



Next Steps - Final Report

A study exploring the experiences of young people in Northern Ireland at risk of disengaging from education, training or employment

August 2016



The
Executive Office

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Working with children,
for children

The Executive Office

Next steps

A study exploring the experiences and barriers of young people who are NEET and measures for preventing young people becoming NEET

Final Report

August 2016

Contents

Acknowledgements	4
About NCB	5
Executive summary.....	6
1. Introduction	16
2. Methodology.....	22
3. Experiences of young people who are NEET – findings from the literature	26
4. Young people’s pathways in Northern Ireland post GCSE and identification of NEET risk groups	32
5. An examination of the experiences of young people who are NEET or are at risk of becoming NEET ...	42
6. Barriers in moving on from school into further education, employment and training	65
7. Preventative measures to reduce NEET risk	76
8. Conclusion and recommendations	86
Bibliography.....	91
Appendix A: Literature review	93
Appendix B: Members of the Adult Steering Group	104
Appendix C: Detailed school sampling table	105
Appendix D: Strategies and initiatives relevant to issue of NEETs	106
Appendix E: Detailed methodology	108
Appendix F: Year 3 Survey Instrument	113

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- The members of the Project Advisory Group for their feedback on research instruments, draft reports and the progress of the research project (see Appendix B for details of the members of the Advisory Group).

About NCB

The National Children's Bureau Northern Ireland (NCB) is a leading research and development charity working to improve the lives of children and young people, reducing the impact of inequalities.

NCB works with children, for children, to influence government policy, be a strong voice for young people and front-line professionals, and provide practical solutions on a range of social issues.

This is done through working in partnership, sharing knowledge, resources and services. There is a particular focus on the participation of children and young people in issues that affect their lives and work to ensure that their voices are represented, where appropriate, in the work of NCB.

Executive summary

Introduction

This research project was commissioned by the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister (OFDMFM) in late 2011 at a time when there were record levels of youth employment not just in the United Kingdom but across the European Union. The issue provoked fears of a 'lost generation' across Europe (Eurofound, 2012).

A person is defined as NEET if they are aged 16 to 24 and not in employment, education or training (full-time or part-time). The number of those who are NEET has steadily reduced in recent years. For example, in 2009, a total of 52,000 or 22.5% of all young people aged 16-24 were NEET, and by 2015, about one-sixth (17.2%) or 36,000 young people were NEET.

Whilst the downward trend in the number of young people who are NEET is positive, there are still a substantial number of young people whose life chances are significantly impacted by the lack of opportunities available to get back into employment, education or training. Many of these young people's life chances will be heavily influenced by their experiences during their school career, and yet relatively little is known about these young people, their experiences and any barriers they may face in the last few years of compulsory schooling and in transitioning from post-primary school.

This study aims to fill this gap by tracking a cohort of young people in the last years of compulsory education to understand whether, in addition to those who have become NEET, there are particular groups of young people who are at risk of becoming NEET, what their experiences are and what barriers they may face that place them at risk of becoming NEET.

Policy and programme context

In June 2012, the Department of Employment and Learning (DEL) launched the first ever strategy in Northern Ireland to specifically address the issue of young people who are NEET. The strategy '*Pathways to Success: Preventing exclusion and promoting participation of young people*'¹ seeks to prevent young people most at risk of becoming NEET from falling into that category and to reduce the number of young people who have become NEET by tackling barriers to learning and providing opportunities for training and employment for 16 – 24 year olds. In addition, the strategy identified three sub-groups of young people:

- Those under the age of 16, where the focus is on work to prevent young people becoming NEET;
- Those aged 16 to 18 who are not at school, college or in training, including those who face specific barriers to participation; and
- Young jobless people aged 18 to 24, who are unemployed or economically inactive and who may or may not be in receipt of Job Seekers Allowance or other benefits.

Within the 16-19 age band the strategy identified three further sub-categories:

- Young people on gap years or engaged in voluntary work classed as 'out of scope' of the strategy as their status is expected to be transitory (16% or c. 2,240 of the NEETs group);

¹ <https://www.delni.gov.uk/articles/pathways-success>

² According to the Strategy there were approximately 14,000 young people aged 16-19 who were NEET in 2010.

- Those with identified barriers to engagement (18% or c. 2,520); and
- Those without identified barriers to engagement (66% or c. 9,240).

It is the third group that is of particular concern as the strategy did not identify new initiatives to address the needs of these young people. According to the strategy, this group has no identified barriers to engagement. However, little is known about this group, their particular needs and any unidentified barriers they might face. This project aims to address this by exploring a cohort of young people who attend schools, where the school leaver data for those schools suggest that NEET is an issue³.

The strategy also brings clarity and coherence to what is already being provided to each of these groups. Specifically in relation to the under-16 age group, the strategy outlines many of the programmes/initiatives that are currently being delivered to prevent this group from becoming NEET in the first instance. A number of these have particular relevance to this project – for example, raising standards and improving outcomes in literacy and numeracy to help reduce the chances of young people becoming NEET.

Since *Pathways to Success* was published in mid-2012, there has already been a significant amount of change on other policy fronts. Examples include:

- **The Delivering Social Change (DSC):** this initiative involved the development and implementation of six signature programmes at an overall cost of some £27 million. Some of these projects have impacted directly and indirectly on young people who are both at risk of becoming NEET or who have already become NEET. A small number of other initiatives have been commissioned under the DSC framework. For example, three signature projects with a combined value of some £56.3 million have been jointly commissioned by the Executive, Atlantic Philanthropies and other Government Departments. One of these signature projects – the Early Intervention Transformation Project (EITP) – could also potentially have an important contribution to make in preventing young people from becoming NEET.
- **The Social Investment Fund (SIF):** is a key lever of the Delivering Social Change Framework. It aims to make life better for people living in targeted areas by reducing poverty, unemployment and physical deterioration. It will support communities to tackle educational under achievement and barriers to employment; tackle systemic issues linked to deprivation; increase community services by regenerating/refurbishing existing facilities, and; address dereliction and promoting investment in the physical regeneration of deprived communities.

There are a wide range of other strategies and initiatives which have relevance to the issue of NEET including, for example:

- Together: Building a United Community (TBUC);
- Enabling Success – supporting the transition from economic inactivity to employment;
- Generating our Success: The Northern Ireland Strategy for Youth Training;
- The Big Lottery – Reaching Out and Empowering Young People (ROEYP);
- Our children and young people, our pledge – A ten year strategy for children and young people in Northern Ireland; and
- The Big Lottery - Reaching Out and Supporting Families.

³ The data shows that in 2010/11, 7.3% of school leavers in the 19 schools that participated in this study had become unemployed according to the school leaver statistical data compared to 4% for all post-primary schools.

Aims and objectives of the research

The main aim of this study is to explore the pathways (i.e. school leaver destinations) young people follow from Year 11 through the end of Year 12 and beyond. In addition, the study seeks to identify a group of young people who are at risk of, or who have already become, NEET and the barriers they (i.e. those who have become NEET) may face in finding employment or training or going back into education. The specific objectives of the research are as follows:

- To identify a sample of young people who are at risk of becoming NEET (or who have become NEET) and profile their characteristics.
- To explore and track the pathways of these young people, as they move through the last years of formal schooling (Years 11 and 12) and into the first year of post compulsory education;
- To better understand the experiences of, and barriers faced by, these young people, and their educators, as they embark upon the transition from formal schooling to either continued education/training/employment or unemployment and suggest measures that could prevent them from becoming NEET; and
- To provide recommendations on preventive actions for reducing the numbers of young people who become NEET⁴.

Methodology

The following research activities were undertaken to deliver this project:

- **Literature review:** A total of c. 50 documents were sourced for the review and c.20 were deemed to be relevant to the study and were included within the review.
- **Longitudinal pupil survey:** The survey was administered once per year over the course of the three years and tracked all Year 11 pupils from 19 schools across Northern Ireland. In Year 1 and 2, the survey was administered on site in each of the schools, which resulted in a high level of response (1,590 in Year 1 and 1,728 in Year 2). In Year 3, given that some of the young people may no longer be attending the same school or indeed any school, the survey was administered using a postal method (with an option to complete an online survey). The survey achieved a total of 389 responses
- **Pupil interviews:** The purpose of these interviews was to understand the experience, needs and barriers of these young people as they move from Year 12 onto their future destination. In total, 43 interviews were completed over the course of the three years.
- **Teacher interviews:** A total of 21 interviews were completed over the course of the three years (against a target of 20).
- **Parent interviews:** A total of 26 interviews were completed.

In addition, two advisory groups supported the delivery of the research activity including a Young People's Research Advisory Group (comprising ten young people aged between 17 and 25) and a NEETs Steering

⁴ The policy context overview above has already alluded to much of what is happening on the ground to prevent young people from becoming NEET. A key aim of our research, therefore, is to make additional recommendations/suggestions for programmes, initiatives or actions to reduce or mitigate the risks faced by young people who are currently at high risk of becoming NEET.

Group comprising 16 representatives from Government departments, secondary schools, further and higher education colleges and education and library boards.

Key findings

Research objective(s):

- To explore and track the pathways of young people, as they move through the last years of formal schooling (Years 11 and 12) and into the first year of post compulsory education; and
- To identify a sample of young people who are at risk of becoming NEET (or who have become NEET) and profile their characteristics.

The Year 3 pupil survey data (2013/14) reveals that young people followed a variety of pathways once they had completed their GCSEs.

- Approximately, three-fifths (58%) of the young people stayed on at school to complete A-levels (or other qualifications), whilst the remaining two-fifths (42%) followed a variety of other pathways including: further education (31%); work (2%); training/apprenticeship (3%), and; NEET (6%).
- 24 young people or 6% of those surveyed in Year 3 became NEET. This group is proportionately smaller in comparison to the overall NEET rate for 16-24 year olds in Northern Ireland (which stands at 17%).
- Further analysis of the survey data identified a total of 52 young people at risk of becoming NEET or 13% of all of those surveyed.
- In total, therefore, 19% of young people in the sample were either NEET or at risk of becoming NEET (close to the overall NEET rate of 17% for the 16-24 year old population in Northern Ireland in 2015).

Research objective(s):

To better understand the experiences of, and barriers faced by, these young people, and their educators, as they embark upon the transition from formal schooling to either continued education/training/employment or unemployment and suggest measures that could prevent them from becoming NEET

A majority of young people surveyed showed positive attitudes towards school in general and reported feeling safe. In addition, the majority of young people did not truant from school, and those who did, did so infrequently. These findings mask considerable variation between groups based on their pathway post compulsory schooling:

- The group who **continued on at school** generally demonstrated the most positive attitudes towards school and their teachers, and were compliant with school rules (only 3% stating in the Year 3 survey that they ignored school rules).
- The group who became **NEET** generally displayed some of the most negative attitudes towards school (only 29% stated they enjoyed it vs. 66% of all young people) and were also more likely to disengage from school.
- In between both ends of the spectrum, were those who pursued other pathways (FE college, training/apprenticeship, and work) who displayed varying degrees of positive/negative attitudes towards school.

Looking more specifically at those who are at high risk or very high risk of becoming NEET, reveals even greater variation vis-à-vis the entire cohort of young people surveyed. The very high risk group, for example, displayed a range of attitudes and behaviours that are more concentrated than the actual NEET group – for example, only one-tenth enjoy(ed) learning (12% vs. 76% of all young people) and a high proportion engaged in behaviours that put them at risk of suspension (e.g. 61% stated they ignored school rules that got in their way vs. 7% of all young people).

The qualitative research found a range of potential reasons why these young people might become disengaged from school or further learning:

- Lack of appropriate support within school;
- Lack of understanding on the part of some young people of why rules exist leading, sometimes, to confrontation with teachers;
- Undiagnosed special educational needs (e.g. dyslexia); and
- Poor attendance resulting in missed learning opportunities and poor preparation for the future.

Young people's experiences outside of school, in terms of drug, alcohol and tobacco consumption were explored. In terms of young people's pathways, the NEET group stood out from almost all of the other groups in terms of having a higher concentration of smokers and alcohol consumers, but were less likely to take illegal drugs.

The high risk NEET group were much like the NEET group in terms of consumption of all three substances. In contrast, a greater proportion of the very high risk NEET group than either of these other two groups smoked or took drugs. Overall, the very high risk NEET group gives particular cause for concern both in terms of their negative experiences of school and their engagement in risk taking behaviours outside school.

Those who have become, or are at risk of becoming, NEET, face a range of barriers to getting back into or sustaining education, employment and training opportunities. These include:

- **Lack of relevant work experience or qualifications:** These were identified by just under two-fifths (38%⁵) of those who are NEET as the main barriers they face in getting into employment, education or training.
- **Low levels of confidence and self-esteem:** This was identified by under one-fifth (17%) of those who had become NEET as the key barrier they face. This manifested itself in a variety of ways, e.g. an inability to undertake activities independently or to socialise and meet new people.
- **Lack of motivation:** This was mentioned by less than one-tenth (8%) of young people who are NEET as the reason why they find it difficult to move into employment, education or training. In contrast, lack of motivation featured much more strongly in the teacher interviews as a key barrier young people face.
- **Lack of parental capacity:** This was a consistent theme underlying a number of the other barriers identified above. Aspects of parenting that teachers considered put young people at particular risk of becoming NEET include:

⁵ 21% cited not having the right kind of work experience as being the main barrier they face in getting into employment, education or training. A further 17% indicated that they did not have the right qualifications.

- Unwillingness to support and push young people to succeed, perhaps linked to their own poor experiences of education;
- Lack of parental control in relation to certain activities (e.g. gaming) resulting in young people unable to concentrate in school; and
- Lack of engagement with schools (e.g. non-attendance at school events such as parent/teacher evenings).

Three broad preventative measures were identified that could be implemented to prevent young people from becoming NEET at the end of compulsory schooling or in subsequent years:

- **Qualifications:** Broadening the range of qualifications on offer through the Entitlement Framework (e.g. by allowing schools to provide Level 2 Essential Skills courses) and ensuring they are valued;
- **Careers guidance:** Deepening careers guidance support for young people (e.g. by having dedicated roles for careers guidance and advice in school) and making greater use of DELs Careers Advisor service; and
- **Parent support:** Greater investment in early intervention for parents and young people to prevent problems escalating to the point where more costly interventions are required.

Conclusions and recommendations

This sub-section set out the conclusions and recommendations of the study. Overall, whilst there has been an improvement in terms of an overall reduction of the number of young people who are NEET in Northern Ireland, much more needs to be done to further tackle this issue. This research comes at an opportune time with a refreshed Pathways to Success strategy due to be published by the newly formed Department for the Economy over the coming months. There is an opportunity, therefore, for the findings of this large-scale and robust research report to feed into the development of the updated Strategy.

Six percent of the 16/17 year olds who completed the survey in Year 3 became NEET. However, statistics for the 16-24 age group as a whole in Northern Ireland shows that almost one-fifth (17%) are NEET suggesting that the issue of NEET is one that becomes more embedded in the 18-24 age group. It would have been helpful to gain a better understanding of the 16-24 age group to establish the particular age groups (by single year of age) that are most impacted by NEET and the geographical areas they live in. Having better quality NEET data at a Northern Ireland level would help to ensure that resources are targeted at those areas with the greatest need, whilst also minimising duplication of effort.

Recommendation 1: Systems for producing disaggregated NEET statistical data should be developed

Given the limited NEET statistical data available in Northern Ireland, Government departments should consider putting in place systems for producing more disaggregated information on 16-24 year olds and the pathways they follow at the end of compulsory education.

Currently, FE and HE providers each have their own respective systems for unique identification of young people, which could be used as the basis for tracking young people's journey through the system. Schools currently allocate Unique Pupil Numbers, whilst FE and HE providers allocate Unique Learner Numbers. However, the systems are not joined up. We therefore suggest that DE and DEL work together to establish a unique identifier for young people coming through the education system, and use this data as the basis for reporting NEET statistics going forward. These suggested changes would help to ensure better disaggregated data and therefore better tailored packages of support for young people.

We are aware that NISRA has constructed a Northern Ireland Pooled Household Survey (NIPHS) dataset recently covering the period 2010/11 – 2013/14. This has a an annual sample size of approx. 20,000 adults and approx. 5,000 children and young people. A key research area which the NIPHS can shed light on is NEETS and this is one of the potential means that could be used for getting better data.

The 6% of young people identified as NEET displayed a wide range of negative attitudes and behaviours towards school resulting, in some instances, in suspension. The types of attitudes and behaviours displayed by this group mirrored those extensively documented in the literature review undertaken as part of this study and we were therefore not entirely surprised by these findings.

In addition to this, a further 13% of young people in education, employment or training at the end of their GCSEs were identified as being at high or very high risk of NEET status in the years following post-compulsory education⁶.

The most prominent risk factors for both the NEET group and the high and very high risk NEET groups related to their attitudes towards school. For example, 'Skiving, bunking off or truanting from school' appeared within the top three risk factors for two groups as did 'Being bored most of the time' at school. The very high risk NEET group expressed the most negative attitudes towards different aspects of their school experiences. For example, 100% of this group indicated that they were bored at school most of the time, compared to 33% of all young people survey representing a 67 percentage point difference.

Lack of parental capacity and support was a consistent theme underlying a number of the attitudes displayed by young people identified above. Aspects of parenting that teachers considered put young people at particular risk of becoming NEET include, for example, lack of engagement with schools (e.g. non-attendance at school events such as parent/teacher evenings). Coupled with this, poor levels of confidence and self-esteem was noted as a key barrier by those who had become NEET. Lack of confidence and self-esteem manifests itself in other ways (e.g. fear of not doing well in exams) which subsequently can contribute to underachievement. Teachers believed that the selective system and transfer test at age 11 played a large part in terms of denting young people's confidence and self-belief, something which schools tried to address on an ongoing basis. In summary, confidence and self-esteem appear to have an indirect impact on young people's attainment and future life chances. Therefore, greater resources are needed within schools for the implementation of interventions specifically aimed at boosting young people's confidence and self-esteem.

Recommendation 2: Early intervention/prevention approaches within schools should be prioritised

It is clear from this study that many of the attitudes and behaviours that young people report have become embedded over time and that much of the work that schools and other stakeholders (e.g. Education Welfare Officers) undertake is late stage, i.e. addressing problems such as poor school attendance. Whilst there is an increasing focus on early intervention across Northern Ireland, more resources should be dedicated to implementing evidence-based initiatives within schools to support parents and families in the early years of their child's life and prevent escalation of issues. It is therefore recommended that:

- *Repositioning government priorities:* A cross-departmental audit should be undertaken to understand what proportion of current budgets are spent on early intervention/prevention services. Separately, a long-term financial commitment to gradually reprioritise budgets away from late-stage intervention (13+) towards early intervention and prevention (0-12) would help to support this. We are aware that Atlantic Philanthropies, alongside Dartington Social Research Unit, and the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People (NICCY) undertook research in 2015 to develop a baseline for investments in prevention and early intervention in NI. That study is a welcome first step in generating a picture of how much is spent on children's services. However, it was unable to provide robust data on the magnitude of

⁶ See pages 37-38 for details of how this group was identified.

spending on prevention and early intervention services more specifically. In order to do this, the report noted the importance of changing the current categorisation and aggregation of budget information to enable limited resources to be more effectively targeted on services that are effective in improving outcomes.

- *Linking schools into early intervention services:* Schools need to be better linked into a network of early intervention and prevention support services in their area (including services for children, young people and their families). This could be achieved by compilation of case studies of good practice of how schools are currently linking into existing community services and by making schools more aware of, and linking them into, existing local structures such as Family Support Hubs.
- *DE should increase the number of schools that can avail of the extended service model:* Extended service provision can be used by schools as the basis for providing a range of services and supports to meet the needs of young people that they work with. In order to understand and meet the needs of the whole child, the extended schools model could be used as the basis for providing support to parents (particularly of those children where there are challenges in terms of engagement with school). Examples of how they could support parents include an assessment of parent's education/skills needs when registering their child for the school and could also involve signposting parents on to other services/support available in their area.
- *Schools should implement specific intervention(s) aimed at boosting young people's confidence and self-esteem:* This research has clearly shown that there is a need for additional interventions (programmes/initiatives) to improve young people's confidence and self-esteem. Teachers and parents consistently pointed to a lack of confidence and self-esteem as a barrier preventing young people who are NEET getting back into education, employment or training (see below).
- *Pastoral leads in schools should take on a greater role to identify and support those most at risk of becoming NEET:* Pastoral leaders in schools should take on a greater role to identify those most at risk through the issues they present with and put in place an appropriate support plan to meet their needs. The support plan for young people should be developed using best practice in participatory models and should take into account the views of young people. The support plan should be reviewed on a regular basis (e.g. every six months) and be made available to the Education and Training Inspectorate when the school is being inspected.

Recommendation 3: Careers support for young people within the home should be enhanced through more support to parents

- It is clear from the findings of this research that all of the parents interviewed wanted the very best for their child. However, a number of the parents interviewed appeared not to have had a positive experience of school themselves (some leaving with relatively few, if any, qualifications) nor did they feel they had the necessary information, knowledge and skills to support their child in making the best decisions about their child's future. However, as this research has shown, young people most often turn to their parents/carers for information and support about their future career choices. It is therefore recommended that schools offer bespoke sessions with parents about how they can best support their child's future career choices and where they might be able to turn to for help and support should this be needed. In addition, it would be beneficial to involve a group of parents in co-designing these sessions to ensure they are relevant and appropriate.
- DEL's Careers Service already provides a lot of useful information and advice for parents on its website including a useful careers matching tool that enables parents to make a link between their child's interests and abilities and jobs that are available. Parents should be made aware of, and encouraged, to use this website. This is consistent with a recommendation made by DE and DEL as part of the Careers Review in 2014.

Lack of relevant work experience or qualifications were identified by just under two-fifths (38%) of NEET young people as barriers that were holding them back. Interview findings suggest that schools did make efforts to provide work experience placements to young people, however findings from the parent interviews suggests that they are not always targeted at young people with the greatest need. In addition, findings from the young people's survey would appear to support this with those identified as at high risk or very high risk of becoming NEET much less likely to report having undertaken a work experience placement in the final year of their GCSEs. Alongside the perceived unfairness in how work experience placements are allocated, there were also concerns about the usefulness of placements where they were not aligned with the interests of the young person and their desired future career path.

In conclusion, it is clear that few, if any, structures are in place to ensure there are sufficient work experience placements available for all of the young people and that they are meaningful in terms of providing for the skills and interests of young people.

Recommendation 4: Every young person sitting their GCSEs should have access to a relevant work experience placement

Lack of a relevant work experience placement puts young people at considerable risk of becoming NEET and prevents young people from moving out of NEET status.

We understand that the Careers Review, undertaken in 2014, recommended a minimum specification of age-relevant work experience be made available for each year group from Primary 7 upwards. Building upon this, we recommend that a work experience placement becomes a mandatory activity for all young people prior to completion of their GCSEs. The Together Building a United Community (TBUC) initiative which plans to make 10,000 work experience placements available to young people, may help to contribute to addressing this recommendation. Core aspects of the work experience placement could include:

- That it is relevant to the interests and abilities of the young person;
- That it sufficiently challenges the young person and enables them to develop a range of skills; and
- Encourages the young person to document the experience and share it with peers.

In addition, and particularly for those that are likely to leave school at the end of their GCSEs, an additional work experience placement should be made available to boost their employability prospects. The second placement should provide participants with a variety of experience(s) that contrast as much as possible from the first placement.

In order to facilitate this, schools could link in with existing private sector networks, e.g. Business in the Community (BITC) who may be able to source work experience/placement opportunities. Alongside this, DEL and DE should work with employers so that a more equal weighting is given to both qualifications and work experience as the basis for progressing into employment, otherwise enhanced availability of work experience placements is unlikely to be beneficial to those at risk of becoming NEET where they may have underperformed in specific subject area(s).

Underachievement and lack of basic qualifications at the end of compulsory schooling was a concern for all of the teachers that took part in this study. It was clear from the interviews that there has been a significant shift in curriculum provision over time with initiatives such as the Entitlement Framework supporting this. However schools believed that they could do more to help young people get the skills and qualifications they need by putting more focus on core subjects such as Maths and English and by enabling them to extend their subject offering, particularly Level 2 Essential Skills. In addition, ensuring that vocational subjects do not lose value over time was viewed as being important alongside improving provision.

Recommendation 5: DE should consider undertaking a consultation with schools about the impact of Area Learning Communities and the Entitlement Framework and establish whether there is a need for an enhanced subject offering to better meet the needs of young people

- Area Learning Communities (ALCs) were established by the Department of Education to support area-wide collaboration between schools and FE providers thereby enhancing young people's access to a wider curriculum (via. the Entitlement Framework). Over time, the number and range of subjects that schools (in collaboration with other partners) are required to provide has increased from at least 18 in 2013 to at least 24 by September 2015. A number of teachers interviewed indicated that they would like to extend their subject offering even more (in particular by being able to offer Essential Skills courses). It may now be an opportune time for the Department to undertake a review of Area Learning Communities and the Entitlement Framework to assess the impact that it has had on schools and young people. The review should look specifically at: the impacts of the Entitlement Framework on subject offering; whether or not it is benefiting all young people by boosting engagement in their own learning (as envisaged in the Revised Northern Ireland Curriculum (RNIC); and what changes might need to be made to further enhance the impact of the framework.

1. Introduction

Background

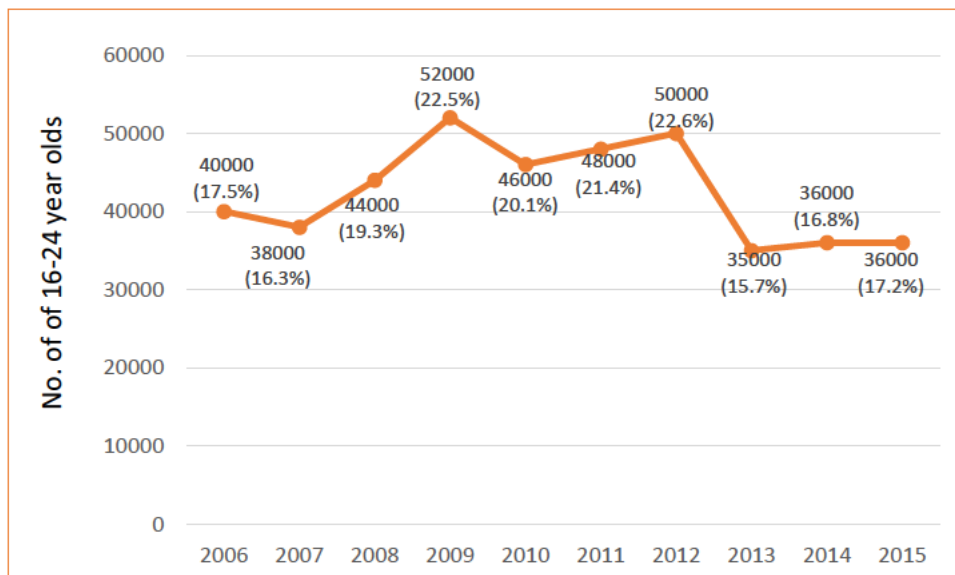
This research project was commissioned by the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister (OFDMFM) in late 2011 at a time when there were record levels of youth employment not just in the United Kingdom but across the European Union. The issue provoked fears of a 'lost generation' across Europe (Eurofound, 2012).

