental work within local authorities with a similar match within the departments of the Welsh Government itself. The challenge of matching outcomes to pooled resources is starting to be addressed partly through the Convergence Programme and partly through holistic responses to the challenge of multiple deprivation.

These are the policy drivers and we must recognise them for what they are. They represent the articulation of a political will to develop a public service in Wales that is responsive and inclusive. The development of programmes such as Pre-VENT transforms policy into practice and turns aspirations into action. It will be central to the ambition to create a smarter and more efficient public service in Wales. To date, the development of these programmes, across a range of local authorities and with the support of other partners, has been in response to a specific political and social ambition and represents the best efforts of those engaged with young people to give them a more equal and successful future.