A person is defined as NEET if they are aged 16 to 24 and not in employment, education or training (full-time or part-time). From October 2013, a person is considered to be in education or training if they:

- Are completing an apprenticeship;
- Are engaged on a Government employment or training programme;
- Are working or studying towards a qualification (whether full time or part time);
- Had job-related training or education in the last four weeks; or
- Were enrolled on an education course (whether full time or part) and were still attending or waiting for term to re(start).

In terms of the group which formally encompasses all those who are NEET (i.e. 16-24), the number of those who are NEET has steadily reduced in recent years. For example, in 2009, a total of 52,000 or 22.5% of all young people aged 16-24 were NEET, and by 2015, about one-sixth (17.2%) or 36,000 young people were NEET. The reduction is partly a result of the change in definition (see footnote 1) of NEET which applied in the last quarter of 2013 (when the number of NEET reduced 15,000 from the same period the previous year).

Figure 1: Number and percentage of NEET young people (aged 16-24)



Source: DFPNI, Labour Force Survey (Q3 data used)

⁷ Previous NEET figures included within the definition of NEET those who were in part-time education.

Whilst the downward trend in the number of young people who are NEET is positive, there are still a substantial number of young people whose life chances are significantly impacted by the lack of opportunities available to get back into employment, education or training. Many of these young people's life chances will be heavily influenced by their experiences during their school career, and yet relatively little is known about these young people, their experiences and any barriers they may face in the last few years of compulsory schooling and in transitioning from post-primary school after they have completed their GCSEs (or equivalent qualification).

This study aims to fill this gap by tracking a cohort of young people in the last years of compulsory education to understand whether there are particular groups of young people who are at risk of becoming NEET, what their experiences are and what barriers they may face that place them at risk of becoming NEET.

Policy and programme context

In June 2012, the Department of Employment and Learning (DEL) launched the first ever strategy in Northern Ireland to specifically address the issue of young people who are NEET. The strategy '*Pathways to Success: Preventing exclusion and promoting participation of young people*'⁸ seeks to do two key things:

- Prevent young people most at risk of becoming NEET from falling into the NEET category; and
- Reduce the number of young people who have become NEET by tackling barriers to learning and providing opportunities for training and employment for 16 – 24 year olds.

In addition, the strategy identified three sub-groups of young people:

- Those under the age of 16, where the focus is on work to prevent young people becoming NEET;
- Those aged 16 to 18 who are not at school or college and not in training, including those who face specific barriers to participation. The focus is on measures to re-engage young people in education and training; and
- Young jobless people aged 18 to 24, who are unemployed or economically inactive and who may or may not be in receipt of Job Seekers Allowance or other benefits. The focus is on engaging young people with employment opportunities.

Within the 16-19 age band the strategy identified three further sub-categories. These sub-categories are:

- Young people on gap years or engaged in voluntary work classed as 'out of scope' of the strategy as their status is expected to be transitory. This group comprises 16% (c. 2,240) of the entire group of NEETs;
- Those with identified barriers to engagement (e.g. illness or a disability) comprising 18% (c. 2,520) of the group; and
- Those without identified barriers to engagement comprising 66% of the group (or c. 9,240 young people).

⁸ <https://www.delni.gov.uk/articles/pathways-success>

⁹ According to the Strategy there were approximately 14,000 young people aged 16-19 who were NEET in 2010.

Whilst those ‘out of scope’ are not necessarily an issue of particular concern for the *Pathways to Success* strategy, and those with an identified barrier can have targeted actions put into place, it is the third group – constituting two-thirds of all young people aged 16-19 – that is of particular concern as the strategy did not identify new initiatives to address the needs of these young people. According to the strategy, this group has no identified barriers to engagement. The issue in reality, however, is that little is known about this group, their particular needs and any (as yet) unidentified barriers they might face. This project aims to address this by exploring a cohort of young people who attend schools, where the school leaver data for those schools suggest that NEET is an issue¹⁰.

Aside from identifying the groups which the strategy is targeting, the strategy brings clarity and coherence to what is already being provided to each of these groups. Specifically in relation to the under-16 age group, the strategy outlines many of the programmes/initiatives that are currently being delivered to prevent this group from becoming NEET in the first instance. Examples of these are detailed in Table 1 below. A number of these have particular relevance to this project – for example, raising standards and improving outcomes in literacy and numeracy to help reduce the chances of young people becoming NEET. The strategy makes it clear that those with no qualifications are ten times more likely to be NEET than those with qualifications and impose significant economic costs on society.

Table 1: NEETs prevention and early intervention measures for those aged 16 and under

Policy/initiative domain	Summary of measures/programmes/initiatives
Early years provision	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sure Start is the key provision – 34 programmes are targeted at 20% most disadvantaged wards. In 2011/12, over 23,000 children were in funded pre-school provision.
Community Family Support Programme	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This is a multi-faceted programme that aims to provide families (including children and young people) with support including, for example, tackling family issues; tackling social/economic issues (e.g. debt management) and health and housing issues. This work is being undertaken under the Delivering Social Change (DSC) initiative (see below).
Raising standards and improving outcomes in literacy and numeracy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognising that those with no qualifications are much more likely to become NEET, the Programme for Government (PfG) has set challenging targets for attainment for all school leavers and specifically for those who come from a deprived background – with a target of 49% of those entitled to Free School Meals (FSM) achieving 5A*-C including English and Maths. The overarching policy for improving standards is the <i>Every School a Good School</i> policy. Other important policies/initiatives include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> — <i>Count, read: succeed</i> – A strategy to improve outcomes in literacy and numeracy. — The ‘Entitlement Framework’ which seeks to provide those in Key Stage 4 and post-16 with a wide and balanced curriculum of general and applied courses. The purpose of providing choice is to reflect the diversity of interests, abilities and aspirations of young people. These policies, aimed at improving educational outcomes, are seen as preventative measures in reducing the numbers of young people who do not progress into further education, training or employment after compulsory education.

¹⁰ The data shows that in 2010/11, 7.3% of school leavers in the 19 schools that participated in this study had become unemployed according to the school leaver statistical data compared to 4% for all post-primary schools.

Policy/initiative domain	Summary of measures/programmes/initiatives
Business education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Aimed at improving young people’s awareness of the world of work. Activities under this category include, for example, enterprise and employability programmes, work experience placements and careers events and programmes in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM).

In addition to specific preventative measures identified above, the strategy also identified a range of policies and programmes to support schools in intervening early and tackling barriers that young people may experience, and who otherwise may drop out of school. This includes research to understand the differential educational attainment within and between areas of multiple deprivation, and the development of new and innovative approaches to promote regular and sustained attendance at school. DEL are currently considering updating the Pathways to Success strategy. This research project is timely in terms of its potential to inform any new content in the strategy and associated action plan.

Since *Pathways to Success* was published in mid-2012, there has already been a significant amount of change on other policy fronts. The Delivering Social Change (DSC) framework, which was just beginning to take shape at the time Pathways to Success was launched, has allowed for the development and implementation of six signature programmes at an overall cost of some £27 million. Some of these projects have impacted directly and indirectly on young people who are both at risk of becoming NEET or who have already become NEET. For example, the Community Family Support Programme (mentioned above) received additional funding from DSC to enable it to expand from helping 20 families to helping up to 720 families. In addition, DSC has also, through a Literacy and Numeracy programme, provided over 18,500 children, who were struggling to achieve basic educational standards, with additional support at the most critical stages of their education. DSC funding for the initial six signature programmes ended in March 2016

A small number of other initiatives have been commissioned under the Delivering Social Change framework. For example, three signature projects with a combined value of some £56.3 million have been jointly commissioned by the Executive, Atlantic Philanthropies and other Government Departments. One of these signature projects – the Early Intervention Transformation Project (EITP) – could potentially have an important contribution to make in preventing young people from becoming NEET. For example, the Edges project aims to support families with a range of areas such as improving school attendance and reducing rates of anti-social behaviour.

The Social Investment Fund (SIF) is a key lever of the Delivering Social Change Framework. It aims to make life better for people living in targeted areas by reducing poverty, unemployment and physical deterioration. It will support communities to:

- Build Pathways to Employment by tackling educational under achievement and barriers to employment; tackling skills deficits and promoting jobs brokerage, widening access to the labour market, promoting business start-up and increasing sustainability through social enterprise.
- Tackle the systemic issues linked to deprivation including poor mental and physical health (suicide and self harm), young mothers, substance abuse, community safety, children and young people at risk and enhancing community capacity, confidence and partnership working to reduce deprivation.
- Increase community services by regenerating and refurbishing existing facilities and providing play facilities and environmental improvements.
- Address dereliction and promoting investment in the physical regeneration of deprived communities.

The £80million Executive Fund will deliver a range of projects developed and prioritised by the local Steering Groups in each of the nine Social investment Zones in line with the four strategic objectives as outlined above.

As such, SIF is not focused on addressing the issue of NEET. However most zones have prioritised projects with a focus on supporting employment opportunities which may assist in increasing the employment opportunities of local people including young people. Additionally SIF is supporting a range of early intervention and/or education projects which are intended to help young people and their families reach their full potential and may in turn reduce the potential for them to become NEET. Many of these are now operational with local people availing of the opportunities they provide and they will continue to be delivered over the next 2-3 years.

There are a wide range of other strategies and initiatives which have relevance to the issue of NEET (see Appendix D) including, for example:

- Together: Building a United Community (TBUC);
- Enabling Success – supporting the transition from economic inactivity to employment;
- Generating our Success: The Northern Ireland Strategy for Youth Training;
- The Big Lottery – Reaching Out and Empowering Young People (ROEYP);
- Our children and young people, our pledge – A ten year strategy for children and young people in Northern Ireland; and
- The Big Lottery - Reaching Out and Supporting Families.

As can be seen from the above, there are a significant array of early intervention, prevention, and family support initiatives underway in the last number of years. These initiatives provide significant opportunities for young people which may help to reduce or prevent them from becoming NEET.

Aims and objectives of the research

The main aim of this study is to explore the pathways (i.e. school leaver destinations) young people follow from Year 11 through the end of Year 12 and beyond. In addition, the study seeks to identify a group of young people who are at risk of, or who have already become, NEET and the barriers they (i.e. those who have become NEET) may face in finding employment or training or going back into education. The specific objectives of the research are as follows:

- To identify a sample of young people who are at risk of becoming NEET (or who have become NEET) and profile their characteristics.
- To explore and track the pathways of these young people, as they move through the last years of formal schooling (Years 11 and 12) and into the first year of post compulsory education;
- To better understand the experiences, needs and barriers faced by these young people, and their educators, as they embark upon the transition from formal schooling to either continued education/training/employment or unemployment; and
- To provide recommendations on preventive actions for reducing the numbers of young people who become NEET¹¹.

¹¹ The policy context overview above has already alluded to much of what is happening on the ground to prevent young people from becoming NEET. A key aim of our research, therefore, is to make additional recommendations/suggestions for programmes, initiatives or actions to reduce or mitigate the risks faced by young people who are currently at high risk of becoming NEET.

Given that this research is focused on examining the experience, needs and barriers not only of those who have become NEET but also those that are at risk of becoming NEET in the future, Sections 4-7 of this report present survey findings that have been analysed by the pathway followed by young people (aged 16-17) and also by the level of NEET risk (focusing specifically on those deemed to be high and very high NEET risk).

Report structure

The remainder of this report is structured under the following headings:

- Methodology;
- Experiences of young people who are NEET – findings from the literature;
- Young people’s pathways in Northern Ireland post GCSE and identification of NEET risk group;
- An examination of the experiences of young people who are NEET or are at risk of becoming NEET;
- Barriers in moving on from school into further education, employment and training;
- Preventative measures to reduce NEET risk; and
- Conclusion and recommendations.

2. Methodology

Introduction

This project used a wide-ranging and multi-method approach to addressing the research aims and objectives. Prior to beginning the fieldwork, a literature review was undertaken to understand the key factors that lead young people to become NEET, and the enablers and barriers young people face in moving out of unemployment into education, employment or training. The fieldwork undertaken as part of this research project included a large-scale survey tracking a Year 11 cohort of young people in each of 19 schools, and qualitative research with school staff, parents/carers and young people. The NEETs Steering Group and Young People's RAG provided input at specific points during delivery (e.g. in terms of feeding into the design of research instruments).

The remainder of this section of the report is structured under the following headings:

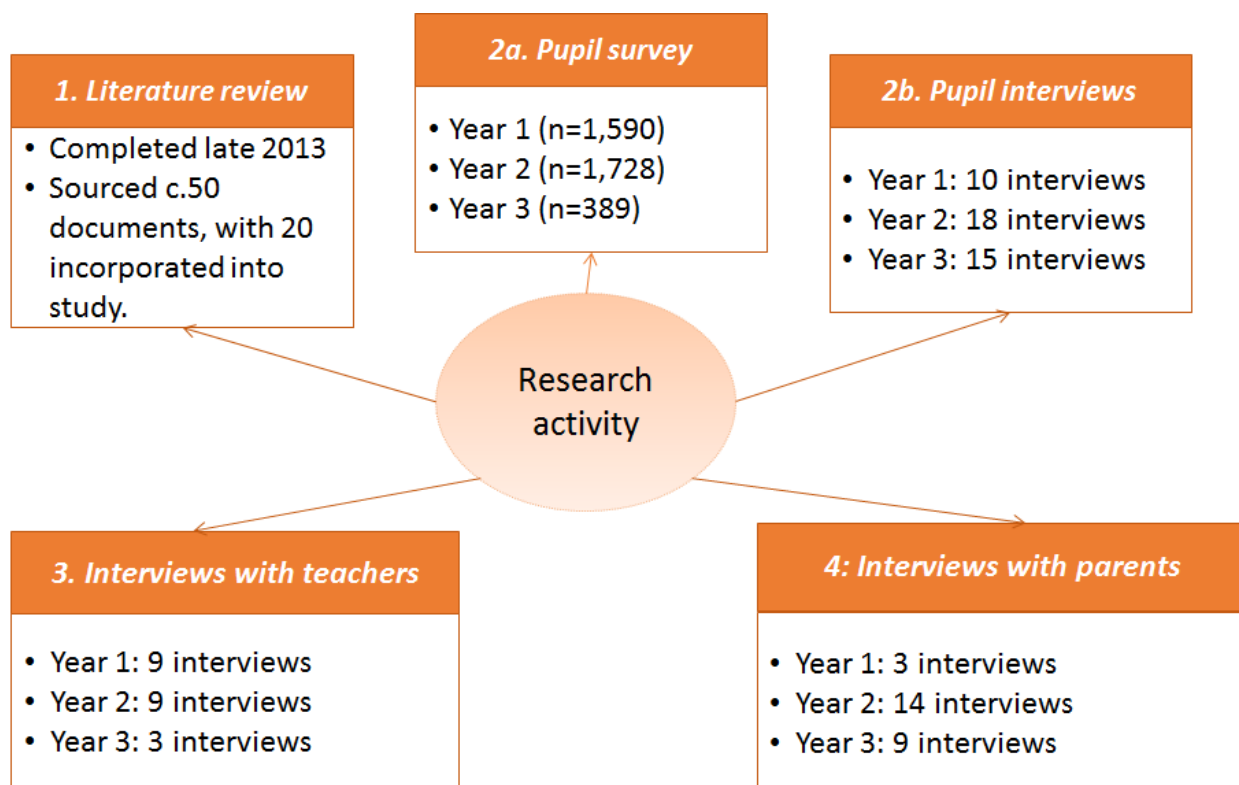
- Methodology – overview;
- Supporting activities; and
- Conclusion.

Details of the full methodology are contained in Appendix E.

Methodology – Overview

Figure 2 provides an overview of the literature and research activities undertaken to deliver this research project alongside an indication of the scale of activity.

Figure 2: Methodology overview



In summary, the following activities were undertaken to deliver this project:

- **Literature review:** The purpose of the review was to provide context to the overall study and also to source potential question items that could inform the questions in the longitudinal survey. A literature review (see Appendix A for more details) was undertaken at the beginning of the project. A total of c. 50 documents were sourced for the review and c.20 were deemed to be relevant to the study and were included within the review. The literature review examined, amongst other things, the characteristics and experiences of young people who are NEET and the barriers they face in moving out of that status.
- **Longitudinal pupil survey:** The purpose of the survey was to capture a range of data on an entire cohort of young people such as their background characteristics, their behaviours and attitudes both inside and outside school that may put them at risk of becoming NEET and their pathways (i.e. post-16 destinations). The survey was administered once per year over the course of the three years and tracked all Year 11 pupils from 19 schools across Northern Ireland. In Year 1 and 2, the survey was administered on site in each of the schools, which resulted in a high level of response (1,590 in Year 1 and 1,728 in Year 2). In Year 3, given that some of the young people may no longer be attending the same school or indeed any school, the survey was administered using a postal method (with an option to complete an online survey). The survey achieved a total of 389 responses (see Appendix E for a profile of survey respondents in Year 3)¹². The survey data has been analysed using SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) and descriptive statistics (e.g. counts/frequencies) and exploratory statistical tests (e.g. Pearson's Chi Square) have been utilised. Pearson's Chi Square tests are most appropriate when the data are categorical in nature (i.e. each question has a finite number of possible responses).
- **Pupil interviews:** The purpose of these interviews was to understand the experience, needs and barriers of these young people as they move from Year 12 onto their future destination. In total, 43 interviews were completed over the course of the three years.
- **Teacher interviews:** The purpose of the interviews was to understand, amongst other things, their views on why certain groups of young people underperform, the groups that are most at risk of becoming NEET and what steps are put in place to help prevent young people from becoming NEET. A total of 21 interviews were completed over the course of the three years (against a target of 20). School staff selected typically included the Year Head, the head of careers, or the principal.
- **Parent interviews:** This activity was not initially included within the scope of the project. However, in response to feedback from the NEETs Steering Group, this was included within the research activities over the three years of the study. The purpose of the interviews was to elicit parents' views on their own experiences of school and that of their child. In addition, parents were invited to share their views on their child's potential performance at GCSE and their future career aspirations. A total of 26 interviews were completed.

¹² Please note that the Year 3 survey responses are not intended to be representative of all Year 12 pupils in Northern Ireland nor indeed all Year 12 pupils in the schools that took part in the survey.

Supporting activities

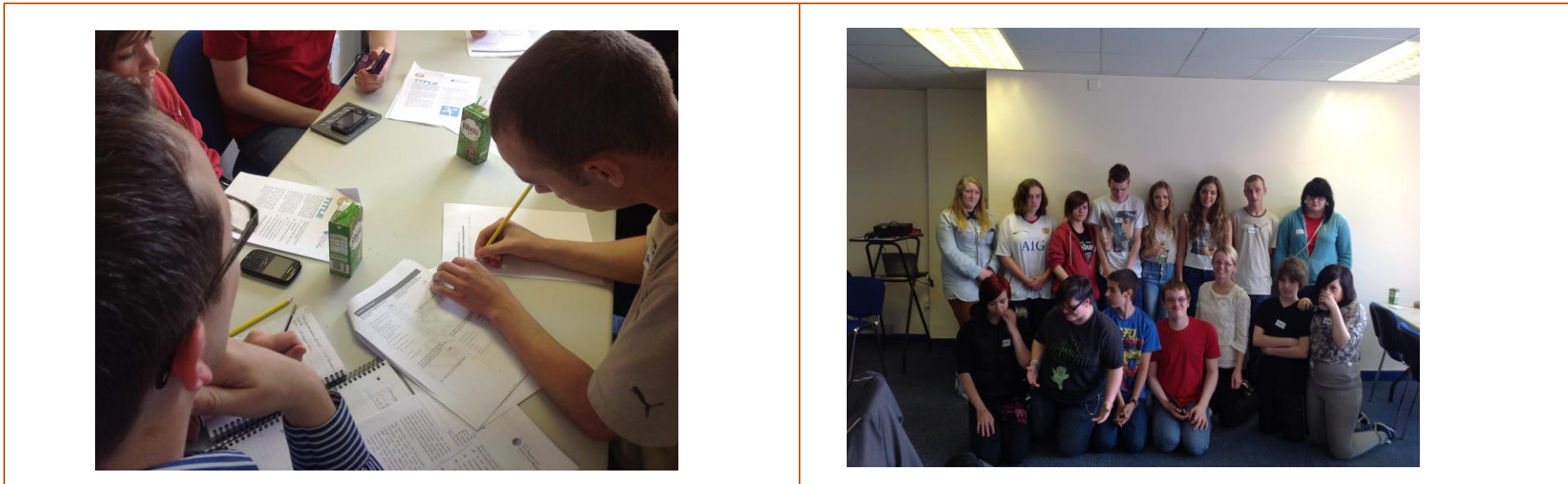
Two advisory groups supported the delivery of the research activity described above, including:

- **Young People's RAG**

This group comprised ten young people aged between 17 and 25 and who, at the time they joined the Advisory Group, were NEET. The Young People's Research Advisory Group helped to provide a unique insight into the issues that young people experience both when at risk of becoming NEET and when NEET from a their own perspective. The group met a total of nine times over a three-year period and their key role and responsibilities was to:

- Inform the content of research instruments prior to data collection by participating in a pilot of the questionnaire and giving feedback;
- Advise NCB on the implementation of the research project from young people's perspectives;
- Advise on a title for the research project;
- Comment on the initial findings of the research and help interpret the data; and
- Contribute to the design and content of a young person's version of the Final Report for dissemination to young people.

Figure 3: The Young People's Research Advisory Group



- **NEETs Steering Group:** A Steering Group was convened by NCB to oversee the delivery of the project. With the exception of NCB and OFMDFM, it comprised 16 representatives from Government departments, secondary schools, further and higher education colleges and education and library boards. The steering group had a peer review role, similar in purpose peer reviewing within the context of academia, in terms of challenging to ensure read across and relevance from research to policy and practice. The Steering Group provided guidance and strategic direction to the research team including:
 - advising on the research scope, methodology and instruments;
 - drawing on the expertise of members to inform the research content;
 - helping to ensure effective links between the research and policy/practice; and
 - disseminating the learning from the project's outputs.

Conclusion

This section of the report has provided a detailed account of the methodology that will be used to deliver this project. The next section discusses some of the key findings from a review of the literature which profiled young people who are NEET. This provides a useful context within which to examine the findings from this research project.

3. Experiences of young people who are NEET – findings from the literature

Introduction

At the beginning of this research project, a full literature review was undertaken to help inform the design of the research instruments (i.e. survey and topic guides). The purpose of the literature review was firstly to understand in greater detail the key circumstances and experiences of young people who are NEET. The review also examined the barriers that they might face in trying to move out of NEET status. Finally, the review also involved a search for large-scale longitudinal survey datasets to help understand the different categories or groups of young people who have NEET status. In light of the fact that there are currently no large-scale studies of this nature in Northern Ireland, studies from other parts of the UK were sourced.

The remainder of this section of the report is structured under the following headings:

- An examination of the key circumstances and experiences of young people who are NEET and the barriers they face; and
- Profiling young people who are NEET.

An examination of the key circumstances and experiences of young people who are NEET and the barriers they face

It is important for this project to take account of factors that studies have shown are linked to NEET status. As discussed earlier, there is little primary research in Northern Ireland that looks specifically at the characteristics of young people who are NEET. We have therefore drawn on the findings from studies in England to fill this gap¹³.

This sub-section details a range of factors that have been linked to NEET status in the full literature review¹⁴ carried out by NCB as part of this research project. These factors can be grouped into six broad areas and are described more fully in Table 2 overleaf:

- Family economic circumstances;
- Personal attributes;
- Personal circumstances;

¹³ We are aware of other studies in other parts of the United Kingdom. For example, the Scottish Longitudinal Study commissioned in 2013 a large-scale longitudinal tracking study which aims to investigate systematically the risk factors for NEET status and the impact of NEET status on later labour market outcomes and well-being in a contemporary context between 1991 and 2011. Further details are available at http://sls.lscs.ac.uk/projects/view/2013_005/

¹⁴ The methodology for the literature review entailed searching for relevant UK reports on NCB's ChildData and various websites including: Audit Commission; Department for Education (DfE); Institute of Education; Joseph Rowntree Foundation; National Centre for Social Research (NatCen); National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER), and Nuffield Foundation. We also relied on our knowledge of the topic and data sources to harvest other documents and recent data. We focused on key publications and resources from the last five years (although older studies were examined). Our key search term was 'NEET', and all sources included in the review included samples of young people NEET. Sources were screened for content, and sources that focused on any of the topic below were read and summarised in more detail: Background and demographic characteristics of young people NEET; Experiences, beliefs and aspirations; Activities and participation; Formal and informal support; Negative behaviour, and; NEET subgroups. We also reviewed a number of existing reports from the Joseph Rowntree Foundation examining the influence of aspirations on young people's attainment (i.e. not necessary on NEET status), given the attention given to 'aspirations' in recent years. In addition to summarising the main findings, reviewers also highlighted relevant survey items or topics that could be adapted by NCB.

- Risk taking behaviours;
- School experiences; and
- Aspirations for the future.

Table 2: Example of factors linked to NEET status

Factor	Key findings
Family economic circumstances	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Free School Meal status</i>: Tracking studies (YCS¹⁵/LSYPE¹⁶) of young people aged 16-19 found that those entitled to FSM in Year 11 were more likely to be NEET in all subsequent time periods. • <i>Low vs. high income</i>: a study of 17 year-olds found that those in the poorest fifth of the overall sample were about seven times more likely to be NEET than those from the richest fifth of families. • <i>Parent's occupational status</i>: Young people whose parents were in professional occupations were less likely to be NEET between 16 and 19 years of age than those whose parents worked in non-professional jobs.
Personal attributes/circumstances	<p>Young people who are NEET are more likely to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have a disability/learning difficulty. • Be a teenage parent. • Have experience of being bullied. • Have responsibilities as a carer.
Engagement in risk taking behaviours	<p>Young people who are NEET are more likely to have:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offended (and/or be in the care of a Youth Offending Team). • Misused/abused substances. • Truanted from school in the past or have been excluded.
School experiences	<p>Young people who are NEET are more likely to perceive their teachers to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Treat them unfairly. • Be ineffective in controlling pupils in their classrooms. • Not take an interest in their work.
Aspirations for the future	<p>Findings from the research suggest that in relation to aspirations that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The influence of young people's aspirations on NEET status is indirect, operating through GCSE attainment (i.e. aspirations influence attainment, and attainment influences education, employment and training outcomes). • Young people's beliefs about their friends' aspirations seem to matter: believing their friends will stay on in full-time education post-16 was associated with a significantly lower chance of young people being NEET or disengaging from education at age 17.

In addition to the above factors that are associated with a young person's NEET status, there are a number of key barriers that contribute to young people becoming NEET or hinder them from returning to education, employment or training (after a period of being NEET).

¹⁵ Youth Cohort Study. See page 29 for more details.

¹⁶ Longitudinal Survey of Young People in England. See page 29 for more details.

One analysis by Spielhofer et al (2009) using data from the Longitudinal Study of Young People in England (LSYPE) and Youth Cohort Study (YCS) data (see page 26 for more details of these surveys) reported that when asked for the primary reasons that they were unable to find work at age 18, 27% of young males with NEET status indicated lack of relevant experience and 25% cited lack of qualifications for available jobs. Spielhofer's study also reported that lack of experience was one of the main barriers young people themselves said they faced: they were unable to get a job until they had experience, but without a job could not get that experience (Spielhofer, et al., 2009).

For females who are NEET, the most common barrier, mentioned by a fifth, was their need to work flexible hours because of caring responsibilities, followed by lack of relevant experience cited by 16% of young people (Department for Education & National Statistics, 2010).

Data from both the surveys and interviews with young people revealed that young people who are NEET (particularly those who spend more time NEET) tended not to have considered what to do when leaving school. In addition, they had not spoken to anyone other than their parents about their choices, and felt they had received adequate support or were equipped with necessary information to plan their futures (Spielhofer, et al., 2009; Spielhofer, et al., 2010).

Looking at what might enable young people to enter into education, employment or training after a period of being NEET, one study found that among young people who moved into employment at age 19, a fifth indicated that assistance from friends or family helped them, and 18% said that their own motivation provided the help they needed (Department for Education & National Statistics, 2011). Survey findings indicated that the option to gain a qualification while working was the factor identified by young people who are NEET that was most likely to encourage them to enter education or training (Spielhofer, et al., 2010). Financial support was also important.

What resonates from these findings is that many young people who are NEET feel trapped by lack of experience: they are excluded from jobs because they do not have relevant experience, but to get relevant experience, they need employers to take a chance with them without necessarily having the desired qualifications or experience. The evidence also suggests that some young people did not receive adequate information or support to make informed choices for their futures. Assistance from family and friends and financial support seem to be important enablers of entry into education, employment or training.

Profiling young people who are NEET

As already highlighted, relatively little is known about the profile of young people who are NEET in Northern Ireland. Therefore, the study team has drawn upon two large-scale longitudinal studies from England –YCS and LSYPE – to undertake this exercise.

YCS is a series of longitudinal surveys that contacts a sample of an academic year-group or "cohort" of young people in the spring following completion of compulsory education and again usually annually until they are aged 19 or 20. The survey looks at young people's education and labour market experience, their training and qualifications and a wide range of other issues, including socio-demographic variables.

LSYPE is a large-scale panel survey tracking 15,000 young people in England from aged 13/14 year old in 2004. The main purpose of the study was to provide evidence on the key factors affecting educational progress and attainment and the transition following the end of compulsory education. The young people have been interviewed each year around the issues of: attitudes to school; aspirations for future work and study; friends and family; use of leisure time; (if applicable) transitions to college/university, and work or unemployment.

Using these longitudinal data, a number of researchers have applied statistical techniques¹⁷ to create distinct groups of young people who are NEET to help illustrate that there are many different groups of young people who are NEET.

Ross (2009), for example, used LSYPE data to examine young people's disengagement from education (both current schooling and longer-term educational prospects.) This group was aged between 14 and 16 (relating to Years 9-11). The analysis revealed four main types of young people as detailed below:

- **Engaged:** *This comprised 30-40% of the Year 9 – Year 11 group*¹⁸. The vast majority achieved the expected level at Key Stage 4 and continued with full time education in Year 12 (95%). They had positive attitudes towards school, enjoyed different school subjects and felt confident in their ability to achieve. Doing well at school was important to them, and they were the most likely of all pupils to recognise the importance of working hard to improve their future prospects. They had positive relationships with teachers and generally accepted school rules and discipline. They did not truant or misbehave in class and were unlikely to engage in risky behaviours including substance use and fighting.
- **Disengaged from school not education:** *This group represented about a quarter of pupils from Year 9 to Year 11.* Similar to 'engaged' students, these young people aimed to continue on into higher education. Indeed, most achieved Level 2 qualifications (71%) and continued with full time education in Year 12 (85%). Yet, they had more negative attitudes towards school and were more likely to have problems with school rules and discipline, misbehave in class, report less positive relationships with teachers and truant than their engaged peers. Relative to engaged peers, they also were less likely to believe that working hard at school will help them progress in life. A third or more engaged in substance use.

¹⁷ While the specifics vary, most of the studies use latent class analysis, which groups together similar young people based on their patterns of responses across a pre-determined selection of survey items related to education, employment and training including their attainment, attitudes, behaviours, experiences and motivations. These analyses provide insight into the heterogeneity of young people who are NEET, as well as some of the precursors of NEET status.

¹⁸ This refers to Year 9 – 11 year groups in England which are not equivalent in Northern Ireland.

- **Engaged with school not higher education:** *This group comprised about a quarter of young people over the course of the study.* These young people wanted to continue with full time education in Year 12, but not higher education. Two-fifths achieved a Level 2 at Key Stage 4, but about half achieved just a Level 1. Three-fifths continued in full time education in Year 12 and a fifth was in work with training, but a further fifth was either in work without training or had become NEET. They had moderate to positive attitudes to school, generally accepted school rules and discipline, had very positive relationships with their teachers and were unlikely to play truant. They preferred ICT to academic subjects, and felt most confident in their ability there. These young people recognised the importance of working hard at school, although not to the extent of ‘engaged’ young people. They were fairly unlikely to engage in any kind of risky behaviour.
- **Disengaged:** *This group represented just 12% in Year 9 and one-fifth of Years 10 and 11 pupils.* Disengaged young people were the least likely to aspire to continue with full time education. Although most achieved a Level 1 qualification, over a third left school with few or no qualifications. The destinations of these young people were much poorer than their peers, with two-fifths in jobs without training and over a quarter NEET in Year 12. Hardly any of these young people recognised the importance of working hard at school to fulfil their ambitions (i.e. 30% felt that working hard at school would help them get on in life vs. 67% of the ‘engaged’ group). Over two-fifths of these young people did not think about their future much, and one fifth planned to ‘wait and see’ where they ended up. They were keener than other pupils to get jobs that paid well and to be their own boss. They were most likely to choose subjects in which they thought they would do well, they liked the teacher or friends were studying. They were the most likely to play truant, had very poor attitudes to school and were more likely to engage in risky behaviour including substance use, crimes against property and fights.

Another analysis focused on slightly older young people. Using Youth Cohort Study (YCS) data, the study tracked over 1,600 young people identified as NEET when they were 16-17 years of age for four years (Spielhofer, et al., 2009). Based on patterns of attainment, prior experiences, attitudes and re-engagement, the study identified three primary NEET subgroups, described below.

Profiling of young people NEET at 16-17 years using YCS

- **Open to learning:** This was the largest subgroup, representing 41 per cent of the sample. This group was generally positive about learning and school and were most likely to re-engage in education or training within in a year’s time. Two-thirds had a Level 1 and 22 per cent a Level 2 qualification at the end of Year 11. Relative to the other two groups, these young people felt most able to find out about future choices and supported to make them, qualified for available courses or jobs, and optimistic about their future prospects.
- **Sustained:** Nearly two-fifths (38 per cent) were in this subgroup of young people who faced a lot of personal and structural barriers and were likely to remain NEET over the course of the study. They were most likely to have parents who were not employed, be young carers and be disabled or have health problems. More than half (58 per cent) had not achieved a Level 1, and just one per cent a Level 2, by Year 11. These young people had the most negative experiences of school, highest levels of truancy and exclusion and lowest educational attainment.
- **Undecided:** The third subgroup represented 22 per cent of young people who are NEET. They had similar attainment levels at the end of Year 11 to the ‘open to learning’ group (71 per cent had a Level 1, and 16 per cent a Level 2). They faced no significant personal barriers to participating in education or training, but they were dissatisfied with the available opportunities. They were as likely as the ‘sustained’ group to remain NEET early on in the study, though more likely to re-engage by the end.

Another report described four groups of young people with NEET status (Allen, Mehta, & Rutt, 2012), which overlapped significantly with the classification summarised above. Their additional, fourth group was defined as 'at risk'. These young people with NEET status may include 'undecided' or even 'open to learning' young people who are particularly vulnerable to the economic downturn and shifting labour market requirements and, thus, may risk long-term disengagement from education, employment or training. Given the current economic climate, this fourth group is important to consider.

Summary

This section of the report has brought together some of the key findings in the literature in relation to what we know about young people who are at risk of becoming NEET or who have already become NEET.

- In relation to Northern Ireland, there are no current large-scale longitudinal studies that have profiled the characteristics of those who are NEET, the barriers they face and enablers that would help them to move out of NEET status.
- In terms of looking at the particular characteristics, and enablers and barriers experienced by young people who have become NEET elsewhere outside of Northern Ireland, the literature is clear, that it is a combination of factors that contribute to NEET status and these can be grouped under a number of headings including family economic circumstances; personal attributes/circumstances; risk taking behaviour; school experiences, and; aspirations for the future.
- A number of large-scale studies have grouped young people according to specific characteristics and background information. This includes, for example, a study undertaken by Ross (2009) which examined the characteristics of those who had participated in LSYPE (Longitudinal Survey of Young People in England) and grouped them according to their background characteristics, attitudes and aspirations towards school. It revealed four main groups of young people and found that the group termed 'disengaged' contained the largest proportion of young people who became NEET. These particular young people displayed a range of negative attitudes towards school and were more likely, for example, to underachieve compared to their peers.
- The purpose of this research project is to shed more light on some of these issues for the particular cohort of young people involved in this research project. The next section of this report begins to present the findings from the fieldwork undertaken over the course of the three years of this project.

4. Young people's pathways in Northern Ireland post GCSE and identification of NEET risk groups

Introduction

This section presents the findings from the primary research activities undertaken and addresses the following research objectives.

To explore and track the pathways of these young people, as they move through the last years of formal schooling (Years 11 and 12) and into the first year of post compulsory education; and

To identify a sample of young people who are at risk of becoming NEET (or who have become NEET).

The remainder of this section of the report is structured under the following headings:

- School selection and profiling;
- Young people's pathways post Year 12;
- Identification of groups at risk of becoming NEET; and
- Summary.

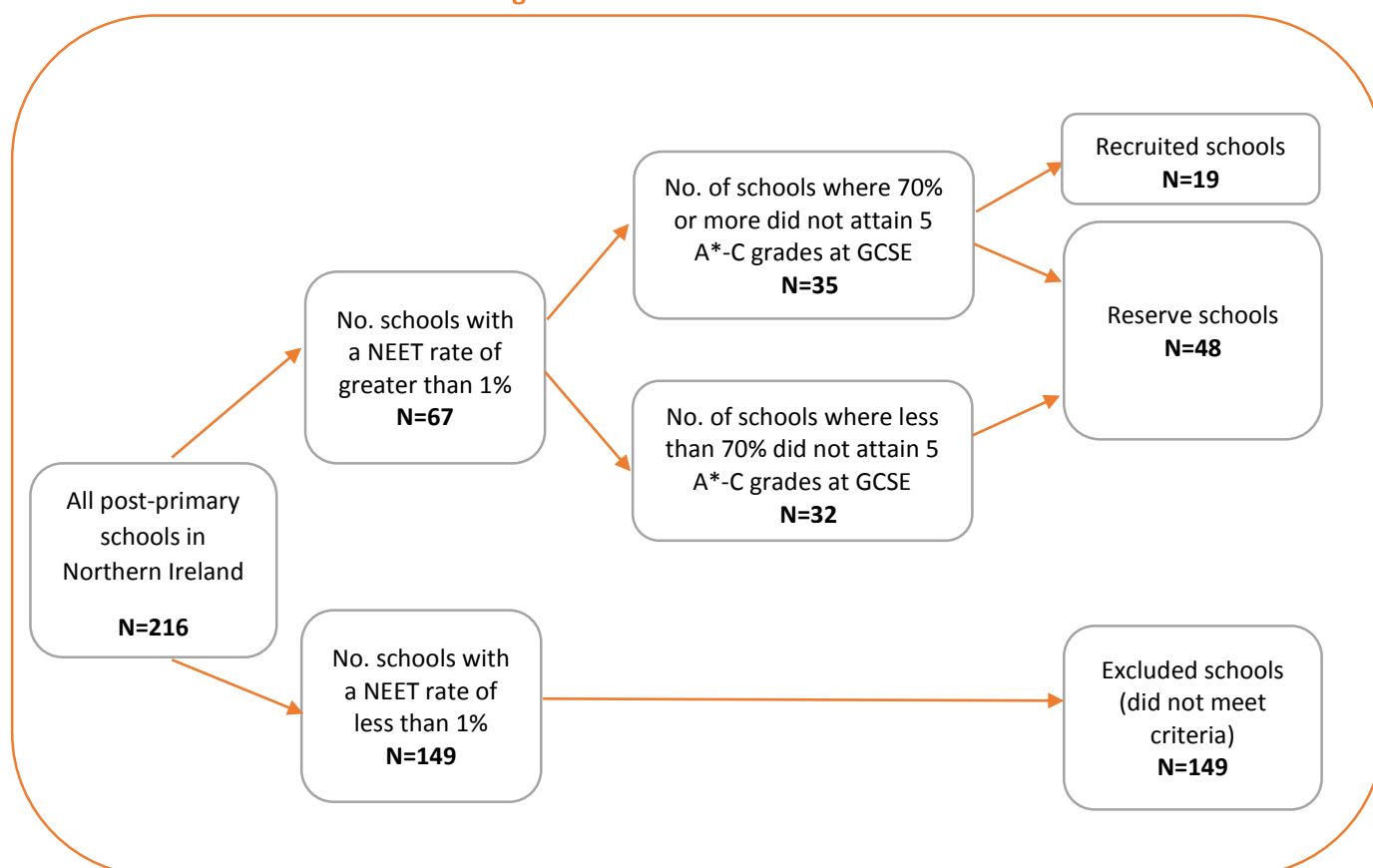
School selection and profiling

School selection process

The study commenced in early 2012 and one of the first tasks undertaken was to select schools for participation in the study. Schools were initially ranked based on the percentage of young people whose main destination was unemployment (averaged over a three-year period 2008/09 to 2010/11). This process identified a pool of 67 post-primary schools for potential recruitment as can be seen in Figure 4. The remaining 149 schools were excluded from further consideration as they did not meet this criteria (i.e. with a NEET rate of more than 1%).

The next step involved ranking the sample of 67 schools according to their GCSE attainment profile: schools where 70% or more pupils did not achieve 5A*-C were put into one group whilst schools where less than 70% of pupils did not achieve 5A*-C grades were put into another group. NCB recruited a total of 19 schools from the first of those groups, i.e. those schools with the highest NEET rates in Northern Ireland combined with the lowest GCSE attainment levels.

Figure 4: Initial selection of schools



Background characteristics of pupils

Table 3 below illustrates the background of pupils attending the schools selected to take part in this study (i.e. described as NEET study schools) as compared to all post-primary schools in Northern Ireland. The data shows in relation to:

- **FSM entitlement:** The NEET Study Schools had a significantly higher proportion of pupils entitled to Free School Meals in comparison to the Northern Ireland average, and the gap has widened over time from 13 percentage points (pp) in 2009/10 to 15 pp in 2013/14.
- **Gender:** The NEET Study Schools had a higher proportion of male than female pupils comprising 56% male and 44% female over the last five years. This compares to the NI average of approximately 50% male and 50% female.
- **Special Educational Needs (SEN):** The NEET study schools had a significantly higher proportion of pupils who were at SEN stages 1-4 (i.e. these young people have SEN but have not yet reached the point of being statemented). The gap between the schools involved in this study and the Northern Ireland average has widened over time from 7pp in 2009/10 to 11pp in 2013/14. In addition, the proportion of young people who are statemented is higher in the NEETs study school in comparison to the Northern Ireland average.

Table 3: Background characteristics of young people

Schools profile	Level	School year				
		2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14
FSM entitlement						
Entitled to FSM	NEET study schools	30%	31%	33%	34%	34%
	NI post-primary schools	17%	18%	18%	19%	19%
Gender						
Male	NEET study schools	56%	56%	56%	56%	56%
	NI post-primary schools	49%	50%	50%	50%	50%
Female	NEET study schools	44%	44%	44%	44%	44%
	NI post-primary schools	51%	50%	50%	50%	50%
SEN status						
Stages 1-4	NEET study schools	20%	22%	24%	27%	27%
	NI post-primary schools	13%	13%	15%	16%	16%
Stage 5 (Statemented)	NEET study schools	5%	5%	5%	5%	6%
	NI post-primary schools	3%	3%	4%	4%	4%

Source: School Census, Department of Education¹⁹

Academic attainment of young people

Table 4 provides details of the proportion of young people who have achieved 5A*-C GCSE grades (including English and Maths) over the period 2010/11 to 2013/14 for the schools that participated in this study and also for Northern Ireland as a whole. It shows that whilst there has been a slight dip between 2010/11 and 2011/12 in the proportion of young people achieving 5A*-C grades at GCSE reducing from 23% to 22%, there has been significant improvement between 2012/13 (29%) and 2013/14 (35%). Part of this improvement may be related to the numerous initiatives (e.g. numeracy and literature signature project funded by OFMDFM) operating in the schools as well as initiatives being operated by schools themselves (e.g. student mentoring). Whilst there also has been an improvement across Northern Ireland, the increase has not been as great rising from 60% in 2010/11 to 65% in 2013/14.

Table 4: Proportion of pupils achieving 5A*-C grades at GCSE (including English and Maths)

Level	School year			
	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14
NEET study schools	23%	22%	29%	35%
NI post-primary schools	60%	60%	61%	65%

Source: Summary of Annual Examination Results, Department of Education

¹⁹ http://www.deni.gov.uk/index/facts-and-figures-new/education-statistics/32_statistics_and_research-numbersofschoolsandpupils_pg/32_statistics_and_research-schoolleveldata_pg.htm

Young people's pathways post Year 12

An analysis of young people's pathways using centrally held data

This subsection provides an analysis of young people's pathways for all of those who completed Year 12 in each of the 19 of the schools that participated in this study compared to Northern Ireland as a whole. It shows that:

- The proportion of school leavers going into further education has increased both for the schools that participated in this study and for Northern Ireland as a whole.
- The proportion of school leavers going into employment or pursuing training opportunities has reduced slightly both for those schools that participated in this study and for Northern Ireland as a whole.
- The NEET rate has reduced by approximately two-fifths over the period 2010/11 to 2013/14 both for the schools that participated in this study and for Northern Ireland as a whole.
- The proportion of young people with an unknown destination has increased both for NEET study schools and Northern Ireland as a whole.

Table 5: School leavers' pathways

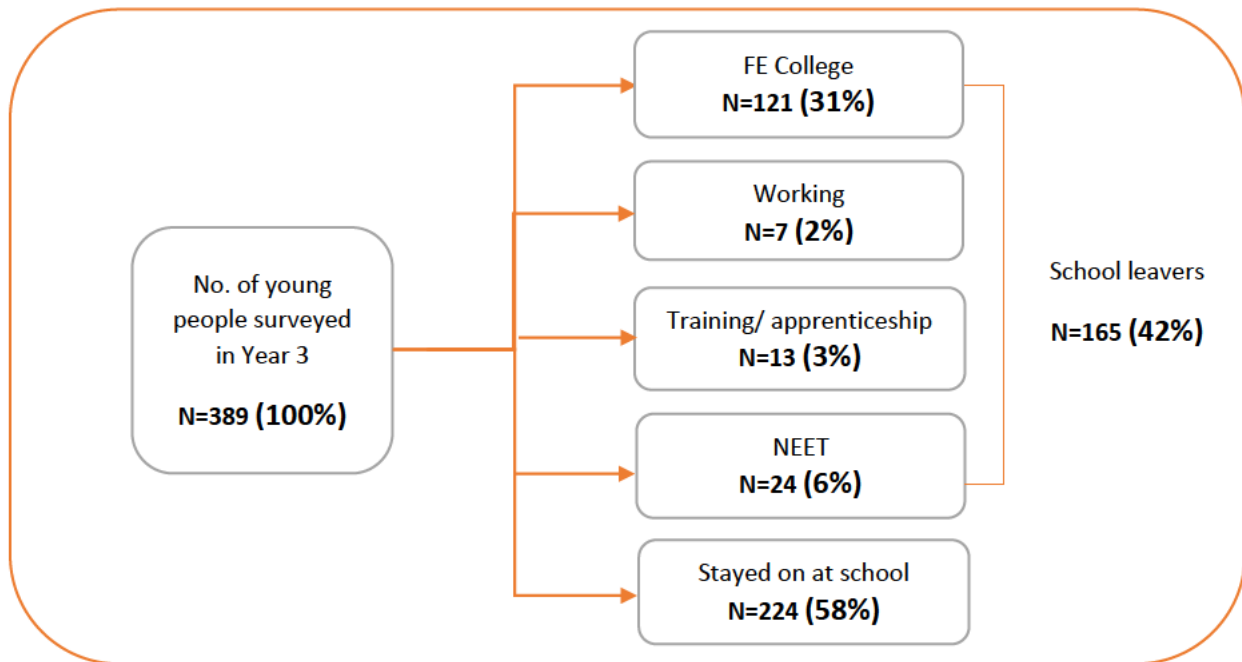
Pathway	Level	School year			
		2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14
Further Education	NEET study schools	55.9	51.5	58.4	57.3
	NI post-primary schools	56.5	61.0	61.0	63.8
Employment	NEET study schools	5.0	5.0	3.5	4.0
	NI post-primary schools	5.1	4.3	4.3	4.2
Training	NEET study schools	29.4	35.1	30.8	28.8
	NI post-primary schools	31.6	28.0	27.7	25.6
Unemployment	NEET study schools	7.3	5.1	4.3	4.4
	NI post-primary schools	4.0	3.2	3.0	2.4
Unknown	NEET study schools	2.5	3.3	3.0	5.4
	NI post-primary schools	2.8	3.4	4.1	4.0

Source: School Leavers Survey, Department of Education
Note NI post-primary figures relate to year 12 school leavers only

An analysis of young people's pathways using the survey data

One of the objectives of this study was to identify a sample of young people who have become NEET and also a group of young people who are potentially at risk of becoming NEET. The Year 3 survey data showed that just over two-fifths (42%) of young people left school at the end of their GCSE year whilst almost three-fifths (58%) stayed on in school.

Figure 5: Young people's pathways post-compulsory education



Identification of groups at risk of becoming NEET

The data presented in Figure 5 above shows that 6% of all of those surveyed were NEET. However, we know from Northern Ireland statistics that there is consistently a higher proportion²⁰ of young people aged 16-24 who are NEET in comparison to those of school leaving age (i.e. aged 16/17). Therefore, it is likely that a proportion of those young people who have stayed on in education, employment and training following Year 12 may become NEET in subsequent years²¹. Data was requested from DETI to understand whether any particular trend in the NEET data is evident within the 16-24 age range by single year of age. Unfortunately, it has not been possible to access robust data at this level of detail due to small survey sample sizes from which the data is drawn.

A number of teachers interviewed believed that those who were at particular risk of becoming NEET in subsequent years are those who undertake courses at the end of compulsory school age that they have little interest in or whose skills/aptitudes are unsuited to particular courses/qualifications. These young people often struggle, therefore, to continue in education, employment or training at 18 years of age and beyond.

One of the objectives of the research is to identify a group of young people who are at risk of becoming NEET in addition to the group that have already become NEET.

In order to do this, a risk score was calculated for all of those surveyed. This was calculated by examining all of the survey items that could potentially contribute to putting a young person at risk of becoming NEET as evidenced within the literature review. Table 6 below illustrates these factors.

²⁰ Statistics show that the 2015 NEET rate for 16-24 year olds is 17% according to the DFPNI Labour Force Survey (Q3 data used).

²¹ NEET statistics are only published for broad age groups and not for single age groups. It would be helpful to have access to NEET statistics for single age groups to understand the specific groups of young people where the NEET rate is highest.

Table 6: Potential factors that could contribute to NEET status

Factor type	Factors (as elicited from Year 3 young person's survey)
	Scored '1' if present, scored '0' if not present
Background/personal	One or more disabilities
	Caring responsibilities
	Entitled to Free School Meals
	No family member studied at university
Attitudes to school	Not happy at school
	Bored at school most of the time
	Did not Enjoy learning
Attitudes to school work	Struggled with school work
	Did not complete homework most of the time
	Did not enjoy schoolwork that is challenging
Attitudes to teachers	Did not get on well with most of the teachers
Peer influences	Pupil felt that teachers did not care about young person and his/her future
	Friends look down on people who work hard
Attitudes to authority	Like to see how much I can get away with
	Do the opposite of what people tell me just to make them mad
	Ignore school rules
Behaviour in school	Got into fights in last 12 months
	Was bullied in last 12 months
	Bullied someone else in last 12 month
	Suspended from school
	Skived or bunked off school
Risk taking behaviours	Drink alcohol
	Smoke cigarettes
	Take illegal drugs
	Contacted by the police in last 12 months
	Asked by the police to stop doing something
GCSE attainment	Did not achieve a grade C in English
	Did not achieve a grade C in Maths

The following steps were followed as the basis for identifying a group of young people at risk of becoming NEET in the future.

- **Step 1 – Generating a risk score for NEET young people:**
 - NEET young people were given a score of 1 or 0 for each of the 28 risk factors identified in Table 6 above. A score of 1 was assigned if the particular factor was present, for example, if a young person stated they had a caring responsibility (i.e. they have answered yes). A score of 0 was assigned if the factor was not present²².

²² For those factors that relate to questions with a strongly agree to strongly disagree scale, where strongly agree related to a positive response, a 1 was assigned for 'strongly agree' or 'agree' and a 0 was assigned for a strongly disagree or disagree response which denoted a negative response.

- An overall score out of 100 is generated for each person depending on how many of the 28 factors apply, e.g. if 9 factors applied, the resultant score would be 32.1²³.
- **Step 2 – Profiling the risk scores of NEET young people**
 - The risk scores for those who are NEET was profiled (n=24; 6% of those surveyed). The scores ranged from 12.5 to 78.6 (out of 100).
 - The risk scores for all 24 young people were then divided into quartiles (i.e. four equal groups). The range of risk scores for each quartile are set out in Table 7. These risk scores are then by applied to the non-NEET group of young people to help identify those most at risk of becoming NEET.

Table 7: Risk score groups for young people who are NEET

Quartile 1	Number NEET in each group	Risk score (out of 100)
1 (lowest risk score)	6	Between 12.5 and 17.9
2	6	Between 18.0 and 28.6
3	6	Between 28.7 and 35.7
4 (highest risk score)	6	Between 35.8 and 78.6

- **Step 3 – Generating a NEET risk score for those currently in education, employment or training**
 - Using the same approach a NEET risk score for those in education, employment or training at age 17 was generated. NEET risk scores ranged from 0 to 65.2. It is important to identify the risk of current non-NEET of becoming NEET because it is likely that a proportion of these young people will become NEET post 17.
- **Step 4 – Creating NEET risk groups for those in education, employment or training**
 - Five NEET risk groups were identified for those currently in education, employment or training. Four of these NEET risk groups (groups 2-5) were compiled using the risk score boundaries identified in Table 7 above. A fifth group (group 1) was created for all those whose risk score was below 12.5 (i.e. those who presented very few risk factors). Table 8 below illustrates these findings.

Table 8: NEET risk groups for those in education, employment or training

Group	Risk score (out of 100)	NEET risk	No. non-NEET	% of non-NEET
1	0-12.4	Very low	153	43.2%
2	12.5-17.9	Low	95	26.2%
3	18.0-28.6	Medium	70	19.3%
4	28.7-35.7	High	25	6.9%
5	35.8-78.6	Very high	19	5.2%
Total			362	100%

As can be seen from Table 8 above, even though those who scored between 35.8 and 78.6 represent one quarter of those who are NEET, within the group that are currently in education, employment or training, they represent just 5.2% of this entire group (as can be seen in Table 9). If it is assumed that none of Group 1 (i.e. the very low risk group) become NEET and exactly one quarter of each of the

²³ Calculated as $9/28 * 100$

groups 2-5 become NEET²⁴, this would mean that c. 52 young people are at risk of becoming NEET or approximately 13% of all of those surveyed.

In summary, therefore, within the entire sample of 389 young people surveyed:

- 24 young people are currently NEET or 6% of the entire cohort of young people surveyed.
- 52 young people who are currently within education, employment or training at age 17 are displaying a range of factors similar to those who are currently NEET that may put them at risk of becoming NEET in future. This represents 13% of all of those surveyed (including those NEET).
- In total, 76 young people are currently NEET or at risk of becoming NEET at some point in the future. This represents 19% of all of those surveyed²⁵.

Caution needs to be exercised when examining the scores generated as no weighting has been attributed to any of the factors that generate the score. There is currently no evidence in the literature as to their relative importance and therefore, weighting of each of the factors has not been possible. In this study the factor score generated is simply a measure of the number of factors that an individual young person indicated exists for them.

Further analysis was undertaken to examine the factors where the greatest differences exist between the entire group of young people and:

- The NEET group;
- The high risk group; and
- The very high risk group.

Table 10 below presents the top three factors for each group based on those factors where the greatest differences were observed between them and the entire cohort of young people surveyed. The following points summarise the findings presented in the table below:

- All of the groups had at least one factor related to school attitudes in their top three – for example only 29% of the NEET group stated they were happy in school compared to 66% of all those surveyed (a difference of 37 percentage points);
- ‘Skiving or bunking off school’ appeared within the top three for two groups (those who had become NEET and those who were at high risk of becoming NEET)
- ‘Being bored most of the time’ also appeared within the top three for two groups (those at high risk and very high risk of becoming NEET);
- The very high risk NEET group expressed the most negative attitudes – for example, 100% of this group indicated that they were bored at school most of the time, compared to 33% of all young people survey. This represents a 67 percentage point difference.

²⁴ This assumes that the same proportions of young people in the group that are not NEET become NEET sometime in the future consistent with the current group who are NEET. In the absence of any other data, this is the best assumption that can be made with the current data.

²⁵ Please note these figures have been computed from the data available on those who are currently NEET and as such are the best estimates that can be produced from the data.

Table 10: Top three factors for each group

Factor	% of group	All young people surveyed	Ranking within group (Percentage Point difference between group and all those surveyed)
Group 1: NEET			
Happy at school	29%	66%	#1 (37pp)
Skived or bunked off school	61%	30%	#2 (29pp)
Achieved a grade C in English	50%	75%	#3 (25pp)
Group 2: High risk NEET			
Bored at school most of the time	84%	33%	#1 (51pp)
Skived or bunked off school	76%	30%	#2 (46pp)
Drink Alcohol	79%	36%	#3 (43pp)
Group 3: Very High risk NEET			
Bored at school most of the time	100%	33%	#1 (67pp)
Did not enjoy learning	11%	76%	#2 (65pp)
Like to see how much I can get away with	72%	11%	#3 (61pp)

This is examined in more detail in the next section of this report.

Summary

This section addresses the following research objectives:

- To explore and track the pathways of young people, as they move through the last years of formal schooling (Years 11 and 12) and into the first year of post compulsory education; and
- To identify a sample of young people who are at risk of becoming NEET (or who have become NEET) and profile their characteristics.

Schools were selected for this study based on the proportion of their school leavers who were NEET and the proportion of young people who did not attain 5 A*-C grades at GCSE (including English and Maths). Statistical data from DE shows that for both of these indicators, schools participating in this study performed much more poorly than the Northern Ireland average in 2010/11 (prior to their participation in this study). Over a subsequent four-year period from 2011/12 to 2014/15, the gap between the 19 schools taking part in this study and the NI average narrowed, such that:

- *GCSE attainment:* In 2014/15, over one-third (35%) of young people in the participating schools achieved 5A*-C (inc. English and Maths) compared to 65% of all Year 12 young people in Northern Ireland. The corresponding figures were 23% and 60% respectively in 2010/11.
- *NEET rate:* In 2014/15, 4.4% of school leavers in participating schools were NEET compared to 2.4% of all Year 12 school leavers in Northern Ireland. The corresponding figures were 7.3% and 4% respectively in 2010/11.

The Year 3 pupil survey data (2013/14) reveals that young people followed a variety of pathways once they had completed their GCSEs. Approximately, three-fifths (58%) of the young people stayed on at school to complete A-levels (or other qualifications), whilst the remaining two-fifths (42%) followed a variety of other pathways including: further education (31%); work (2%); training/apprenticeship (3%), and; NEET (6%).

24 young people or 6% of those surveyed in Year 3 became NEET. This group is proportionately smaller in comparison to the overall NEET rate for 16-24 year olds in Northern Ireland (which stands at 17%). However, as data for the 16-24 age group is not available by single-year of age, it is not possible to discern patterns within it. However, it is clear that a number of young people who pursue pathways (other than NEET) at age 16/17, are at risk of becoming NEET over subsequent time periods. Teachers, in particular, believed that young people studying unsuitable qualifications or subjects in which they have little interest are most at risk of becoming NEET.

Further analysis of the survey data identified a total of 52 young people at risk of becoming NEET or 13% of all of those surveyed. In total, therefore, 19% of young people in the sample were either NEET or at risk of becoming NEET (close to the overall NEET rate of 17% for the 16-24 year old population in Northern Ireland in 2015).

The most prominent risk factors for both the NEET group and the high and very high risk NEET groups related to their attitudes towards school. For example, 'Skiving, bunking off or truanting from school' appeared within the top three risk factors for two groups as did 'Being bored most of the time' at school. The very high risk NEET group expressed the most negative attitudes towards different aspects of their school experiences. For example, 100% of this group indicated that they were bored at school most of the time, compared to 33% of all young people survey representing a 67 percentage point difference. Further analysis of this data is presented in the next section of this report.

5. An examination of the experiences of young people who are NEET or are at risk of becoming NEET

Introduction

The review of literature undertaken at the beginning of this project has clearly shown that not all young people have similar experiences at school. Their needs and the barriers they face in trying to get into employment, education or training can vary quite significantly. The purpose of the next three sections of the report is to analyse the experiences of the young people who have become NEET and make comparisons (where possible) between this group and other groups of young people (e.g. those who stayed on in school). In addition, we also examine the range of preventative measures that can be put into place to help prevent young people from becoming NEET.

This section of the report directly addresses the first part of the following research objective.

To better understand the experiences, needs and barriers faced by these young people (i.e. those who have become NEET), and their educators, as they embark upon the transition from formal schooling to either continued education/training/employment or unemployment.

Young people's experiences inside and outside of school are important in terms of the extent to which these can contribute to, or protect against, NEET status in later life. As part of both the surveys²⁶ and the interviews, young people were invited to share their views of their experiences both inside and outside of school.

The remainder of this section of the report is structured under the following headings:

- Young people's experiences inside school, including the following:
 - Attitude towards school and teachers;
 - Attitude to learning; and
 - School rules and behaviour.
- Young people's experiences outside of school include the following risk taking behaviours:
 - drinking alcohol;
 - smoking; and
 - taking illegal drugs.

Caution should be exercised in interpreting the findings where the number of respondents answering a particular question is low. Instances where this is the case have been highlighted throughout.

²⁶ Please note that a number of the questions in relation to school experiences asked respondents who had left school at the time the Year 3 survey was administered to reflect back to year before they had left school.

Young people's experiences inside school

As part of both the surveys and the interviews, young people were invited to share their views of their experiences inside school. Other interview respondents such as parents and teachers also commented on a number of issues that impact on young people's experience of school.

Experiences inside school

In terms of experiences inside school, these can further be broken down into:

- Attitude towards school and teachers;
- Attitude to learning; and
- School rules and behaviour.

Attitude towards school and teachers

As part of both the survey and interviews, young people were invited to share their views about school in general. A number of statements were included in the survey in Years 1-3 to capture young people's views on school and their relationship with teachers including:

- I am/I was happy at school;
- I often struggle(d) with school;
- I am/was bored most of the time in school;
- I get on/got on well with most of my teachers; and
- I feel/felt that teachers in this school care(d) about me and my future.

Table 11 shows that two-thirds (66%) of young people in Year 3 of the survey indicated that they are/were happy²⁷ at school and felt that their teachers care(d) about them and their future. Furthermore, the majority (83%) of pupils said that they get on/got on well with most of their teachers. Pupils also indicated that by Year 3 they struggled less with school (28% in Year 3 compared to almost one-third in Year 2) and fewer of them felt bored at school at this stage (one-third in Year 3 as opposed to 41% for the previous two years). However, pupils were also less happy in Year 3 than they were in either of the first two years of the study.

Table 11: Attitudes towards school and teachers
(% of young people who agree/strongly agree with statement)

Statement	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3
I am/I was happy at school	72%	68%	66%
I often struggle(d) with school	n/a	32%	28%
I am/was bored most of the time in school	41%	41%	33%
I get on/got on well with most of my teachers	73%	78%	83%
I feel/felt that teachers in this school care(d) about me and my future	n/a	n/a	66%
Base	1581-1586	1710-1724	383-386

Source: NCB Young People survey 2012/13-2014/15

²⁷ Those who had left school in Year 3 were asked to reflect on their experiences of school in the entire year prior to leaving. This approach was adopted so that we could make comparisons between different groups in terms of their school experiences.

Looking at responses to these statements at Year 3 by pathway of the young people, Table 12 shows that in relation to almost all of the statements those who stayed on at school were happier, more positive about their teachers and less likely to struggle or feel bored than pupils in the other pathway groups. The only instance where this is not the case is in relation to the statement about getting on well with teachers (with 92% of those in the training/apprenticeship category indicating that they did compared to 86% of those who stayed on in school) and feeling that teachers cared about them and their future (85% vs 72% of those who stayed on at school). Those who are working or who are studying at an FE college and those who had become NEET were substantially less likely to feel that their teachers cared about them and their future (57%, 59% and 38% respectively). Those who had become NEET were also less likely to indicate that they had been happy at school (29%) and more likely to state that they struggled more than others with school (42%). However, despite their disenchantment with school those in the NEET category do appear to have had a positive relationship with their teachers.

Looking more closely at those who, although not currently NEET, but who are deemed to be at a high risk or a very high risk of becoming so reveals a less positive picture. All of those who have a very high risk of becoming NEET indicated that they were bored most of the time at school as were the majority (84%) of those whose risk was high. This is in contrast to those who actually became NEET, where one half said they were bored at school. Similarly, those at a high risk and very high risk of becoming NEET tended to be a lot less positive about the school experience in general: just over one quarter said they were happy at school whilst a significant proportion in both categories admitted that they often struggled with school. They were also less likely to indicate that they got on well with teachers or feel that teachers cared about them and their future.

The fact that these two groups are not yet NEET but are at a very high risk of becoming so is interesting. It may be that, at the moment, that there are sufficient opportunities within the FE sector or opportunities to participate in training programmes or work. Some of these young people may have also managed to stay within education or training because of the financial incentives provided by government to training bodies as there are no state benefits they can claim (below the age of 18).

Table 12: Attitudes towards school and teachers
(% of young people who agree/strongly agree with statement)

Statement	Year 3 – by pathway					Of the non-NEET	
	Non-NEET				NEET	High-risk NEET	Very high-risk NEET
	School	FE	Working	Training / App'ship			
I am/I was happy at school	72%	62%	57%	69%	29%	28%	28%
I often struggle(d) with school	27%	26%	29%	39%	42%	48%	61%
I am/was bored most of the time in school	25%	39%	57%	62%	50%	84%	100%
I get on/got on well with most of my teachers	86%	79%	57%	92%	72%	44%	50%
I feel/felt that teachers in this school care(d) about me and my future	72%	59%	57%	85%	38%	40%	23%
Base	383-386					25**	18**

Source: NCB Young People survey 2012/13-2014/15 ** Caution – low number of respondents

These themes were also explored during the interviews with the young people. Those who stayed on at school cited a number of reasons why they liked school and were indeed looking forward to staying on at school because of the additional freedoms they might experience. Table 13 below illustrates a range of views put forward.

Table 13: Reasons for liking school and staying on post-16

Reason	Supporting evidence
<i>Greater freedom in subject choice</i>	<p>"...It's subjects you want to study not the compulsory ones you have to do for GCSE."</p> <p>"It's good because you're not getting forced to do all the work..."</p>
<i>Being treated in a more adult way by the teachers</i>	<p>"It's far better than 4th and 5th year, you're trusted more, the way people treat you it's different, it's like you're an adult."</p> <p>"It's very different than Year 12...You're treated more as a young adult than a child."</p>
<i>Being more responsible for planning and organising their own work and use of time</i>	<p>"The work side is much more independent, you have to do your own background reading and look things up yourself."</p> <p>"You have got free time, like you can go into the common room and sit and have a laugh with your friends."</p>
<i>The welcoming nature of the school</i>	<p>"I feel like school is really welcoming, I feel like I get on better at school."</p>
<i>Having good friends</i>	<p>"...I mostly get on with everybody, there are a couple of groups but I would move about them and talk to others, not the same people all the time."</p> <p>"I have loads of friends in school. All my close friends got back into school so our wee group is back together again."</p>

Respondents who had gone onto FE, pursued training opportunities or who were doing apprenticeships echoed many of these themes, which are summarised in Table 14 below.

Table 14: Reasons for liking place of study/work for those who did not stay on at school following GCSEs

Reason	Supporting evidence
<i>Being treated in a more adult way by teachers/trainers:</i>	"The teachers in tech treat you more like a young adult instead of a child..."
<i>Being with friends</i>	"I would rather be going to tech than sitting about the house with no job. I like tech and the placement just the same, the only thing I prefer about tech is the fact that I get to see my friends."
<i>Supportive teachers/trainers:</i>	<p>"I sometimes find it difficult to do my work, but they are supportive. They know what I'm going through, they know I'm young and not qualified, so they give me help. They're really nice people."</p> <p>"I find the support in tech much better than in school. I only got support in school if I was actually doing a GCSE, I didn't get help with coursework, whereas in tech I get it for the whole year (young person with dyslexia)."</p>

Attitude to learning

Young people were asked a number of a questions in relation to their attitude to learning in general. The survey included the following response statements in relation to this:

- I complete(d) my homework most of the time;
- I enjoy(ed) learning;
- I enjoy(ed) school work that is challenging; and
- My friends look(ed) down on people who work hard at school.

Table 15 summarises the responses to these questions for each of the three years that the survey was administered. The survey results for Year 3 shows that more young people were completing their homework more often than in the previous two years (80% in Year 3 versus 72% in year 2). In addition, over three-quarters of young people surveyed were enjoying learning in Year 3, an increase on Year 1 and 2 (57% and 58% respectively) and there was an increase in those indicating that they enjoyed school work that is challenging (52% in Year 3 as opposed to 41% in Year 2). The vast majority also indicated that their friends have positive attitudes towards those who work hard at school with only 12% saying that their friends look down on people who work hard at school.

Table 15: Attitudes towards learning
 (% of young people who agree/strongly agree with statement)

Statement	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3
I complete(d) my homework most of the time	77%	72%	80%
I enjoy(ed) learning	57%	58%	76%
I enjoy(ed) school work that is challenging	n/a*	41%	52%
My friends look(ed) down on people who work hard at school	n/a	13%	12%
Base	1581-1586	1710-1724	383-386

Source: NCB Young People survey 2012/13-2014/15

* Question item not included in the survey in Year 1

Looking at the responses to these statements by Year 3 pathway categories reveals substantial differences between the groups. For example, those who stayed on at school were much more likely than the other groups to indicate that they completed their homework most of the time (87%) and that they enjoy learning (83%). However, slightly more of the young people who went to FE and those who had become NEET indicated that they enjoyed school work that is challenging (56% and 54% respectively). In addition over-three quarters of young people who had become NEET stated that they enjoyed learning. In terms of young people's attitudes towards those who work hard at school, those who continued on at school and those in training/apprenticeships indicated that their friends had positive attitudes towards working hard (only 8% said their friends looked down on people who worked hard at school). This is in contrast to those in FE (16%), and those who are working (14%) and particularly for those in the NEET category where over one-fifth (21%) agreed with this statement.

Looking more closely at those who are at a high risk or a very high risk of becoming NEET, reveals quite a complex picture. Only one third (34%) of those who are at a very high risk of becoming NEET indicated that they completed their homework most of the time compared to 60% of the high risk NEET group. This difference between the two at risk groups is also apparent in the responses to the statement about enjoying learning with the high risk group being more like the FE group (64% and 68% respectively) than the very high risk group. The very high risk group were also twice as likely to say that their friends looked down on people who worked hard at school than the high risk group whilst there was less difference between the two groups in terms of enjoying challenging school work (only 4 percentage points difference).

Table 16: Attitudes towards learning
(% of young people who agree/strongly agree with statement)

Statement	Year 3 – by pathway					Of the non-NEET	
	Non-NEET				NEET	High-risk NEET	Very high-risk NEET
	School	FE	Working	Training/ App'ship			
I complete(d) my homework most of the time	87%	75%	57%	69%	54%	60%	34%
I enjoy(ed) learning	83%	68%	43%	39%	79%	64%	12%
I enjoy(ed) school work that is challenging	52%	56%	29%	39%	54%	32%	28%
My friends look(ed) down on people who work(ed) hard at school	8%	16%	14%	8%	21%	12%	28%
Base	383-386					25**	18**

Source: NCB Young People survey 2012/13-2014/15 ** Caution – low number of respondents

Some of these topics were also explored during the interviews with the young people. Several of those who stayed on at school referred to the challenging, but enjoyable, nature of the work post GCSE:

“School is harder this year but I enjoy it more.” (Young person)

“...you have a lot more coursework than GCSE. I thought for a time I was a bit mad going back but I actually enjoy it.” (Young person)

Those who went onto FE or another training institution tended to highlight that much of the work they did now was more practical or tangible in nature, which, for many, suited their learning style:

“I like it because I get to do people’s hair and you get to learn to be a hairdresser.” (Young person)

“I do find there is a lot of work, you could have a lot of assignments which can be stressful, but I try and keep on top of it as best I can. I get on well with the performing arts people in tech from being involved in the pantomime for so long.” (Young person)

However, for one young person who had become NEET a combination of workload and the number of teachers proved too much and she did not complete the courses she had enrolled in:

“... I was doing BTEC health and social care, A-Level business studies and BTEC IT, but I left business studies half way through because there was too much pressure. I just stuck with IT and Health and Social care. The work was not too bad. It’s just I had six teachers for health and social care and everybody was complaining about that, it was just crazy. Two or three is bad enough but six!” (Young person)

School rules and behaviour

In Year 2 of the study, additional question items were added to the survey in relation to pupils’ attitudes to schools rules and their general behaviour in school. Young people were asked to respond to the following statements in this area:

- I like(d) to see how much I can get away with at school/when I was at school;
- I do/did the opposite of what people tell/told me, just to make them mad;
- I ignore(d) rules at school that get/got in my way; and
- I got into fights at school in the last 12 months/in the last year of school.

Table 17 summarises the young people’s responses to these statements over the course of the three years of the study. It illustrates that in Year 3, that young people were less likely to break school rules and push boundaries than they were in Year 2. For example, 11% indicated that they liked to see how much they get away with at school in Year 3 as opposed to almost one fifth (19%) in Year 2.

Table 17: Young people’s behaviour and attitudes towards school rules
(% of young people who agree/strongly agree with statement)

Statement	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3
I like(d) to see how much I can get away with at school/when I was at school	n/a	19%	11%
I do/did the opposite of what people tell/told me, just to make them mad	n/a	9%	4%
I ignore(d) rules at school that get/got in my way	n/a	10%	7%
I got into fights at school in the last 12 months/in the last year of school.	n/a	7%	5%
Base	1581-1586	1710-1724	383-386

Source: NCB Young People survey 2012/13-2014/15

However, looking at the responses in Year 3 by pathway, there is a marked contrast between the responses of different groups. Those who remained at school were substantially less likely to break rules or push boundaries. Only 6% or fewer of those at school agreed or strongly agreed with this statement. In contrast those in training/apprenticeships and those who had become NEET were much more likely to state that they would do this (39% and 29% respectively). Similarly these two categories indicated they were more likely to push boundaries by doing the opposite of what was required (23% and 13%) and to ignore rules that got in their way (31% and 17%). Possibly more worrying is the fact that over one fifth (21%) of those who had become NEET indicated that they had been involved in fighting at school in the past year compared with only 1% of those who stayed at school, 8% of those in training/apprenticeships and 9% of those in FE. So, whilst those in training or apprenticeships demonstrate a lack of respect for rules and boundaries, their behaviour does not seem to get so out of control that it results in aggressive behaviour towards others. Interestingly, those who are working seem to have much greater regard for rules (aside from seeing how much they can get away with) than any of the other categories as none of the respondents in this category indicated that they do the opposite of what is required, that they ignored rules or that they fought at school. Perhaps this group have a greater maturity or understanding of why rules exist that has also enabled them to find work.

Looking more closely at those deemed to be at high risk or very high risk of becoming NEET, it is clear that those at a very high risk have little or no regard for rules:

- Almost three-quarters (73%) admit that they like to see how much they can get away with;
- More than three-fifths (61%) ignore rules that get in their way;
- More than one-half (55%) do the opposite to what is required to annoy people; and
- Over one-third (34%) state they had been involved in fighting in school in the last 12 months.

Over four-fifths (84%) of very high risk group are either in FE or are undertaking training or an apprenticeship and attitudes and behaviours such as those described above may contribute to these young people actually becoming NEET some time in the future.

Table 18: Young people’s behaviour and attitudes towards school rules
(% of young people who agree/strongly agree with statement)

Statement	Year 3 – by pathway					Of the non-NEET	
	Non-NEET				NEET	High-risk NEET	Very high-risk NEET
	School	FE	Working	Training/ App’ship			
I like(d) to see how much I can get away with at school/when I was at school	6%	12%	14%	39%	29%	24%	73%
I do/did the opposite of what people tell/told me, just to make them mad	1%	7%	0%	23%	13%	8%	55%
I ignore(d) rules at school that get/got in my way	3%	9%	0%	31%	17%	32%	61%
I got into fights at school in the last 12 months/in the last year of school.	1%	9%	0%	8%	21%	16%	34%
Base	383-386					25**	18**

Source: NCB Young People survey 2012/13-2014/15 ** Caution – low number of respondents

During the interviews young people, teachers and parents commented on behaviour and attitudes towards school rules. Some young people admitted that they did not like adhering to rules at school and often those who went on to FE felt that there were less rules to follow.

“I didn’t get on with the teachers in school I was always fighting with them...they have got less rules in tech – I don’t like rules.” (Young person)

A number of the parents interviewed admitted that their child’s attitudes and/or behaviour was not conducive to either getting on well with teachers or peers and could possibly negatively impact on their attainment.

“...he has a bit of attitude towards school, so I think that is reflective on his work... he hadn’t a great attitude with teachers, like trying to be the big lad.” (Parent)

Some teachers mentioned a perceived deterioration in pupil behaviour in recent years. Sometimes the negative behaviour was considered to be at a relatively low level (low level disruption) but other times it was quite extreme:

“...there is a culture developing, or already developed... where school is just... such a negative thing on the kids...the kids are not afraid anymore of sanctions... the (discipline) policy that’s in place doesn’t work for a lot of the kids...I suppose in general the main challenge is trying to get something from the kids in a class...A lot of them just are not focused and it is trying to get them focused...” (School teacher)

“I have found there is just an unbelievable lack of respect...Every class they go into they... would be showing a lack of respect to the teacher. They would go in late. They would be using bad language in most classes. Sometimes they don’t even know they are using it...So the respect isn’t there, and if you don’t have their respect, you can’t be expected to turn round and teach them a complex subject like algebra.” (School teacher)

However, other teachers believed that sometimes children who are deemed to have ‘behavioural’ issues may actually have undiagnosed special educational needs. The failure to identify and address these needs can manifest itself in behaviour that is perceived to be disruptive or disrespectful:

“...you know we get the notes that in the past they were badly behaved but in fact they haven’t been seen by an educational psychologist when they should have been...in primary school. And then therefore we are picking up the pieces...I am thinking of one boy in particular, he should have been seen in primary school. He was not, he came to us and he was seen when he got into Year 9. He has moderate learning difficulties...” (School teacher)

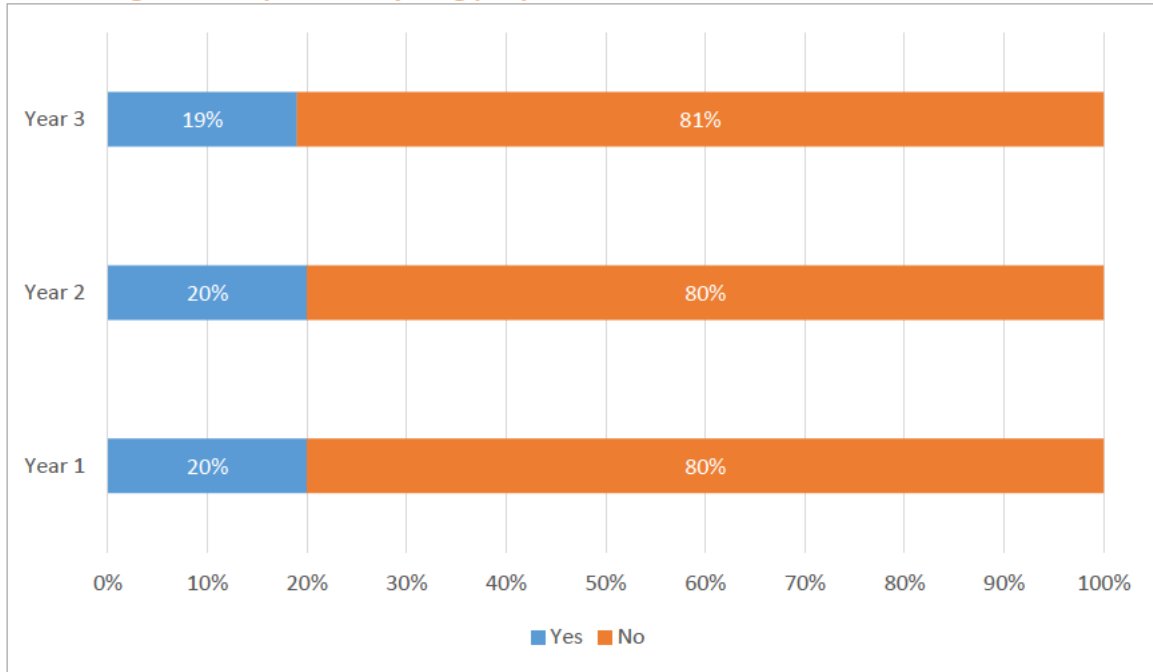
A number of teachers also referred to the lack of support from parents in relation to enforcing school rules and discipline. There was a feeling among some teachers that parents’ actions or lack of action undermined the schools’ attempts to promote a positive learning environment:

“In simple terms where a kid has come into school and they have a fight and it’s a case of well, you know, he hit me therefore I must hit him back and... my daddy says I must do whatever. And it is that sort of attitude (that does not help).” (School teacher)

Bullying

A wide range of other questions were asked in relation to behaviour such as the extent to which young people have bullied their peers or had been a victim of bullying themselves. As Figure 6 illustrates, over the course of the three years of this study, approximately one-fifth of respondents indicated that they had been bullied.

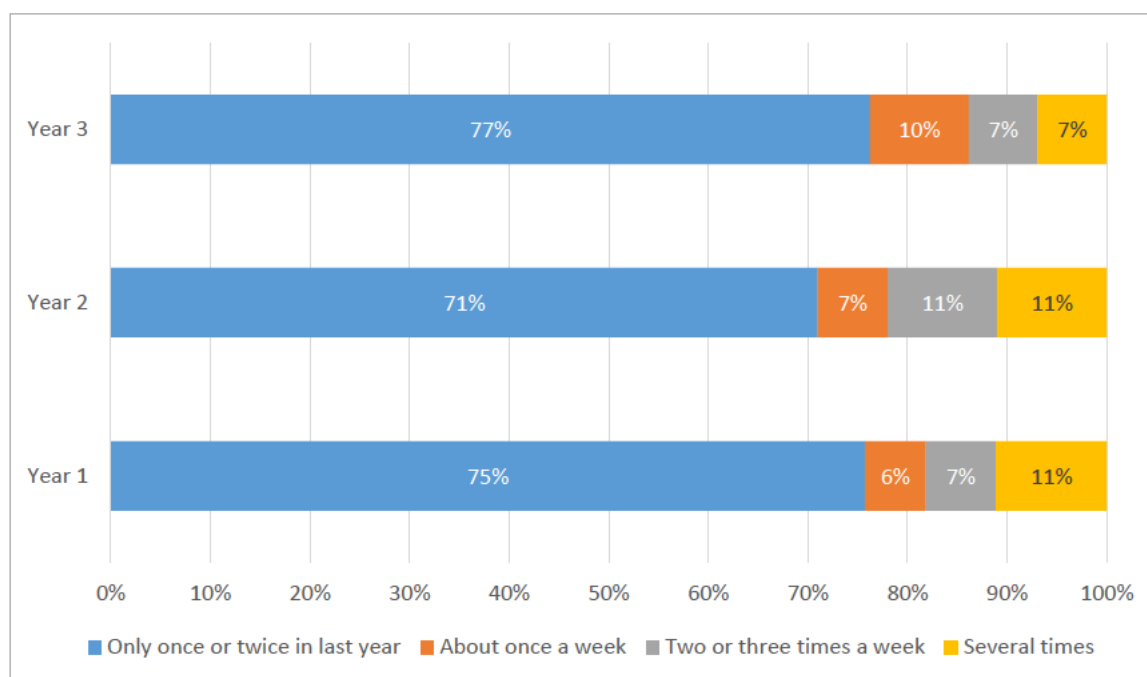
Figure 6: Proportion of young people who have been bullied in last 12 months



Base: Year 1, 1,576; Year 2, 1,701; Year 3, 386
Source: NCB Young People survey 2012/13-2014/15

When examined more closely, it shows that many of those who said they were bullied also indicated that this had only happened once or twice in the last year (see Figure 7). Such incidents, whilst distressing for the individual, do not actually constitute bullying as it is currently defined by the Northern Ireland Anti-Bullying Forum (NIABF). NIABF defines bullying as the repeated use of power by one or more persons intentionally to hurt, harm or adversely affect the rights and needs of another or others (NIABF website). Therefore, of those who stated they were bullied in the last 12 months, almost a quarter of these respondents were repeatedly the victim of bullying (once a week or more often) in Years 1 and 3 whilst 29% were repeatedly bullied in Year 2.

Figure 7: Of those who were bullied, extent of bullying in last 12 months



Base: Year 1, 309; Year 2, 343; Year 3, 74

Source: NCB Young People survey 2012/13-2014/15

Closer inspection of the extent of bullying in Year 3 and the pathways of young people shows that young people whose pathway was either work or NEET were more likely to have reported being bullied at school in the last 12 months. Similarly, the high risk and very high risk groups of young people were more likely to report having been bullied in the previous 12 months than the overall average. Table 19 below illustrates this.

Table 19: % of young people who have been bullied in the last 12 months by pathway and by NEET risk level

	Bullied in the last 12 months?	
	Yes	No
Pathway		
School	14%	86%
FE College	24%	76%
Work	71%	29%
Training/Apprenticeship	15%	85%
NEET	33%	67%
NEET risk level**		
High	40%	60%
Very high	33%	67%

Base: 386 (pathway) and 43 (NEET risk groups) ** Caution – low number of respondents

Source: NCB Young People survey, 2014/15

Not only were those who were NEET more likely to have been the victim of bullying than almost all other categories but a higher proportion of this group were bullied more frequently than any other group based on the pathway the young person followed. In terms of the NEET risk groups, those in the very high risk group were more likely to have been bullied more frequently than the overall group.

Table 20: Frequency of bullying over the last 12 months by pathway and by NEET risk level

Pathway	Frequency of bullying	
	About once or twice a year	About once a week or more often
Pathway		
School	77%	23%
FE College	82%	18%
Work	80%	20%
Training/Apprenticeship	100%	0%
NEET	50%	50%
NEET risk level**		
High	90%	10%
Very high	67%	33%

Base: 74 (pathway) and 16 (NEET risk groups) ** Caution – low number of respondents

Source: NCB Young People survey, 2014/15

Closer examination of the statistics on bullying reveal that those who are currently not NEET but are at a high or very high risk of becoming NEET were also much more likely than all of the other groups (apart from those who are now at work) to have experienced bullying. Some 40% of those deemed to be at high risk and one-third (33%) of those deemed to be at a very high risk of becoming NEET indicated they had been bullied in the previous 12 months.

The issue of bullying was also discussed during the interviews. Some teachers referred to the role that social media and technology play in bullying behaviour which may happen outside of school, but nevertheless, impacts on the school, its pupils and teachers.

“I know from just speaking at different meetings at the school that it (bullying) is quite prominent in the older boys. Year 13, Year 14 there’s a few different things have come up, with Facebook and Twitter and MSN, which has been sorted.” (School teacher)

“...when we have difficulties and issues (in terms of bullying) it’s because of the difficult things about the internet and the Facebook contacts and all of that...what happens outside of school is therefore brought into school and we have to deal with it.” (School teacher)

Missing school - truanting, absenteeism and suspensions.

Young people may miss school because of truanting, absenteeism and/or due to being suspended which is sometimes used as a sanction by schools for poor behaviour.

Young people were asked a series of questions about whether, and how often, they truanted²⁸ from school, if at all. Overall, the trend is one of increasing proportions of young people truanting from school over the three years of the study. For example, whilst four-fifths (80%) of those surveyed indicated that they never truanted in Year 1, this reduced to 70% by Year 3. Table 21 illustrates these responses.

²⁸ Expressed as bunking or skiving off school in the young people’s questionnaires.

Table 21: Frequency of skiving or bunking off school over previous 12 month period

Frequency	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3
Never	80%	73%	70%
For the odd day or class	15%	19%	22%
For particular days or classes	3%	5%	5%
For a few days at a time	2%	2%	2%
For weeks at a time	<1%	1%	1%
Totals	100%	100%	100%
Base	1,590	1,728	389

Source: NCB Young People survey 2012/13-2014/15

Further analysis of the survey data in Year 3 by pathway of school leaver, revealed that those who went on to undertake training/apprenticeship and those who became NEET were more likely to truant than other groups of school leavers. For example, whilst 78% of those surveyed in Year 3 who stayed in school indicated that they had never truanted from school, 46% and 39% respectively of those who went to undertake an apprenticeship or those left school and became NEET indicated that they had not.

Closer examination of the statistics relating to those deemed to be a very high or a high risk of becoming NEET reveals that only about a quarter (24%) of those who are high risk and over a quarter (28%) of those who are at a very high risk indicated that they never truanted.

A variety of reasons were put forward by those surveyed in Years 2 and Year 3 as to why they truanted from school. The reason given by the largest proportion of young people (40% in Year 2 and 44% in Year 3) was that they could not be bothered going to school in general. Other reasons given included that they did not like a particular teacher (11% in Year 2 and 17% in Year 3) or subject (12% in both years) or had not completed their homework (4% in both years). Peer influence appeared to play a relatively small role with only 10% and 4% of those who truanted from school in Year 2 and Year 3 respectively indicating that they did so because their friends were doing it also.

During the interviews parents and teachers discussed absenteeism. For teachers, absent pupils represent a significant challenge as it means that the pupils miss out on work and subsequently find it difficult to keep up with the rest of the class. It also means that the young people's understanding of both academic subjects and ability to fully interact with careers advisors is adversely affected.

"Sometimes the child would be very bright and have the ability, but their... pattern of attendance would show us that this child is not going to be in school and they are not going to have the attitude required to get 10 GCSE's." (School teacher)

"I would say attendance would be an issue...the pupils that...haven't been in school, ...wouldn't have had much contact with myself or the DEL careers advisor and if they are not in school then they are missing out when we are talking about: what to do next, and going to open days and putting in applications..." (School teacher)

Some teachers expressed frustration about absenteeism and the limited interventions that could be offered to address it.

“... His attendance is 20%, he is preventing himself from getting his GCSE’s... and he is going to be long term unemployed and it’s heart-breaking. I said that to the EWO (Education Welfare Officer)...we’re failing him: he’s the one that won’t come to school and his parents are the ones that are not making him come to school...” (School teacher)

Several other teachers also commented on the amount of parent condoned (allowed or even facilitated) absenteeism.

“We would have good parents that would see nothing wrong with letting their child stay off school if a new video game comes out. I would phone parents to ask why their child isn’t in school...and they say ‘eh, he’s sick’ and he would come in the next day and say of course I was not sick, I was down the town getting my ‘Call of Duty’ game, sure I queued up since 6am.” (School teacher)

“A lot of our pupils would be allowed to stay of school on their birthday...90% of our pupils don’t come to school on their birthdays.” (School teacher)

There was, however, also recognition from teachers that sometimes young people have had to assume caring roles within their households which has had a negative impact on attendance:

“...of course we have some pupils that are parenting the parent. That has a big impact (on attendance and attainment), maybe they are in a caring role, the parents are addicts or whatever. They (the pupils) could be caring for younger siblings and putting them out to school before they go out to school themselves.” (School teacher)

“...a lot of our children are carers to their parent who has been unwell or epileptic or even an alcoholic...” (School teacher)

In addition some parents admitted that they had allowed their child to be absent from school, sometimes due to being focused on dealing with their own problems or meeting their own needs, rather than meeting the child’s needs.

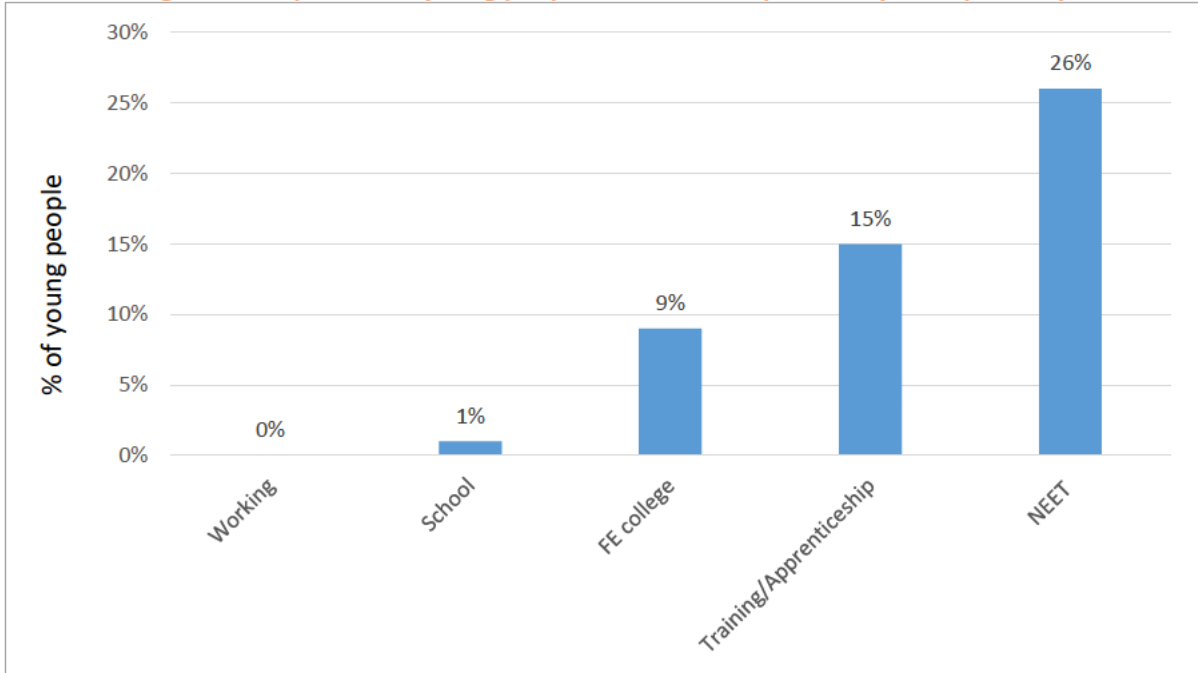
“I think her attendance was something like 69% which was terrible...when I had left my husband we were basically homeless... emotionally I was in the wrong place to support (my daughter) ...she was more supportive of me...I saw the report and spoke to the year head about her attendance and told him the truth I said there are a lot of personal issues going on...I had to hold my hands up and say some of it was my fault.” (Parent)

In terms of suspensions, of those surveyed, levels of self-reported suspension appeared to reduce over the course of the three years of the study, from some 14% of those surveyed in Year 1 to 9% in Year 2 and then further reduced to 5% in Year 3. Whilst the survey showed that levels of self-reported suspension differed significantly between male and female survey respondents in Years 1 and 2 of the study²⁹, there were no statistically significant differences based on gender in Year 3, however it is important to note that female respondents were over-represented in the survey in Year 3.

Looking specifically at the levels of suspensions in Year 3 in relation to the pathway of young people shows that young people who are NEET were more likely than other groups to have been suspended in the previous 12 months followed by those who pathway was training or an apprenticeship. These findings are illustrated in Figure 8 below.

²⁹ In Year 1 and Year 2 there was a statistically significant relationship between levels of suspension and gender with males statistically more likely than females to have been suspended [Year 1: $X^2=61.302$, $df=1$, $p=0.005$] and [Year 2: $X^2=13.658$, $fd=1$, $p=0.0005$].

Figure 8: Proportion of young people who were suspended by their pathway



Base: 386
Source: NCB Young People survey, 2014/15

Examining the self-reported suspension figures for those deemed to be at a high or very high risk of becoming NEET reveals that more than two-fifths (44%) of those who are at a very high risk had been suspended compared to 16% of the high risk group.

Not only were young people who were NEET more likely to state that they had been suspended from school, but they were also more likely to be suspended for a longer period of time than any other group as is illustrated in Table 22 below.

Table 22: No. days suspension by school leaver pathway

Pathway **	Number of days suspension	
	1-5	6 or more
School	100%	0%
FE College	55%	45%
Work	n/a	n/a
Training/Apprenticeship	50%	50%
NEET	17%	83%

Base: 21 ** Caution – low number of respondents
Source: NCB Young People survey, 2014/15

During the interview one young person discussed the impact of suspension on their educational attainment. This young person believed that there was a direct link between being suspended and not passing their GCSE Maths:

“... I got suspended for messing about and not doing my work. Everything I missed out on was in my exam and I didn’t have a clue what to do.” (Young person)

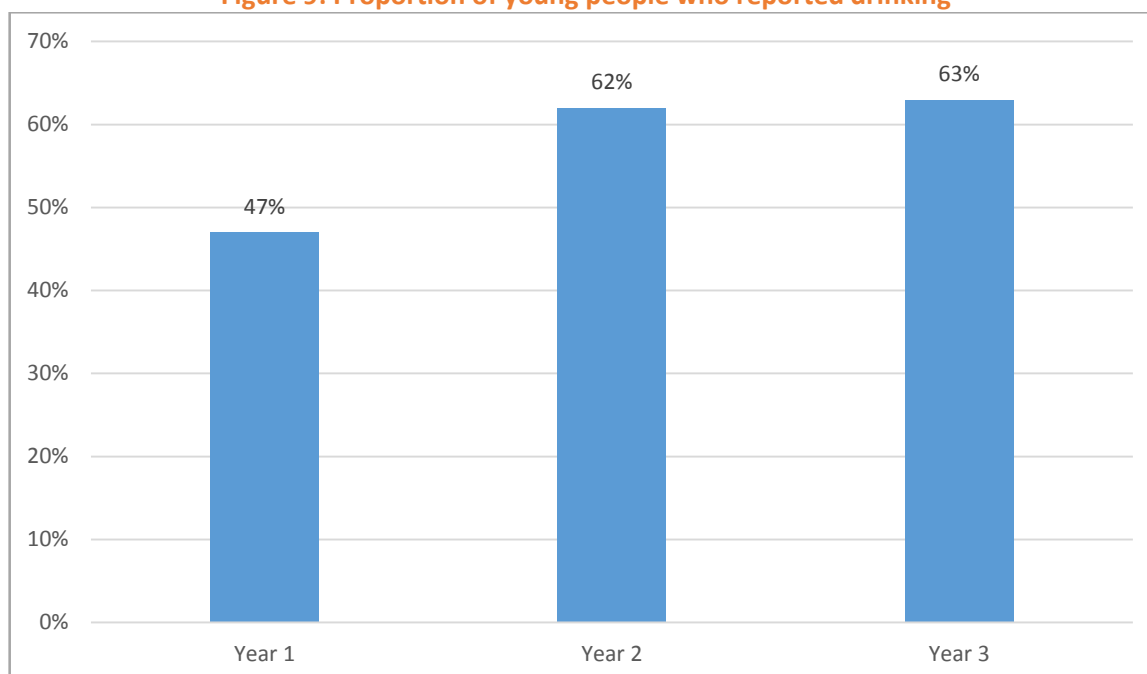
Experiences outside school

Outside of school, young people may engage in risk taking behaviours that have an adverse effect on their performance in school and consequently may contribute to young people either leaving school early and/or becoming NEET. Risk taking behaviours may involve young people drinking alcohol, smoking or taking illegal drugs.

Alcohol consumption

In terms of consumption of alcohol, the survey suggests that an increasing proportion of young people are consuming alcohol as they move through the Key Stage 4 years, as is illustrated in Figure 9 below. By Year 3 of the survey almost two-thirds (63%) of young people indicated that they consumed alcohol at some time in the past.

Figure 9: Proportion of young people who reported drinking

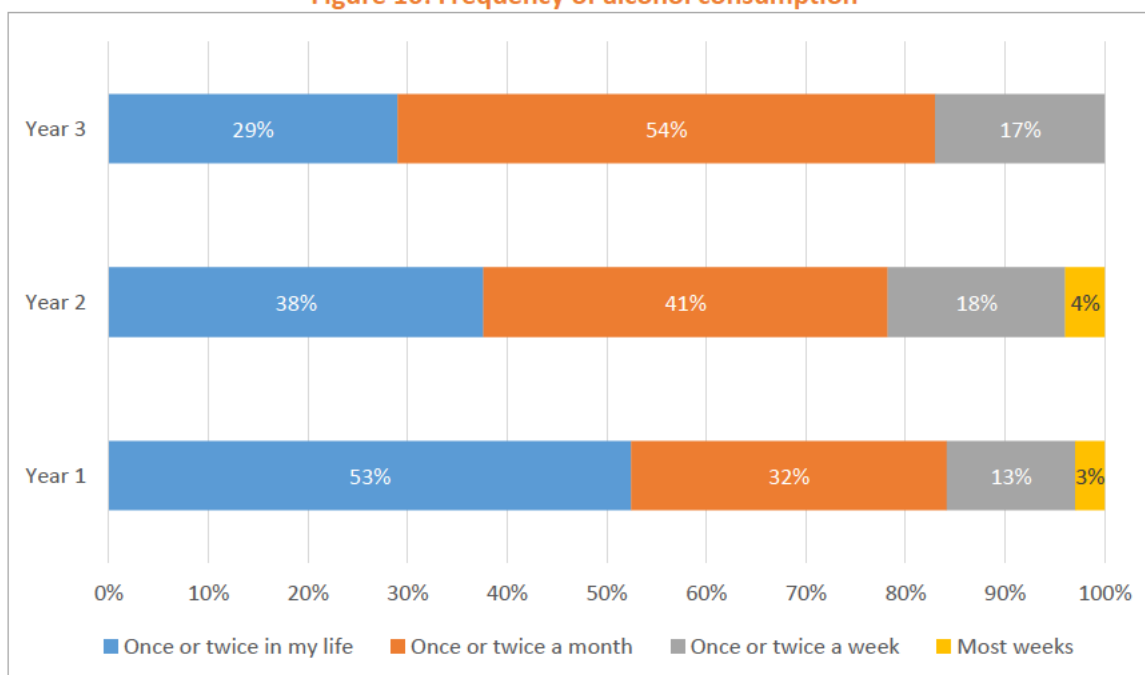


Base: Year 1, 1,590; Year 2, 1,728, Year 3, 389.

Source: NCB Young People survey 2012/13-2014/15

Of those who reported drinking alcohol, there is a trend evident in the data of increasing frequency of alcohol consumption. For example, the majority (53%) of those who reported drinking alcohol in Year 1, did so only once or twice in their life, however by Year 3 this group formed just over one-quarter (29%) of those who reported drinking. Conversely over 70% in Year 3 indicated that they consumed alcohol on a very regular basis (once a month or more often). These findings are illustrated in Figure 10 below.

Figure 10: Frequency of alcohol consumption



Base: Year 1, 732; Year 2, 1,061, Year 3, 239.

Source: NCB Young People survey 2012/13-2014/15

An analysis of the Year 3 survey data in terms of pathway of young people at the end of Key Stage 4 showed that the group with the highest proportion of young people who drink are those who stated that they work (100%). This is followed by those who are NEET (75%), whilst two-thirds or fewer of those who stayed on in school (64%), are undertaking an apprenticeship (61%) or who went on to FE college (58%) reported drinking. In terms of frequency of consumption, analysis of the data suggests that there was no significant differences between groups based on their pathway post Key Stage 4.

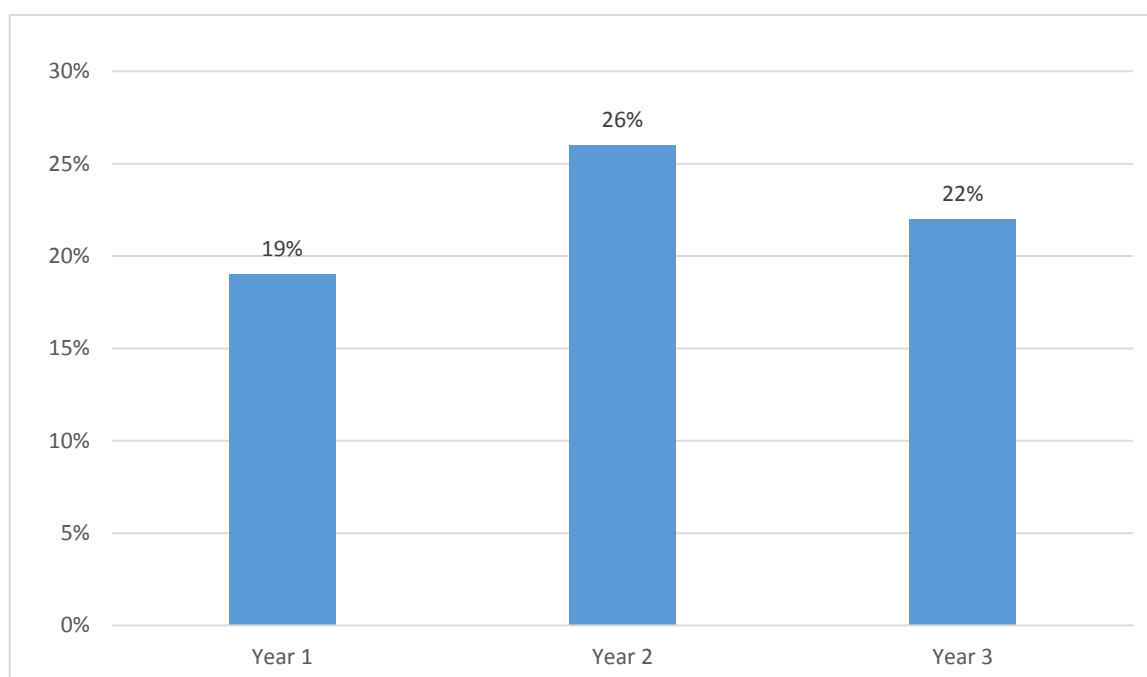
Looking more specifically at the high risk and very high risk NEET categories shows that both groups of young people are similar to the NEET group of young people with 79% of the high risk group reporting that they drink and 71% of the very high risk group reporting the same.

Smoking

The survey data increasing proportions of young people who smoked between Year 1 and Year 2, with a small reduction in Year 3. Figure 11 below showed that in Year 1 of the study, just under one-fifth (19%) of young people had smoked once or more in their lives, however this increased to over one-quarter (26%) in Year 2 before dropping back to just over one-fifth in Year 3³⁰.

³⁰ It is important to note that the number of respondents in Year 3 was significantly lower than in Years 1 and 2. Therefore, caution should be exercised in interpreting these findings.

Figure 11: Proportion of young people who reporting smoking (once or more in their lives)



Base: Year 1, 1,567; Year 2, 1,710, Year 3, 379.

Source: NCB Young People survey 2012/13-2014/15

Looking more specifically at the number of smokers by pupil background illustrated the following:

- **Gender:** Males were statistically less likely to smoke than females in Year 1 and Year 2³¹ of the study, however there were no statistically significant differences in smoking status in Year 3.
- **Free School Meal entitlement:** there was no statistically significant relationship between the proportion of young people smoking and their FSM status in Year 1 of the study. However there was a statistically significant relationship in Years 2 and 3 with a higher proportion of young people entitled to FSM indicating that they smoked³².

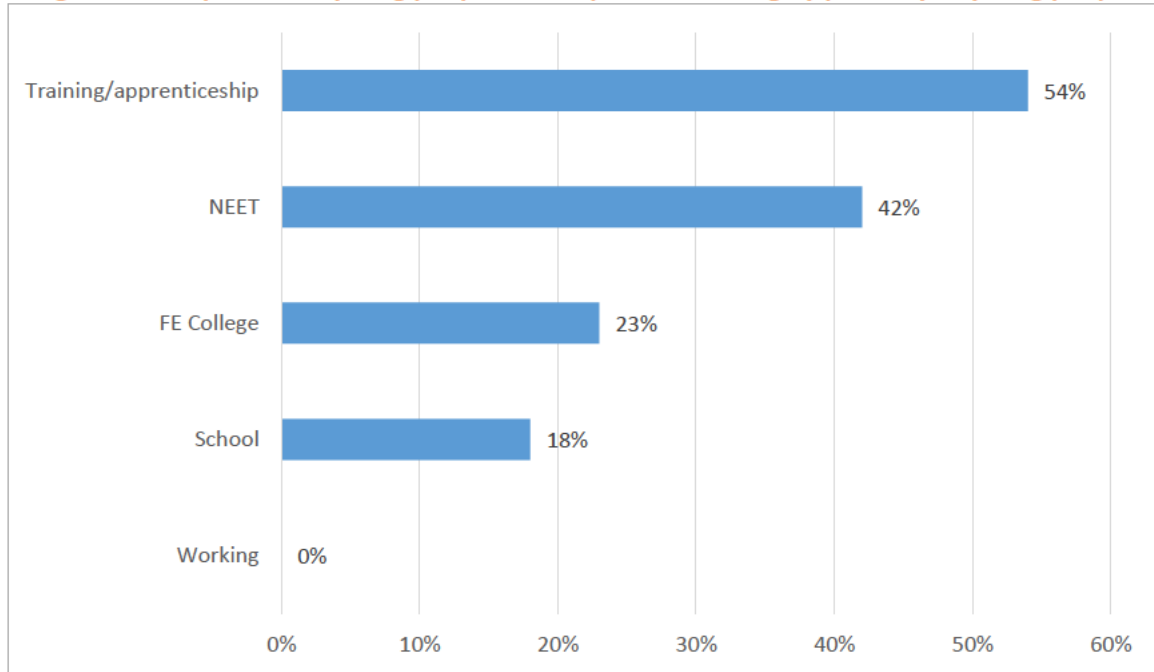
Looking more specifically at the Year 3 survey data and the pathways of those surveyed showed that there is a statistically significant relationship between smoking status and pathway of those surveyed. Those who have become NEET and those who indicated that they are in training/apprenticeship were statistically more likely to smoke than any of the other groups of young people³³. Over one-half (54%) of those in training/apprenticeship and over two-fifths (42%) of those who said they were NEET smoked compared to one-quarter or fewer of all of the other groups of young people. None of those in work smoked.

³¹ In Year 1: $\chi^2=10.276$, $df=4$, $p=0.036$. In Year 2: $\chi^2=11.076$, $df=4$, $p=0.026$.

³² In Year 2: $\chi^2=36.140$, $df=8$, $P=0.0005$. In Year 3: $\chi^2=18.929$, $df=8$, $p=0.015$.

³³ $\chi^2 = 14.756$, $df=4$, $p=0.005$ (Please note that the number of young people in certain groups was low, therefore caution should be exercised when interpreting this data).

Figure 12: Proportion of young people who reported smoking by pathway of young people



Base: 389

Source: NCB Young People survey, 2014/15

Further analysis of those who said that they smoked showed that young people who are NEET were the group with the highest proportion of daily smokers with four-fifths (80%) of this group reporting that they smoked daily, whilst those who continued on in school were the group with the lowest proportion of daily smokers at 39%. These findings are illustrated in Table 21 below.

Table 21: Extent of smoking

Pathway**	Extent of smoking	
	Less frequent than daily	Daily
School	61%	39%
FE College	41%	59%
Work	n/a	n/a
Training/Apprenticeship	29%	71%
NEET	20%	80%

Base: 83 ** Caution – low number of respondents

Source: NCB Young People survey, 2014/15

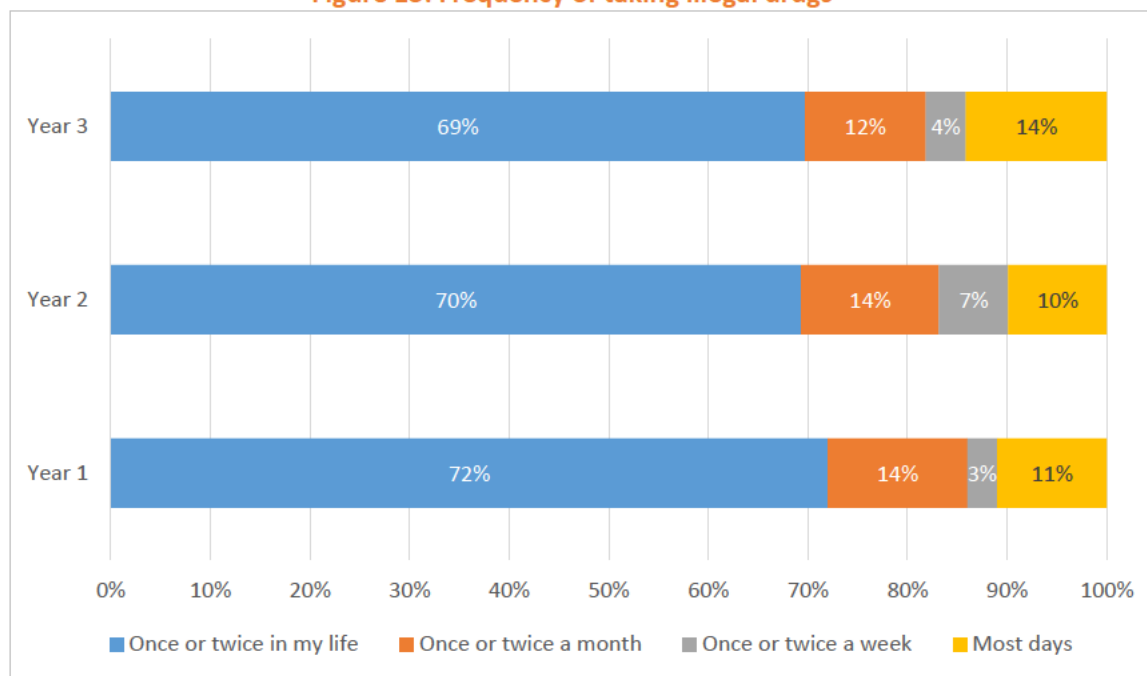
Looking more closely at those who were at a high risk or a very high risk of becoming NEET reveals a similar picture in terms of smoking with 42% of those deemed to be high risk indicating that they smoked (the same as those who are NEET). Almost three-fifths (59%) of those who are very high risk of becoming NEET said they smoked which is somewhat similar to those in training/apprenticeships (54%).

Illegal drug use/abuse

Young people were asked about how often they took illegal drugs. In Year 1 of the study, less than one-tenth (9%) of young people indicated that they took drugs. In Year 2, the proportion almost doubled (to 16%) before dropping back slightly in Year 3 to 13%.

In terms of how frequently young people had taken illegal drugs, there was relatively little variation in frequency over the three years. Figure 13 shows that almost three-quarters (between 69% and 72%) had taken drugs once or twice in their life, whilst approximately one-tenth of those who took drugs, did so almost on a daily basis.

Figure 13: Frequency of taking illegal drugs**



Base: Year 1, 139; Year 2, 281, Year 3, 49. ** Caution – low number of respondents in Year 3

Source: NCB Young People survey 2012/13-2014/15

Looking more specifically at the extent to which young people take drugs and the pathway post GCSE, shows that a higher proportion of those working or training/on an apprenticeship reported taking drugs in comparison to those who were NEET (25%). Young people who continued on in school had the lowest prevalence of drug taking (at just 8%). For the majority of those who did report taking drugs, they did so infrequently (i.e. only once or twice in their lives).

Similarly over one-fifth (21%) of those who were at a high risk of becoming NEET indicated that they had taken illegal drugs compared to 41% of the very high risk NEET group.

The issues of alcohol consumption, smoking and drug use/abuse as also discussed with respondents during the interviews. Teachers commented on the negative impact of such behaviour on young people and their ability to fully participate in education.

“It does have an impact, because we do know for example if children are at the weekend... are doing...drugs and alcohol or whatever, they are not fit to come to school on a Monday morning or any other morning during the week...” (School teacher)

Some teachers linked young people’s access to alcohol to lack of parental supervision or inadequate parenting skill.

“If a child of fourteen is getting access to alcohol, where is this child getting the alcohol? Is there no adult with them? Are they out of the house? Are they getting money for it? It is a supervision issue and that goes back to the parent.” (School teacher)

Summary

This section of the report set out to:

- Uncover the experiences (inside and outside of school) of the young people who took part in this study as they embark upon the transition from formal schooling to either continued education/training/employment or unemployment;
- To understand how their experiences differ depending on their:
 - post-16 pathway; and
 - NEET risk category (of those who did not become NEET at age 16).

A majority of young people surveyed showed positive attitudes towards school in general and reported feeling safe. In addition, the majority of young people did not truant from school, and those who did, did so infrequently.

However, these findings mask considerable variation between groups based on their pathway post compulsory schooling:

- The group who **continued on at school** generally demonstrated the most positive attitudes towards school and their teachers, and were compliant with school rules (only 3% stating in the Year 3 survey that they ignored school rules). The qualitative research supports these findings and suggests that a range of factors (e.g. more freedoms and responsibilities) contribute to young people's positive attitudes toward school.
- The group who became **NEET** generally displayed some of the most negative attitudes towards school (only 29% stated they enjoyed it vs. 66% of all young people) and were also more likely to disengage from school (e.g. by truanting or engaging in activities that result in suspension).
- In between both ends of the spectrum, were those who pursued other pathways (FE college, training/apprenticeship, and work) who displayed varying degrees of positive and negative attitudes towards school.

Looking more specifically at those who are at high risk or very high risk of becoming NEET, reveals even greater variation vis-à-vis the entire cohort of young people surveyed. The very high risk group, for example, displayed a range of attitudes and behaviours that are more concentrated than the actual NEET group – for example, only one-tenth enjoy(ed) learning (12% vs. 76% of all young people) and a high proportion engaged in behaviours that put them at risk of suspension (e.g. 61% stated they ignored school rules that got in their way vs. 7% of all young people).

The qualitative research found a range of potential reasons why these young people might become disengaged from school or further learning:

- Lack of appropriate support within school (e.g. with coursework) for those with special educational needs and lack of support/poor parental engagement within the home environment (e.g. helping young people to complete homework);
- Lack of understanding on the part of some young people of why rules exist leading, sometimes, to confrontation with teachers;
- Undiagnosed special educational needs (e.g. dyslexia); and
- Poor attendance resulting in missed learning opportunities and poor preparation for the future.

Young people's experiences outside of school, in terms of drug, alcohol and tobacco consumption were explored. In general, the picture is one of increasing proportions of young people consuming alcohol over the three years (63% stated they had consumed alcohol at some point in their life in Year 3, compared to 47% in Year 1), whilst the proportion of young people smoking and taking drugs fluctuated (rising from Year 1 to 2 and reducing in Year 3).

In terms of young people's pathways, the NEET group stood out from almost all of the other groups in terms of having a higher concentration of smokers and alcohol consumers, but were less likely to take illegal drugs.

The high risk NEET group were much like the NEET group in terms of consumption of all three substances. In contrast, a greater proportion of the very high risk NEET group than either of these other two groups smoked or took drugs.

Overall, the very high risk NEET group gives particular cause for concern both in terms of their negative experiences of school and their engagement in risk taking behaviours outside school.

6. Barriers in moving on from school into further education, employment and training

Introduction

The purpose of this section of the report is to analyse the barriers young people who have become NEET face and make comparisons (where possible) between this group and other groups of young people (e.g. those who stayed on in school).

This section of the report directly addresses the following research objective.

To better understand the experiences, needs and barriers faced by these young people (i.e. those who have become NEET), and their educators, as they embark upon the transition from formal schooling to either continued education/training/employment or unemployment.

The remainder of this section of the report is structured under the following headings:

- An overview of the barriers facing young people who are NEET;
- A qualitative analysis of the barriers facing young people; and
- Summary.

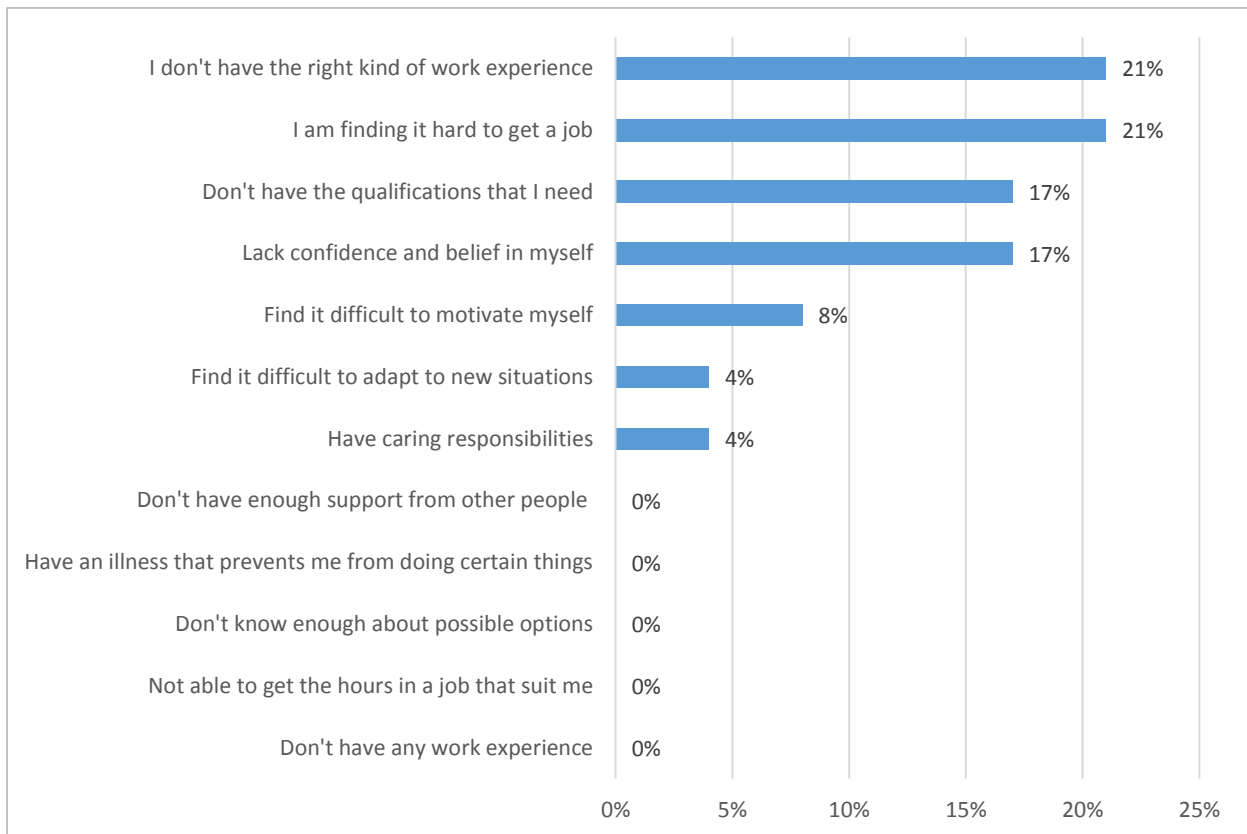
The findings presented in this section of the report are based primarily on survey findings. As such the proportion of young people within the sample who were NEET at the time of completing the survey was low. Therefore, caution should be exercised when interpreting the findings from what is a relatively small number of respondents and no inferences should be drawn from this in terms of the overall NEET population in NI.

An overview of the barriers facing young people who are NEET

A total of 24 young people of those surveyed in Year 3 were NEET at the time they completed the survey. This represents just over 6% of those surveyed. Of those who reported being NEET, the majority (54%) were NEET for 6 or more months, whilst less than one-tenth (8%) were NEET for less than one month.

Both the survey and interviews (discussed in more detail below) explored the range of potential barriers facing young people who are NEET and who wish to move out of this status. Figure 14 below lists some of the barriers potentially faced by young people in trying to move out of unemployment (and into a job, training or further education). It is clear from the findings that young people face a wide range of barriers with the largest one being lack of relevant work experience (chosen by just over one-fifth (21%) of young people. The same proportion of young people (21%) indicated that they found it hard to get a job as their main barrier to moving out of NEET status. Not having the right qualifications and lacking confidence/self-belief were jointly the second largest barriers reported by those surveyed with one-sixth of those NEET indicating that they faced these barriers. It is interesting to note that five of the potential barriers listed were not selected as a main barrier by any of those who were NEET.

Figure 14: Barriers faced by young NEET in moving into education, employment or training**



Base: 24 ** Caution – low number of respondents in Year 3
 Source: NCB Young People survey, 2014/15

Notwithstanding the above findings, there was a fairly high level of confidence amongst those who reported being NEET that they would be able to move out of unemployment and into a job, education or training. Almost two-fifths (38%) were very confident they would be able to secure a job, get back into education or training in the next six months, whilst just under one-third (29%) were quite confident. Only one survey respondent (4%) was not at all confident of moving out of unemployment over the next six months.

A qualitative analysis of the barriers facing young people

Survey respondents were invited to share more detail about the things that might prevent them from moving out of unemployment. Again, lack of work experience was cited by a large number of the young people.

“I don’t have enough experience.” (Young person)

“Nowhere is taking people... and if they are, you need at least six months of work experience.” (Young person)

During the interviews the barriers that prevent young people from moving on from GCSEs to post 16 education, training or employment were discussed with young people, parents and teachers. The findings from the interviews suggest that the following are the key barriers impacting on young people getting back into education, employment or training:

- Lack of relevant work experience;
- Availability of employment opportunities;
- Lack of relevant qualifications;
- Low levels of confidence and self-esteem; and
- Lack of initiative/motivation.

Each of these is discussed in turn further below. However, it is important to note that young people sometimes face a multitude of barriers in moving out of NEET status. The case study below illustrates the challenges that one of the young people who had become NEET faces in trying to move out of NEET and into education, employment or training. It points to the fact that not every young person faces the same challenges and barriers and that it is also almost always a combination of factors that prevent young people moving out of NEET status.

Case study: An examination of the multiple barriers to moving out of NEET status

Introduction

Jane (not her real name) was 14 years of age and in Year 10 when she was first interviewed as part of this study. Jane is an only child.

Jane's mother left school when she was 16 with a qualification in short-hand and typing. She has worked in several jobs since she left school, the most recent of which was for the NHS, where she worked for over 20 years as a member of the Human Resources department.

Family circumstances

Jane's mother and father have recently split and this has had an impact on her attendance at school and consequently on her ability to mix with others within school.

"She missed school quite a bit at the start of Year 11. I think her attendance was something like 69% - when I had left my husband we were basically homeless." (Parent interview)

Jane's mother believes that this along with the fact that she was in a bad place emotionally herself meant that Jane did not perhaps receive the support that she needed.

"She was being uprooted from what she was used to... emotionally I was in the wrong place to support Jane... some of it was my fault."

In addition, Jane's grandmother has deteriorating health and as there is only Jane's mother and herself to look after the grandmother, this has placed a significant amount of caring responsibilities on Jane's Shoulder. These caring responsibilities have increased over time from Year 10 through to the end of her GCSEs.

"My mum started to get ill when Jane was doing her GCSEs but then she deteriorated since then - its Alzheimer's! And it's really only me and Jane to care for her, but it really does have a knock-on effect. She helps me a lot with my mum... 24 hour care, for a wee girl her age it's a lot of pressure." (Parent Interview)

Getting back into education, employment and training

Jane has achieved 5A*-C grades in her GCSE including English and Maths and she has reported a strong desire to follow a career in counselling. In addition, she has spent a significant amount of time in researching what she needs to do to get into counselling.

"I have spoken to two people (classroom assistant and my aunt) about what I need to do to do counselling. I spoke to my careers teacher a few weeks back and I found out that I needed a B to do psychology and the highest I can get is a C... so I bypassed that there....health and social care will take me into that route..." (Young person interview)

Despite this, there are a number of barriers that Jane needs to overcome to get into her chosen career including:

- Lack of confidence
"She is so shy and lacks confidence." (Parent interview)
- Caring responsibilities
"Yeah, caring responsibilities is definitely a barrier for Jane." (Parent interview)

Work experience

Whilst none of the young people cited a total lack of work experience as a barrier to them gaining employment, over one-fifth (21%) did indicate that they did not have the *right kind* of work experience. The issue of work experience was explored further in the interviews with young people, teachers and parents.

Some teachers commented on the usefulness or otherwise of work experience. It was felt that, if the young person had some idea as to what kind of job they might like to do in the future, then a suitable work experience placement could be identified for the individual. In cases where young people went on to a work placement without a clear link to their aptitudes or interests, that work experience was not all that valuable.

"They go on work experience at the end of Year 11 for a week. Some pupils find it beneficial but it depends on what their placement is. If they have something in mind that they would like to do in the future and they get a placement that is appropriate to that, yes a lot of them really enjoy it. If they haven't quite decided and maybe just go to the local shop or something like that, well then it's not as beneficial to them." (School teacher)

However, one parent felt that schools did not do enough to get appropriate work placements for pupils and felt that they then had to find work experience for their own child.

"Well, you don't get any help or support from school... to get people into a place of work... when I was in school they got us into offices... You go now to look for a work placement; it's up to you to find it...I found the work placement for (my daughter) – the school did nothing." (School teacher)

Employment opportunities

During the interviews some young people and their parents felt that the current economic situation (in 2013/14) in Northern Ireland was the biggest barrier to finding employment. There was a perception that there are simply no jobs available. This leads to a 'catch 22' situation – young people could not find employment because they did not have enough experience but they could not get the experience without getting a job.

"The work is not there, they use less staff for the same amount of work, and the money is not there." (Parent)

"I find you have to be 18 or you have to have experience and if you're under 18 it's hard to get experience. I've been looking for a part time job and I'm only starting to get interviews...Once you're in one it's easier to get another." (Young Person)

"I applied to work in shops, cafes and restaurants. Most of them want work experience which you can't get until you have had a job." (Young Person)

However, some parents did think there were employment opportunities available if enough effort was made in finding them, however a number of parents felt that whilst there are jobs for young people, those jobs might not be considered good quality jobs.

"There is, I think that young people who can't get a job are not looking enough." (Parent)

"I think it's nonsense that people say there are not any jobs. It might not be something you like or a stupid job like cleaning or something but it's a job. (There are) plenty of jobs but not good ones for young people. I think that's why some young people join the army, they don't even want to do it, but they want a job and they don't want to clean." (Parent)

Other young people commented that there were not a lot of jobs for 16-18 year olds and that most employers wanted those aged 18 or over, placing those who have left school at the age of 16 at considerable disadvantage in comparison to those who stay on at school or go on to further education.

"...nearly every day I would go onto the internet and look for jobs and they all said you had to be 18 or over or have at least a year's experience." (Young person)

...all the jobs I was looking at before I went back to school was 18 and over or 21 and over. Most workplaces don't think of you as an adult until you're 18 and then you can work more flexible hours." (Young person)

Qualifications

The issue of qualifications was also raised in the interviews with teachers, parents and young people during the interviews. Young people were aware that in order to get jobs or to go on to further education or avail of other training opportunities, certain qualifications were necessary, particularly qualifications in Maths and English, but they also mentioned a range of vocational qualifications and skills acquisition:

"...as long as I get the qualifications that I need I should be okay." (Young person)

"There's some people in my class that are a bit better than me at bricklaying, I was a bit slow on taking it up. But I just have to stick at it and hopefully I'll get better. It's a two year course and if you pass it you can get onto an apprenticeship...If you get onto an apprenticeship... You would just be constantly improving and getting more skills." (Young person)

"Not getting the right results (would stop me from doing what I want in the future)..." (Young person)

"It's definitely hard to get a job especially when you don't have much qualifications. You need your C in English and Maths." (Young person)

Several young people who did not pass Maths and/or English at GCSE were either repeating them or were taking alternatives (e.g. essential skills) at school or FE colleges.

“I passed Art and that’s it, I got a C...I would have like to have passed more....I’m doing English, Maths, ICT and Essential skills at tech.” (Young person)

“...the only ones I knew I was not going to pass was Maths and English, I’m not really good at them. I’m doing my essential skills in English and Maths and so far I am on target to get them. I’m doing it at tech alongside Brickwork.” (Young person)

A number of the teachers interviewed were particularly concerned at the low base from which some of the young people started post-primary school. In particular, they highlighted the fact that some children entering Year 8 (i.e. the first year of post-primary school) are already behind their peers in key areas such as literacy and numeracy. The post-primary schools then have to try and make up the deficit before developing such skills further. Being behind in literacy and numeracy then has a knock-on effect on GCSE attainment.

“...I think those children who maybe would fall into that category of NEET...are falling into it because of a deficit in literacy and numeracy skills... some are coming to us with reading ages of eight and nine, trying to do GCSEs...By the time they get to us, it’s too late... I’m not saying nothing can be done, but there is a plateau for learning and really a reading age of 8 or 9 limits the subject choices.” (School teacher)

“...if pupils are coming in to us with very low reading and spelling ages then it is much more difficult for them to achieve...five A* to C grades at GCSE. So... the major group of underachievers then, are those who come in with very low scores initially.” (School teacher)

Some parents too were conscious of the importance of qualifications for their children to realise ambitions.

“Without your education you’re not going to get very far, you need your education, you stand a better chance with your qualifications. That’s why she (daughter) is going back.” (Parent)

However, not all parents were perceived by teachers, as supporting their children in their education and in being ambitious for the future. A number of potential reasons for this were cited by teachers, such as inter-generational unemployment and lack of capacity among parents for a variety of reasons.

“...I think a lot of the young people...need someone to push them and say to them you need to get your qualifications. We would have a lot of parents that maybe would be second or third generation unemployed and that’s what they see as their career path...for those young people getting a job or further education is not the done thing.” (School teacher)

“Parenting would be an issue, some parents would allow their boys to stay up half the night playing video games, that’s very common....” (School teacher)

“... (in some homes) the skills, the aptitudes and the organisation that are needed to make a regular commitment either to training, education or employment are not hotwired... and young people pick those things up naturally from what they see their parents do.” (School teacher)

“...if you don’t have that support (from parents)... you are on a losing battle.” (School teacher)

Confidence and self-esteem

Lack of confidence and self-esteem was cited by several teachers as a barrier for young people in having the ability to move on from GCSEs and many of the teachers interviewed believed that secondary schools play a large part in trying to address the issue of low self-confidence.

“Well I think we are central to it. I mean if we are not positive about them and if we can’t make them feel positive about themselves, then we are failing them... we try to build their confidence, their self-esteem and you know, even if they are straying as it were, we try to re-establish them in terms of their self-belief and their self-worth.” (School teacher)

“...when you speak to them (pupils), when you say to them what are your skills? What are your qualities? They don’t know. You know maybe that comes from lack of confidence, maturity or self-esteem. And we do our best in school to give them as many opportunities as we can to develop that.” (School teacher)

School teachers interviewed also recognised that whilst they have a role for building young people’s self-esteem and confidence (e.g. through helping young people set goals), not every child or young person will learn or achieve at the same pace, but that by persisting with education, they can eventually get the grades that they need to progress further.

“They may not have got their GCSE Maths or English the first time round, but may have been able to secure enough grades in other subjects to come back to 6th form, resit their Maths and then eventually get it. So sometimes it can just take children a little bit longer.” (School teacher)

Linked to the lack of self-confidence, one of the key points made by teachers in the interviews, is the very negative impact of the selective education system in Northern Ireland. Several teachers mentioned how the young people’s self-esteem and confidence had been damaged immediately following the transfer tests resulting in post-primary teachers having to build this back up from Year 8 onwards.

“...there’s a sizeable percentage of youngsters when they come here feel that they are failures because they are not going to the grammar and that’s a problem... some of them will ignore that and continue positively. But others will always have that chip on their shoulder and that’s hard; you have to work at that, to make them feel that they are valued and what they are doing is valued.” (School teacher)

“A lot of our children coming from their primary schools have had a knock from maybe perhaps not getting an A in their transfer. So we really have a challenge...in a secondary school, of rebuilding their confidence and we start from there and basically build upon their self-esteem...” (School teacher)

Parents and young people, regardless of whether they had become NEET or were continuing on in education, employment or training, noted that lack of self-confidence and self-esteem was an issue that continually impacted on young people’s lives and could therefore present a challenge to them in the years immediately following their GCSEs. One parent, for example, noted how through a lack of confidence her daughter was unwilling to undertake activities independently – which could impact negatively on her future education, employment and training opportunities.

“She doesn’t socialise much and suffers badly with confidence.” (Parent)

“Now the only weakness that [my daughter] really has at the minute is that she won’t go anywhere on her own. I’d say to her, would you run round to the shop for me. No. She couldn’t get on a bus on

her own; she would have to have somebody with her. And you can't go through life depending on other people, you know. So that would be an issue and I am concerned." (Parent)

It's scary going into a new environment and meeting new people." (Young person)

The need for schools to work in partnership with parents and others in addressing young people's low self-esteem was also mentioned.

"The children that have come to my attention in the last two years are kids who have displayed very low self-esteem, are in a very bad place and for whatever reason, are not happy. And we have worked with the parents...in a collaborative way for the good of the child. And nine times out of ten we are very successful in that." (School teacher)

"There's maybe three or four different mentors in our school who are taking young people through study skills, applications and then some revision sessions. We have bought into the idea that if we can split these kids into small groups and tell them their value, and tell them their worth, hopefully then it will pay dividends. Because it is about self-esteem and raising their confidence and so on. We hope in the end that the mentoring programme will improve GCSE results." (School teacher)

Initiative/motivation

Another key area cited by teachers is lack of motivation among young people. Whilst it is difficult to be certain of the reason for this lack of motivation, some teachers did mention some young people being 'lost' and not really knowing what they were interested in doing now, or indeed after, their compulsory school years.

"...Our biggest problem... is the fact that they are not motivated..." (School teacher)

"...So many of our pupils are demotivated for whatever reason and they can't see a point. They don't see a point in school. They don't have a work ethic for whatever reason, when they come to us. And I'm talking about even the first years of them coming to us – they have just tuned totally out of the education system. Trying to motivate them is quite difficult." (School teacher)

Often teachers felt that the lack of motivation could be due to parental attitudes towards education and work. Some teachers felt that some parents did not value education and therefore, it was difficult for teachers to motivate young people to learn and be ambitious for themselves.

"...Motivation basically comes from the home first and I think you have to have that. I don't think, I know you do. Children have to be motivated from the home and parents working collaboratively with the school." (School teacher)

...tomorrow night we've got our Year 10 parents' night...And those folks that you really want to (talk to), will be the ones who don't turn up. So (when) they are Year 10; those kids know, sure it doesn't matter what I do in school, my mum and dad don't care. So therefore in Year 11 when...they don't turn up again, it further reinforces to that child, you know, what does it matter? ...They know that the parents are not going to fight their corner in school, so therefore why should they perform?" (School teacher)

However, the wider community was also identified as well as individual young people's parents in terms of its influence on motivation levels.

“...and also the community’s view (of education and employment)... and I think it is too easy nowadays to say, oh you can’t get a job, there are not any jobs, without actually trying to get a job. So I think the community is a major factor...” (School teacher)

Notwithstanding this, it was acknowledged by teachers that the recent recession and slow-down in the economy also influenced young people in terms of motivation, with many deprived neighbourhoods having fewer job or training opportunities available generally, partly as a result of closures within particular sectors of the economy (e.g. construction).

“...some (young people) are a lot more difficult to motivate than others... and it is becoming increasingly so because of the employment situation in this particular area, and young people are more difficult to motivate because they see the decline in the building trade... trades where their fathers and uncles... were working and they would have liked to follow on. They know there are no jobs...” (School teacher)

However, lack of motivation to learn and stay at school does not always come from those whose families have been unemployed for several generations. One teacher spoke of how some young people knew they could work in a family business or had already got a part-time job at the weekend which the young people felt would become a full-time job – gaining qualifications was, for these young people, considered by them to be unnecessary.

“...Some of our boys...who are very disaffected with school feel that... actually parents have their own business and they don’t need their GCSEs because they are going to get a job there anyway. If they have some sort of a job at the minute, a part time job, they feel that will just become a full time job and I’m there anyway and it doesn’t matter. So, you know, they lose interest in GCSEs because they perceive that they have got a job and that’s it.” (School teacher)

Other teachers felt that many of the pupils who are not motivated due to them assuming they were not going to achieve well at GCSE examinations. It was almost like they were opting out or giving up before they had even sat any examinations.

“I would say the main students who are not motivated are those who... know they are not going to...achieve the good grades at GCSE. ...I would say ... almost a third of our students...are lacking in motivation come Year 12, to achieve anything. It is because a lot of them feel that they won’t achieve.” (School teacher)

Linked to lack of motivation is the fact that some young people do not see the relevance of studying particular topics, areas within subjects or perhaps even whole subjects:

“These guys are going, sir, when am I ever going to use this outside of school? Which is a fair enough question... I’m saying look, it’s on the exam. You need to pass the exam. That’s your passport to a job. And they can’t get that into their head.” (School teacher)

“...they (young people) have to make the link that this is how I get out of poverty and have a better life style or a better house than my parent’s or a bigger car. For a lot of them they are not able to make that link...” (School teacher)

Summary

This section of the report set out to understand the range of barriers that those who are NEET or who are at risk of becoming NEET might face in terms of getting back into, or sustaining, education, employment or training opportunities.

Those who have become, or are at risk of becoming, NEET, face a range of barriers as follows:

- Lack of relevant work experience or qualifications;
- Low levels of confidence and self-belief;
- Poor levels of motivation; and
- Lack of parental capacity and support.

Lack of relevant work experience and/or qualifications was identified by just under two-fifths (38%³⁴) of those who are NEET as the main barriers they face in getting into employment, education or training. Whilst schools did provide work experience opportunities, parents did not believe that these were appropriately targeted to those with the greatest need. In addition, teachers believed the usefulness of work experience placements was limited in situations where the placement was not fully aligned to the aptitude or interests of young people. In terms of qualifications, underachievement in core subjects – especially English – was a particular concern amongst teachers. This deficit in basic literacy and numeracy skills was believed by teachers to arise much earlier in the young person's school career (prior to them entering Year 8) and teachers felt limited in what they could do to make up this deficit.

Low levels of confidence and self-esteem was identified by under one-fifth (17%) of those who had become NEET as the key barrier they face. This manifested itself in a variety of ways, e.g. an inability to undertake activities independently or to socialise and meet new people. Teachers, in particular, believed that the selective system in Northern Ireland has a damaging impact on young people's confidence and self-esteem, which schools addressed (e.g. by helping them to set goals).

Lack of motivation was mentioned by less than one-tenth (8%) of young people who are NEET as the reason why they find it difficult to move into employment, education or training. In contrast, lack of motivation featured much more strongly in the teacher interviews as a key barrier young people face. Factors teachers believed contributed to lack of motivation include:

- Lack of a work ethic amongst young people (linked to family values);
- Fear of failing exams and subsequently giving up;
- Low value placed on getting an education (both by young people, parents/carers, and community); and
- Perceived shortage of jobs, particularly in deprived areas.

Lack of parental capacity and support was a consistent theme underlying a number of the other barriers identified above. Aspects of parenting that teachers considered put young people at particular risk of becoming NEET include:

- Unwillingness to support and push young people to succeed, perhaps linked to their own poor experiences of education;
- Lack of parental control in relation to certain activities (e.g. limiting gaming activity) resulting in young people unable to concentrate in school; and

³⁴ 21% cited not having the right kind of work experience as being the main barrier they face in getting into employment, education or training. A further 17% indicated that they did not have the right qualifications.

- Lack of engagement with schools (e.g. non-attendance at school events such as parent/teacher evenings).

7. Preventative measures to reduce NEET risk

Introduction

The purpose of this section of the report is to analyse the needs of young people at risk of NEET of becoming NEET in the future. This section of the report addresses the following research objective.

To better understand the experiences, needs and barriers faced by these young people (i.e. those who have become NEET), and their educators, as they embark upon the transition from formal schooling to either continued education/training/employment or unemployment.

The remainder of this section is structured under the following headings:

- Qualifications on offer to young people;
- Career advice and understanding the world of work; and
- Parental support.

Qualifications on offer to young people

Through the Entitlement Framework³⁵ young people may be offered vocational qualifications as well as, or instead of, traditional GCSE qualifications. Several teachers felt that having the Entitlement Framework in place was a positive development both in terms of schools being able to provide courses (through their partnerships with other institutions) that otherwise may not have been provided thereby helping to meet the needs of their young people.

“The best thing the government has done and needs to continue doing is to continue to fund the Entitlement Framework because that is giving children access to skills, courses, opportunities that schools could not provide themselves... if we are talking about creating an economically viable population, that is the best way of doing it...I have some children... who prefer to stay in school, who don't want any access to courses outside of school. And there are other children who do. And I think that that provision is a good provision because it allows (that choice)...” (School teacher)

“... (in) some of the courses in the (FE college) they have a lot of links with employers and they can get children down a more direct route, whereas we would have more links with Further Education...In Year 12, those children who do the occupational studies also do a day's work experience...So they do one day work experience, one day at the (FE College), and the other three days they are in school here. So that does appeal to a lot of them.” (School teacher)

“I think having BTECs for the children who do not perform well under examinations, enabling them to create portfolios to gain GCSEs has been hugely important and has helped them gain great confidence in the world of work here at school and so they want to excel, they know they can excel and then they know now that they can succeed.” (School teacher)

³⁵ The Entitlement Framework is the post 14 curriculum which aims to provide access for pupils to a broad and balanced curriculum to enable them to reach their full potential no matter which school they attend or where they live. It guarantees all pupils access to a minimum number of courses at key stage 4 and post-16, of which at least one third must be general and one third applied. The Department specifies the number of courses and is responsible for designating courses as general or applied. For more details see: <https://www.deni.gov.uk/articles/entitlement-framework>

Notwithstanding the numerous benefits noted by teachers in relation to the Entitlement Framework, not all schools indicated that they had the physical resources (such as buildings) and/or financial resources to offer courses that they feel might benefit their young people.

“I would love to see an actual apprenticeship type workshop in place for some of our pupils...If we could do it through maybe electrician work or construction... on-site training. ...some schools do have it already in place with hair salons and things like that. I would love something like that for the children that are not academic...and who would really benefit from it.” (School teacher)

“We certainly could offer many more vocational courses and courses that would be really useful to those kids, but we don’t have the money to run them.” (School teacher)

“... more funding...would help us to broaden the curriculum for these young people... we don’t have the facilities here to offer the range of courses the (FE college) offers and it costs us quite a lot of money to send them down there... CCEA (Council for Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment) are offering quite a lot of very relevant sorts of occupational type courses as GCSEs now, so the curriculum is becoming (broader)... but then you need people in here to deliver it, so with school budgets, our staffing levels are diminishing. So money to be able to employ teachers who could offer these courses and make the curriculum more relevant... (would be welcome).” (School Teacher)

Some of the delivery of the Entitlement Framework involves linking in with FE colleges. However, it was pointed out that for some schools linking with an FE college to provide a broader base of qualifications as envisaged by the Entitlement Framework may not be logistically possible due to the location of some schools and some FE colleges. This was noted as potentially an issue for rural schools.

“Well if you are in a very remote part of Fermanagh, or even parts of Antrim, you know... We are very lucky that the college is down the road, but you know, you could be miles away from your local further education college.” (School teacher)

In addition, it was felt by a number of teachers that some young people are not ready for education at an FE college. However, post-primary schools are typically not allowed under the current funding regime to let children who are over 16 stay on at school to take Essential Skills Level 2 qualifications – these young people must attend an FE college – something that is not necessarily going to meet their needs.

“...some of our children, when they leave here in fifth year, are not really keen or ready for the (FE college), because they have to work independently...they have to be self-motivated and a lot of our children are not. So something that we would like to be able to deliver for them, is ...where they are doing something at school, where maybe we could work in conjunction with an (FE college)... let them look at their Maths again or their English if they haven’t got it, and give them that wee...cushion almost until they grow up a wee bit, or they are ready to go.” (School teacher)

“This year when we were putting in our Level 2 courses, they actually stopped them and they then had to go off to the Department of Education and get special dispensation for us to run Level 2 courses. So there seems to be a mismatch between those courses that would be the most applicable and useful for the youngsters, and the funding of Level 2 courses. Because the general message we were getting was, you shouldn’t be doing that, they should be going to tech.” (School teacher)

Despite the many positive aspects of the Entitlement Framework including broadening the subject choice to provide an enhanced vocational element, the fact that the value of some of the qualifications had been reduced during the time that the young people were working towards them was both disheartening and confusing to the teachers who were interviewed.

“... We did the CCEA Level 2 employability, which was a very good qualification. It covered all of the areas that the Department requires and yet last year, at this time of the year, when the girls already had their portfolios almost ready for entry, we were told that it was only worth a quarter of a GCSE, and not worth the Grade C that we previously had been told.” (School teacher)

Whilst almost all of the teachers interviewed were broadly supportive of a wider and more diverse curriculum to meet young people’s needs, not all parents saw the value of all of the subjects being offered in terms of supporting their child(ren) into their chosen career nor did they necessarily support their child(ren) having to study some of the subjects in other institutions (such as FE).

“They are reviewing all these vocational qualifications... some of them are maybe a bit of a joke. I think they give young people false hope. (Parent)

“If the schools could maybe put in... and actually do the stuff on school grounds, if you know what I mean. It would be far better for the kids, rather than having to leave school to go to tech to learn a specific thing. (Parent)

Other teachers felt that more resources (staff time and personnel) needed to be invested in getting the basics - Maths and English - right. Doing so it was believed would help right across all of the curriculum and would help to prevent young people from becoming NEET.

“... More time to teach English and Maths. It’s very, very difficult on the reduced budget that we now have and therefore the reduced staff and therefore the reduced timetables... More money and do literacy and numeracy, definitely. More staff training for it, you know, and whole school staff training, not just the Maths and English teachers... they (young people) are taught the skills in Maths, but it is in other departments that they are going to apply it and improve it and work with the skill.” (Teacher)

In terms of attainment at GCSE for the core subjects - English and Maths - one school commented on the usefulness of the recent signature project provided to some schools under the Delivering Social Change initiative, which saw newly qualified teachers providing extra support to pupils for literacy and numeracy.

“We do focus a lot on English and Maths and this year we have got what we call the Signature Project...that is government funded, where we would look at target pupils... in two subjects, and we would... really hone in on their skills for English and Maths.” (School teacher)

It should be noted, however, that this signature project no longer exists, due to government budget cuts.

Careers advice and understanding the world of work

Over the course of this project, young people were asked a range of survey questions in relation to the careers they wished to pursue and were asked to comment on the quality of careers advice they had received, including its sufficiency and quality.

Overall, 72%³⁶ of young people surveyed in Year 1 indicated that they had decided on the type of career they would like to have in the future. However, by Year 2, this had reduced to 60%³⁷. This is perhaps not surprising given the life-stage these young people are at and it also reinforces what a number of teachers indicated through the interviews that many young people appeared not to have a firm idea of what they wanted to do post GCSEs (see below).

In Years 2 and 3 of the study, the survey included question items about the range of careers advice activities that young people may have been involved in³⁸. The top three careers guidance activities are illustrated in Table 24 below. It is interesting to note that over both years in which data on careers guidance activity was captured that:

- Talking to family was the main activity that young people engaged in with over three-fifths (62%) in Year 2 and over four-fifths (82%) in Year 3 indicating that they had engaged in this activity. This highlights the critical importance of parents as a potential source of support for young people in deciding their potential future career options.
- The top three careers activities and their ranking did not change between each year and indeed it is encouraging that even greater proportions of young people report being involved in each of these activities in Year 3 compared to Year 2.

Table 24: Top three careers guidance activities in Year 2 and Year 3

Activity	Year 2 (%)	Year 3 (%)
Talked to my family about my future	62% (#1)	82% (#1)
Attended a careers talk in school (/FE College/Tech)	49% (#2)	62% (#2)
Went on a work experience placement	47% (#3)	64% (#3)
Base:	1,685-1,687	381-382

It is interesting to note that in relation to all three careers guidance activities, that there were significant differences in the proportion of young people undertaking each of these activities based on their NEET risk score. For example:

- 91% of the very low risk NEET group indicated that they had talked to their family about their future compared to 63% of the very high risk NEET group³⁹.
- 75% of those in the very low risk NEET group indicated that they had attended a careers talk in school compared to 48% of those in the high risk NEET group and 58% in the very high risk NEET group⁴⁰.

³⁶ 1,560 answered this question.

³⁷ 1,645 answered this question. This question was not asked in Year 3.

³⁸ In Year 1, no questions were asked about this as the young people had just started Key Stage 4 and would not have been expected to participate in careers guidance activities.

³⁹ $\chi^2 = 17.668$, $df=4$, $p=0.001$. The test indicates statistically significant differences between each of the NEET risk categories.

⁴⁰ $\chi^2 = 13.949$, $df=4$, $p=0.007$. The test indicates statistically significant differences between each of the NEET risk categories.

- 75% of those in the very low risk NEET group indicated that they went on a work experience placement compared to 53% of the very high risk group⁴¹.

The above findings would therefore seem to suggest that those at high risk or very high risk of becoming NEET are engaging in fewer careers guidance activities and the lack of engagement in a number of these such as work experience placements, may contribute to putting these young people at risk of becoming NEET. It is not clear in relation to work experience placements why there is a difference between groups - whether the issue is related to lack of interest amongst young people who are high/very high risk or how work experience placements are targeted at particular individuals/groups of individuals. However, what is clear is that more needs to be done to extend the range of careers guidance activities that young people, particular those at high/very high risk of becoming NEET, engage in.

It is interesting to note that overall relatively few young people had talked to either a teacher or a careers advisor in Year 2 (32% and 25% respectively), however this situation improved in Year 3 with over one-half (54%) indicating that they had talked to a teacher or member of staff and just under two fifths (39%) stating that they had talked to a careers advisor about their future.

In terms of the quality of careers advice received, 76% of young people in Year 2 believed it to be excellent, very good or good, whilst in Year 3, 60% indicated that it was very good or good⁴².

Despite the fact that the majority of young people stated they were broadly content with the quality of careers advice they had received and were engaging in a variety of careers guidance activities, both parents and teachers interviewed felt that there remained a considerable amount of work to do to ensure that all young people are adequately prepared for their future career path.

In relation to parents, many reported feeling ill-equipped to support their child(ren) in tasks ranging from picking appropriate subjects through to identifying a fit between their child's strengths and the potential careers or jobs that might play to those strengths. A number indicated that they rely on the schools to do this, however as the findings above suggest a considerable proportion of young people surveyed had not attended careers talks or talked to a careers advisor in the place where they are studying.

"... We will be relying on the careers teacher to help her out in finding a suitable career for her."
(Parent)

"...Whenever he had to decide what he wanted to do... he really was at a loss, and he came and said, what should I do? And also in picking his subjects and stuff, we talked about it a lot as well. But not about what job he wants to do.... I was hoping that careers would sort of come into play." (Parent)

As alluded to earlier, some teachers felt that many of the young people at GCSE stage did not know what they really wanted to do post the examinations. Some of this was thought to be due to a lack of maturity and a certain lack of preparedness among the young people exacerbated by schools who feel they spoon-feed young people with information about options which isn't always necessarily helpful in terms of fostering independence. Similarly, a number of the parents interviewed felt disempowered in terms of trying to help their child focus on a potential career when they themselves had had

⁴¹ $\chi^2 = 13.169$, $df=4$, $p=0.010$. The test indicates statistically significant differences between each of the NEET risk categories.

⁴² The response categories to each question were different in Year 2 and Year 3, therefore, the findings cannot be directly compared.

difficulties with this in the past.

“...I don’t think those guys are fully aware of what’s going to happen when they leave school. I think they are spoon-fed in here by teachers, myself included... and the next thing they come to leaving school and they are sort of out on their own, and they don’t know how to cope. They don’t know how to cope on their own in terms of, how do I go and apply for this job? How do I apply for this course?” (School teacher)

“He wants to be a fireman, but he is too old to join the fire cadets... He wants to be a police man. He wanted to be a mechanic. I don’t know what he wants to be. He keeps changing his mind. But sure I don’t know what I want to be either when I grow up.” (Parent)

Others echoed these thoughts and felt that much more one-to-one work needed to happen with individual young people to help them appreciate how and why they needed to plan ahead.

“Another difficult thing is that our pupils would be very slow or find it difficult to make decisions about what they are going to do in the future. Most would be concerned about the moment, what’s happening today or tomorrow...They need as much one-to-one help in planning ahead and planning for their careers and I know with all the other stuff that goes on in the school, it can be difficult.” (School teacher)

It was clear from the interviews with teaching staff that schools are involved in a range of initiatives to provide young people with support, advice and guidance on careers. For example, one school worked with partners from industry to bring mentors into the school to work voluntarily with the young people and hopefully help them make the link between what they are learning and actual careers.

“We got together with Business in the Community, so we have eight volunteer mentors from (a local firm) who are our partner industry...These are all engineers.... Business in the Community have given them mentor training...We split the kids into groups...and attached each pupil to a mentor... And (they are) doing four one-hour sessions to try and prepare them for their exams. I can stand up in the classroom and rattle on about, oh you need this and you need that and you need your double C in Maths and English. But when they hear it from someone who is what you want to be, you believe it a wee bit more, don’t you?” (School teacher)

Other schools utilised past pupils to make similar links to occupations and/or to training in specific areas, which they felt helped their pupils see why they might study certain subjects.

“I’ve had pupils...who’ve come back into the Art Department, that have delivered Photoshop and have brought their expertise (to the young people). I’m thinking of one in particular who is in (university) doing her degree in multimedia and she comes in here all the time, and I’ll say to them, look, you know this girl sat here like you...And that has a big... influence I think.” (School teacher)

In addition, volunteers from industry often played a valuable part in providing guidance and/or practice in job seeking activities such as preparation for interviews, CV writing and completing application forms.

“...And another man...has thirty two years’ experience in human resources in... industry. So these people know inside out what the industries are looking for and they can tell these kids, you either

have it or you don't. And OK, so you don't have the skills that you need for an interview, let's teach you what they are. So that process is invaluable. It's a good link with industry." (School teacher)

Several teachers highlighted the lack of investment by the Department of Education in developing specialised careers advice teachers. In many schools, teachers were required to deliver careers advice as an additional duty and sometimes did not hold qualifications in careers advice. Lack of investment meant that there was lack of time to deliver what teachers considered a high quality careers advice service.

"The lack of funding for careers (is an issue). I could do careers full time, but the Department won't fund a teacher when all they do is careers, you also have other responsibilities, which means you don't have as much time as you would like to devote to giving pupils information and help so that they make informed choices....I'm the only careers teacher in the school." (School teacher)

One school in this study had access to a DEL Careers Advisor which they felt was a huge resource for them. The DEL advisor in conjunction with the young people, teachers and parents helped to develop a career plan for each young person. In addition, it was felt that this advisor was more up to date on training and employment opportunities than a teacher (who is not a career guidance teacher) is and also had very valuable links to industry. Whilst this service appears to be available to all post-primary schools in Northern Ireland, it was not clear from the interviews undertaken whether each school was making full use of the service provided.

"...she is invaluable. The DEL help is invaluable. ...For the secondary sector, DEL are essential... Fabulous service. I would be devastated if the plug was pulled on DEL involvement with the secondary sector, honestly. It is really needed, really needed." (School teacher)

Several teachers commented on the mis-match between young people's aspirations and the reality of the qualifications they were able to take. Whilst teachers were careful not to demean or disregard the ambitions of the young people, they also felt they needed to be as honest as possible and explore the most suitable entry routes into the young people's chosen careers:

"Occasionally there would be one or two people whose aspiration is far too high, and you never want to deflate that entirely, but you really know from their skill base and so on that they think they are going to be astronauts or pilots or whatever, and that's not really going to be appropriate for them." (School teacher)

"I have to be very diplomatic when I am talking to my vocational people and I know they've put down that they are interested in a job that requires a university degree. Who am I to tell them that they are not going to have a university degree? And in some cases they develop and they can go on to do that... people do develop and do blossom...but the vast majority will not, and it is being very diplomatic... OK maybe we'll look at technician level, you know, in that particular job or whatever. I don't want to take the rug from under them by any means, you know, I don't want to knock their aspirations." (School teacher)

However, most teachers felt that young people being over-ambitious was actually less of an issue as opposed to young people not having any ambition at all.

Parenting

All of the parents that were interviewed as part of this research believed strongly in the value and importance of their son(s)/daughter(s) getting a good education despite the fact that sometimes it can be difficult for them to get this message through to their child(ren). In addition, all of the young people interviewed said that their parent(s) consistently conveyed this message, although there was a certain sense of indifference conveyed by many of the young people interviewed.

“It’s very important they get their education.” (Parent)

“But I do believe that school is very important for them... but with some children, it is hard to just get them to see that.” (Parent)

“My parents take it seriously for me to go on to FE. I don’t mind what I do.” (Young person)

“My mum would have talked to me more about... before I went on work experience, if that’s definitely what I wanted to do, and like when we were picking our GCSE choices, like she was the one that was saying what would be good. I might not have listened to her on some, but I listened to her on others.” (Young person)

However, as discussed above, parents often felt ill-equipped to support their child’s education and provide them with direction for deciding their future career. Indeed some of the young people themselves appear to suggest that parents themselves lack the knowledge or skills to support their child’s education suggesting an unmet educational need on the part of parents.

“Yeah, I have to do most of their (younger siblings) homework because mummy doesn’t understand it... they don’t help me with anything. They don’t know the stuff we do at school.” (Young person)

Similarly, several teachers felt that parents needed more support in helping them be more effective in terms of supporting their child’s learning and highlighted the limitations of schools to influence parenting.

“At the end of the day we are the educators... but we don’t have any control over home factors. We don’t have any control over the skills of parents.” (School teacher)

“... Parents need all the support they can get and so do the schools, and it is a two-way street. The parents and the school work together and...it is all...for the good of their (children). And I don’t think (our town) or our school is unique in that... I think that’s right across the board.” (School teacher)

Some schools have, through initiatives like full service schools and extended schools, been able to add to the expertise in their staff team. External organisations that specialise in a variety of areas have been utilised to complement the existing staff and to support young people’s readiness to learn. However, this type of support appears to be reactionary (i.e. dealing with situations arising), rather than preventative (i.e. dealing with situations before they arise).

We are a full service, extended school ...and it means we have a lot of external... agencies who come in to work with the (pupils)...we have other people that we can refer to...all these different people who come in and they can deal with situations urgently or spend a lot of time, you know, weeks, dealing with a pupil...So the ethos really is, fostering a readiness to learn.

It was also clear from many of the interviews conducted with school staff that there is a wide variety of other services and support available to them. For example, one school commented on the supportive nature of the Education Welfare Service (EWS) in terms of the non-confrontational manner in which it worked with parents to support their child's attendance at school. Other schools talked about the support provided by the family support officers, who are employed by the Education Authority to help parents support their child's education. All of this support, whilst greatly welcomed by schools themselves, focuses on mitigating the impact of problem behaviours and are not preventative in nature.

"...the EWO services are very good at...forming a relationship with Mum and Dad...with the parents as well as with the pupils, in a supportive role initially. And it is very much whenever we would refer on to the EWO, it is a case of, this is to help you get back into school, rather than this is going to land you in court." (School teacher)

"...we have a support worker that would help bring them into school, help with their attendance and work with their parents to try and get them to see the benefits of education and we would have classes for their parents as well. The support worker that we have actually goes out to the home to work with the parents, it's not just all done within the school setting, she tries to like be a buddy that they can talk to. Sometimes they find school can be intimidating, because they have had a bad experience themselves in schools." (School teacher)

In addition to the problem solving nature of many of these interventions, such posts tend to be funded on a short-term basis and schools feared that these posts may not survive government cuts to education.

"She is employed by the (EA), but as far as I know her funding is being cut and we won't have her next year." (School teacher)

A number of the schools that participated in the research had developed links to specific family support projects in their local community to help support parents and this was believed to have had a positive impact on both the school and the families involved.

"We work closely with a lot of external agencies...one...has a family worker that works with them on small programmes in the school and the community... We work with them a lot and they do make a difference." (School teacher)

Much of what schools do regarding parents' needs, outside of education, involves signposting onto more specialised services:

"I have had parents who are distraught about their child's mental health and maybe they have been using substances, alcohol or legal highs. The parent doesn't recognise that when the child is down or not coming out of their room that they have to go to the GP. They don't have the knowledge that the GP has about how you access a psychologist or whatever other specialist services might be required." (School teacher)

"A lot of the work of the pastoral team is signposting parents and pupils to external agencies that can offer support. We would always ask a parents' permission before we signpost, and they are usually very grateful at that point for any help that can be given." (School teacher)

Summary

This section of the report examined the range of potential measures that, if implemented, could help to reduce the risk of young people becoming NEET.

Three broad preventative measures were identified that could be implemented to prevent young people from becoming NEET at the end of compulsory schooling or in subsequent years:

- **Qualifications:** Broadening the range of qualifications on offer and ensuring they are valued;
- **Careers guidance:** Deepening careers guidance support for young people and making greater use of DELs Careers Advisor service; and
- **Parent support:** Greater investment in early intervention for parents and young people.

Whilst the Entitlement Framework has enabled schools to broaden and extend their subject offering, schools felt constrained in further extending their offering (both in terms of physical space available and financial resources). In particular, a number of teachers interviewed indicated that they would like to see their school offer more Level 2 Essential Skills courses for young people to boost their jobs prospects. In addition to this, both teachers and parents were concerned about the reducing value/equivalence of certain qualifications (particularly those of a vocational nature).

Greater proportions of young people are engaging in a wide variety of career support activities as they progress through Key Stage 4. For example, in Year 3 of the survey (at age 16/17):

- 82% had talked to their family about their future (vs. 69% in Year 2);
- 64% had gone on a work experience placement (vs. 47% in Year 2); and
- 62% had attended a careers talk in school (vs. 49% in Year 2).

However, the high/very high risk NEET groups were much less likely to engage in any of the above activities. Teachers interviewed suggested that careers guidance could be further strengthened through:

- DE resourcing dedicated roles for careers advice and guidance; and
- Schools making greater use of DEL's Careers Advisor service.

Alongside a strengthened curriculum and careers advice and guidance, teachers believed that more support should be provided to families to prevent problems escalating to the point where more costly interventions are required. Schools that already had tapped into family support projects noted the positive impact these have had in supporting them in dealing with family issues. However, the funding for these services are typically of short duration.

8. Conclusion and recommendations

This is the first ever large-scale tracking study in Northern Ireland that sets out to:

- Identify and track a large cohort (c. 1,700) of young people in 19 schools across Northern Ireland at particular risk of becoming NEET at end of their post-compulsory education;
- understand the experiences of these young people, in and outside of school;
- uncover the barriers that those who are at high risk of becoming NEET face in terms of sustaining their engagement in education, employment or training as well as those who have already become NEET; and
- Gather stakeholder (e.g. parents/carers and teachers) views on possible measures that could prevent young people from becoming NEET.

The 19 schools that were targeted to take part in this first ever large-scale tracking study in Northern Ireland had two key factors in common: lower than average GCSE attainment and a higher than average proportion of school leavers becoming NEET. Despite this, over the period 2010/11 to 2014/15, these schools managed to improve at a better rate than the Northern Ireland average. For example, 35% of young people in these schools achieved 5A*-C grades in 2014/15, an improvement of 12 percentage points from 2010/11. In comparison, the Northern Ireland average for Year 12 pupils was 65% in 2014/15, an improvement of just 5 percentage points from 2010/11. Given that these schools were selected based on their relatively low attainment and higher than average NEET rate of 16/17 year olds, it is encouraging that so many of these young people have gone on to avail of education, employment and training opportunities and they are to be commended for this change. Below, we present the key findings, conclusions and recommendations from this study. The Department for Employment and Learning may wish to use the findings and recommendations from this timely report to feed into the development of the next NEETs strategy.

Six percent of the 16/17 year olds who completed the survey in Year 3 became NEET. However, statistics for the 16-24 age group in Northern Ireland shows that almost one-fifth (17%) are NEET suggesting that the issue of NEET is one that becomes more embedded in the 18-24 age group. It would have been helpful to gain a better understanding of the 16-24 age group to establish the particular age groups (by single year of age) that are most impacted by NEET and the geographical areas they live in. Having better quality NEET data at a Northern Ireland level would help to ensure that resources are targeted at those areas with the greatest need, whilst also minimising duplication of effort. We are aware that NISRA has constructed a Northern Ireland Pooled Household Survey (NIPHS) dataset recently covering the period 2010/11 – 2013/14. This has a an annual sample size of approx. 20,000 adults and approx.. 5,000 children and young people. A key research area which the NIPHS can shed light on is NEETS. We suggest that recommendation 1 (see below) builds on whatever data is already available.

Recommendation 1: Systems for producing disaggregated NEET statistical data should be developed

Given the limited NEET statistical data available in Northern Ireland, Government departments should consider putting in place systems for producing more detailed disaggregated information on 16-24 year olds and the pathways they follow at the end of compulsory education.

Currently, FE and HE providers each have their own respective systems for unique identification of young people, which could be used as the basis for tracking young people's journey through the system. Schools currently allocate Unique Pupil Numbers, whilst FE and HE providers allocate Unique Learner Numbers. However, the systems are not joined up. We therefore suggest that DE and DEL work together to establish a unique identifier for young people coming through the education system, and use this data as the basis for reporting NEET statistics going forward. These suggested changes would help to

The 6% of young people identified as NEET displayed a wide range of negative attitudes and behaviours towards school resulting, in some instances, in suspension. The types of attitudes and behaviours displayed by this group are already extensively documented in the literature review undertaken as part of this study and we were therefore not entirely surprised by these findings.

In addition to this, a further 13% of young people currently in education, employment or training, were identified as being at high or very high risk of NEET status in the years following post-compulsory education. The high risk group were similar in many respects to the NEET group in terms of their overall attitudes towards, and behaviour in, school. However, the very high risk group displayed an unexpectedly high level of disengagement from school. For example, just over one-tenth (12%) indicating that they enjoyed learning. A higher proportion of these young people also reported that they engaged in risk taking behaviours (in particular smoking and taking drugs) than either the NEET group or the high risk NEET group.

A range of potential reasons were uncovered that could help to explain why these young people might become disengaged from school and engage in risk taking behaviours. Some of these – particularly in relation to parenting – also acted as a barrier to young people engaging in, or sustaining, education, employment or training opportunities. Specific aspects of parenting that concerned teachers included:

- Lack of a work ethic amongst some young people (linked to family values);
- Low levels of engagement in learning activities (e.g. helping with homework) – perhaps linked to parents own background and lack of educational opportunities;
- Low value placed on educational opportunities and unwillingness to push young people to succeed (perhaps as a result of their own negative experience of education);
- Lack of parental controls over specific activities (e.g. gaming) resulting in young people being unable to actively engage in school activities; and
- Poor parental engagement with school (e.g. poor attendance at parent/teacher evenings and parent).

Recommendation 2: Early intervention/prevention approaches within schools should be prioritised

It is clear from this study that many of the attitudes and behaviours that young people report have become embedded over time and that much of the work that schools and other stakeholders (e.g. Education Welfare Officers) undertake is late stage, i.e. addressing problems such as poor school attendance. Whilst there is an increasing focus on early intervention across Northern Ireland, more resources should be dedicated to implementing evidence-based initiatives within schools to support parents and families in the early years of their child's life and prevent escalation of issues. It is therefore recommended that:

- *Repositioning government priorities:* A cross-departmental audit should be undertaken to understand what proportion of current budgets are spent on early intervention/prevention services. Separately, a long-term financial commitment to gradually reprioritise budgets away from late-stage intervention (13+) towards early intervention and prevention (0-12) would help to support this. We are aware that Atlantic Philanthropies, alongside Dartington Social Research Unit, and the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People (NICCY) undertook research in 2015 to develop a baseline for investments in prevention and early intervention in NI. That study is a welcome first step in generating a picture of how much is spent on children's services. However, it was unable to provide robust data on the magnitude of spending on prevention and early intervention services more specifically. In order to do this, the report noted the importance of changing the current categorisation and aggregation of budget information to enable limited resources to be more effectively targeted on services that are effective in improving outcomes.

Recommendation 2: Early intervention/prevention approaches within schools should be prioritised (continued)

- *Linking schools into early intervention services:* Schools need to be better linked into a network of early intervention and prevention support services in their area (including services for children, young people and their families). This could be achieved by:
 - Compilation of case studies of good practice of how schools are currently linking into existing community services; and
 - Making schools more aware of, and linking them into, existing local structures such as Family Support Hubs.
- *DE should increase the number of schools that can avail of the extended service model:* Extended service provision can be used by schools as the basis for providing a range of services and supports to meet the needs of young people that they work with. In order to understand and meet the needs of the whole child, the extended schools model could be used as the basis for providing support to parents (particularly of those children where there are challenges in terms of engagement with school). Examples of how they could support parents include:
 - An assessment of parent's education/skills needs when registering their child for the school; and
 - Signposting parents on to other services/support available in their area.
- *Schools should implement specific intervention(s) aimed at boosting young people's confidence and self-esteem:* This research has clearly shown that there is a need for additional interventions (programmes/initiatives) to improve young people's confidence and self-esteem. Teachers and parents consistently pointed to a lack of confidence and self-esteem as a barrier preventing young people who are NEET getting back into education, employment or training (see below).
- *Pastoral leads in schools should take on a greater role to identify and support those most at risk of becoming NEET:* Pastoral leaders in schools should take on a greater role to identify those most at risk through the issues they present with and put in place an appropriate support plan to meet their needs. The support plan for young people should be developed using best practice in participatory models and should take into account the views of young people. The support plan should be reviewed on a regular basis (e.g. every six months) and be made available to the Education and Training Inspectorate when the school is being inspected.

Recommendation 3: Careers support for young people within the home should be enhanced through more support to parents

- It is clear from the findings of this research that all of the parents interviewed wanted the very best for their child. However, a number of the parents interviewed appeared not have a positive experience of school themselves (some leaving with relatively few, if any, qualifications) nor did they feel they had the necessary information, knowledge and skills to support their child in making the best decisions about their child's future. However, as this research has shown, young people most often turn to their parents/carers for information and support about their future career choices. It is therefore recommended that schools offer bespoke sessions with parents about how they can best support their child's future career choices and where they might be able to turn to for help and support should this be needed. In addition, it may be helpful to involve a group of parents in co-designing these sessions to ensure they are relevant and appropriate.
- DEL's Careers Service already provides a lot of useful information and advice for parents on its website including a useful careers matching tool that enables parents to make a link between their child's interests and abilities and jobs that are available. Parents should be made aware of, and encouraged, to use this website. This is consistent with a recommendation made by DE and DEL as part of the Careers Review in 2014.

Lack of relevant work experience or qualifications were identified by just under two-fifths (38%) of NEET young people as barriers that were holding them back. Interview findings suggest that schools did make efforts to provide work experience placements to young people, however findings from the parent interviews suggests that they are not always targeted at young people with the greatest need. In addition, findings from the young people's survey would appear to support this with those identified as at high risk or very high risk of becoming NEET much less likely to report having undertaken a work experience placement in the final year of their GCSEs. Alongside the perceived unfairness in how work experience placements are allocated, there were also concerns about the usefulness of placements where they were not aligned with the interests of the young person and their desired future career path.

In conclusion, it is clear that few, if any, structures are in place to ensure there are sufficient work experience placements available for all of the young people and that they are meaningful in terms of providing for the skills and interests of young people.

Recommendation 4: Every young person sitting their GCSEs should have access to a relevant work experience placement

Lack of a relevant work experience placement puts young people at considerable risk of becoming NEET and prevents young people from moving out of NEET status.

We understand that the Careers Review, undertaken in 2014, recommended a minimum specification of age-relevant work experience be made available for each year group from Primary 7 onwards. Building upon this, we recommend that a work experience placement becomes a mandatory activity for all young people prior to completion of their GCSEs. The Together Building a United Community (TBUC) initiative which plans to make 10,000 work experience placements available to young people, may help to contribute to addressing this recommendation. Core aspects of the work experience placement could include:

- That it is relevant to the interests and abilities of the young person;
- That it sufficiently challenges the young person and enables them to develop a range of skills; and
- Encourages the young person to document the experience and share it with peers.

In addition, and particularly for those that are likely to leave school at the end of their GCSEs, an additional work experience placement should be made available to boost their employability prospects. The second placement should provide participants with a variety of experience(s) that contrast as much as possible from the first placement.

In order to facilitate this, schools could link in with existing private sector networks, e.g. Business in the Community (BITC) who may be able to source work experience/placement opportunities. Alongside this, DEL and DE should work with employers so that a more equal weighting is given to both qualifications and work experience as the basis for progressing into employment, otherwise enhanced availability of work experience placements is unlikely to be beneficial to those at risk of becoming NEET where they may have underperformed in specific subject area(s).

Underachievement and lack of basic qualifications at the end of compulsory schooling was a concern for all of the teachers that took part in this study. It was clear from the interviews that there has been a significant shift in curriculum provision over time with initiatives such as the Entitlement Framework

supporting this. However schools believed that they could do more to help young people get the skills and qualifications they need by putting more focus on core subjects such as Maths and English and by enabling them to extend their subject offering, particularly Level 2 Essential Skills. In addition, ensuring that vocational subjects do not lose value over time was viewed as being important alongside improving provision.

Recommendation 5: DE should consider undertaking a consultation with schools about the impact of Area Learning Communities and the Entitlement Framework and establish whether there is a need for an enhanced subject offering to better meet the needs of young people

- Area Learning Communities (ALCs) were established by the Department of Education to support area-wide collaboration between schools and FE providers thereby enhancing young people's access to a wider curriculum (via the Entitlement Framework). Over time, the number and range of subjects that schools (in collaboration with other partners) are required to provide has increased from at least 18 in 2013 to at least 24 by September 2015. A number of teachers interviewed indicated that they would like to extend their subject offering even more (in particular by being able to offer Essential Skills courses). It may now be an opportune time for the Department to undertake a review of Area Learning Communities and the Entitlement Framework to assess the impact that it has had on schools and young people. The review should look specifically at:
 - The impacts of the Entitlement Framework on subject offering;
 - Whether or not it is benefiting all young people by boosting engagement in their own learning (as envisaged in the Revised Northern Ireland Curriculum (RNIC); and
 - What changes might need to be made to further enhance the impact of the framework.

Poor levels of confidence and self-esteem was noted as a key barrier by one-sixth (17%) of those who were NEET. It was quite surprising that it was mentioned by such a small proportion of young people given how frequently it was mentioned within the qualitative interviews. Often, however, lack of confidence and self-esteem manifests itself in other ways (e.g. fear of not doing well in exams) which subsequently lead to underachievement. Teachers believed that the selective system and transfer test at age 11 played a large part in terms of denting young people's confidence and self-belief, something which schools tried to address on an ongoing basis. In summary, confidence and self-esteem appear to have an indirect impact on young people's attainment and future life chances. It is recommended that greater resources are provided within schools for the implementation of interventions specifically aimed at boosting young people's confidence and self-esteem (see Recommendation 2 above).

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Appendix A: Literature review⁴³

Background

According to statistics from Northern Ireland's (NI) Department for Employment and Learning (DEL), approximately 14,000 young people aged 16-19 years are not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET).⁴⁴ Yet, relatively little is known about this group of young people in terms of their characteristics, experiences and beliefs, as well as the barriers affecting their participation in education, employment or training.

Estimates suggest that about two-thirds of these young people do not have any 'identifiable barriers', such as a physical illness or disability; however, it is likely that many of these young people face considerable adversity in their lives, including economic disadvantage and poor prior attainment. To date, however, research has not systematically explored the characteristics, experiences and barriers of young people at risk of becoming NEET in NI using longitudinal quantitative data to better understand the key predictors of future education and employment outcomes.

The National Children's Bureau (NCB) has been funded to carry out a three year research project examining the barriers of young people at risk of becoming NEET to help fill this gap. The study includes an annual longitudinal survey of c.2,000 young people (from Year 11 until the year following the end of compulsory schooling) attending 20 schools serving disadvantaged communities to track their characteristics, experiences, barriers and ultimate outcomes.

This rapid review aims to inform the background and survey design for this study. Based on the key UK surveys and studies of young people who have NEET status over the past five years, this review focuses focus on:

- prevalence of young people who are NEET;
- different subgroups of young people who are NEET; and
- key characteristics, experiences, enablers and barriers of those who are NEET.

The following three sub-sections summarise the relevant literature, including an outline of relevant topics that should be included in future surveys.

What is the prevalence of young people with NEET?

Before describing young people with NEET status in more detail, it is useful to know their prevalence.

According to the most recent official statistics from the Department for Education (DfE), 7.3 per cent of 16-18-year-olds in England were NEET at the end of 2010 (Department for Education, 2012). Using more timely, but perhaps less detailed estimates, analysis of the most recent Labour Force Survey (LFS) for the first quarter of 2012 puts the statistic at 9.8 per cent of 16-18-year-olds and 15.8 per cent of 16-24-year-olds. This equates to 183,000 and 954,000 young people respectively. Further, the proportion of 16-18-year-olds with NEET status in Quarter 1 of 2012 is 1.5 percentage points higher than Quarter 1 estimates for 2011.

⁴³ This literature review was undertaken in 2012.

⁴⁴NEET includes both inactive (i.e. not looking for work) and unemployed (i.e. looking for work) young people with no participation in either education or training.

In past years, rates have been consistently higher for females than males, but the two are converging: in early 2012, 16.8 per cent of 16-24-year-old females and 15 per cent of males were NEET, an 11 per cent difference.⁴⁵ Analyses based on nearly 13,000 young people who participated in the Longitudinal Study of Young People in England (LSYPE) or the Youth Cohort Study (YCS) (See Figure A1) found that while the proportion of females who have NEET status looking for work declined for those aged 16 to 19 years (i.e. from 66 per cent to 50 per cent⁴⁶), the proportion for males who are NEET and are looking for work increased (i.e. from 83 per cent to 87 per cent⁴⁷) (Department for Education & National Statistics, 2011). Indeed, the proportion of females looking after their families or homes more than doubles from 16-19 years (i.e. from 18 per cent to 40 per cent⁴⁸), suggesting that many females with NEET status have caring responsibilities.

Table A1: Longitudinal data sources

Longitudinal Study of Young People in England (LSYPE)

LSYPE is a large scale panel survey following about 15,000 young people across England. Young people were first interviewed when they were in Year 9 with subsequent interviews taking place annually to find out about their experiences over the past academic year, to see what they have been doing and if any of their plans for the future have changed. The current plan is to follow respondents until they are aged 25 years. The main role of the study is to identify, and enable analysis and understanding of, the key factors affecting young people's progress in transition from the later years of compulsory education, through any subsequent education or training, to entry into the labour market or other outcomes.

Youth Cohort Study (YCS)

YCS, also known as *Pathways*, is a series of longitudinal surveys that initially contacts a cohort of young people in the spring following compulsory education. The study then typically interviews them annually for around three years thereafter. Each survey of a particular cohort is referred to as a 'sweep'. The study focuses on young people's education and labour market experience, their training and qualifications and a range of other issues, including socio-demographic variables.

YCS and LSYPE have shared a survey since 2007.

Certainly some young people are NEET only for short periods of time as they transition from one activity to another, while others are more persistently NEET. One analysis based on longitudinal survey data of young people from 16-19 years found that for 11 per cent their longest spell NEET was for less than six months, a further 10 per cent between 6-11 months, and 14 per cent for a year or more – including 3 per cent for more than two years (Department for Education & National Statistics, 2011). According to another longitudinal analysis using data from the British Household Panel Survey (BHPS) tracking young people from 16-24 years, young people who were in education, employment or training had nearly a 7 per cent chance of becoming NEET over the course of the five years, and those who were NEET had a 42 per cent chance of transitioning into education, employment or training (Cusworth, Bradshaw, Coles, Keung, & Chzhen, 2009), suggesting that NEET status is somewhat fluid, but also quite enduring for the majority of young people. Indeed, analyses based on the LSYPE and YCS indicated that it was common for young people to have been in the same main activity at age 19 as at age 16:

⁴⁵See statistics on: <http://www.education.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/STR/d001064/index.shtml>

⁴⁶ These data relate to the years 2007 and 2010.

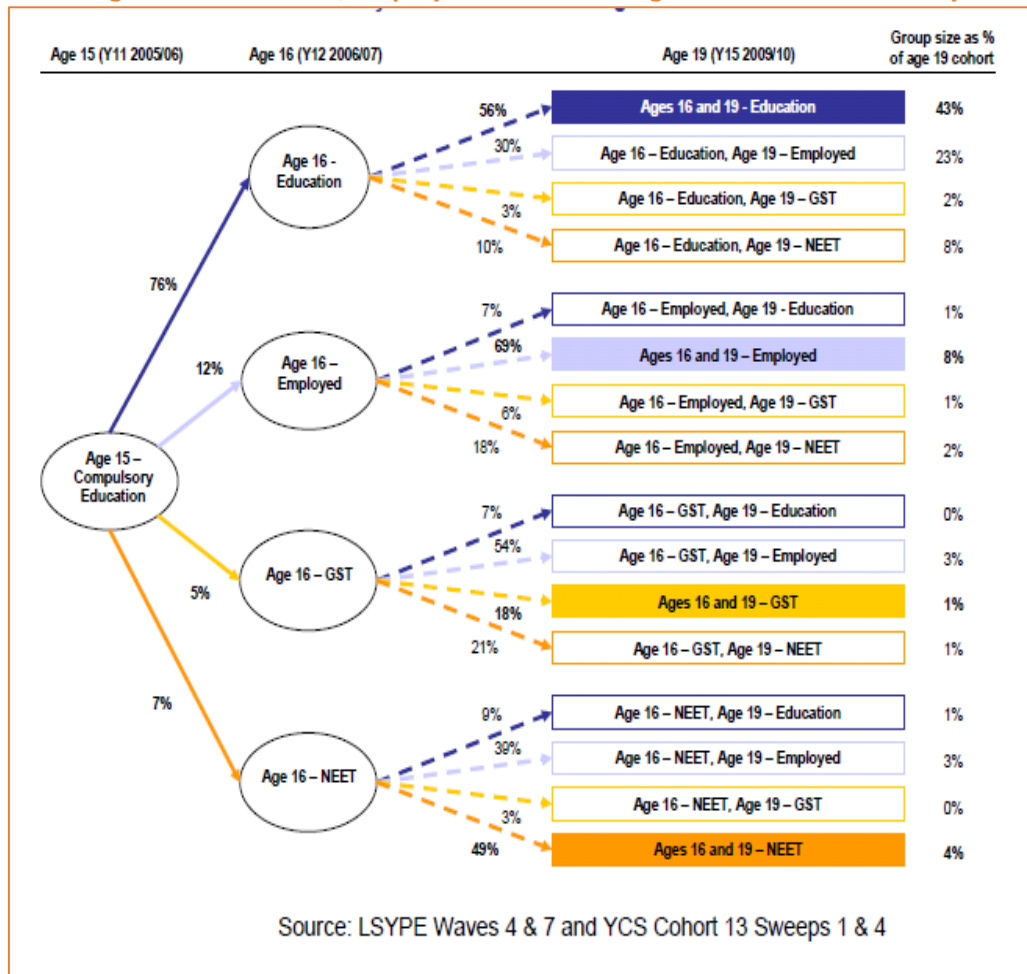
⁴⁷ These data relate to the years 2007 and 2010.

⁴⁸ These data relate to the years 2007 and 2010.

- over half (56 per cent) of young people who were in education at age 16 were also in education at age 19;
- 69 per cent of young people who were in employment at age 16 were also in employment at age 19; and
- almost half of those NEET at age 16 were also NEET at age 19 (49 per cent) (Department for Education & National Statistics, 2011).

Figure A1 below summarises young people’s transitions from 16-19 years.

Figure A1: Education, employment and training transitions from 16-19 years



Source: Department for Education & National Statistics, 2011

Thus, approximately 7-10 per cent of young people 16-18 years of age are NEET at any one time. A higher proportion of females than males tend to be NEET, probably due to females’ caring responsibilities. While some young people transition out of NEET status quickly, for many young people, NEET status is fairly persistent: nearly half of young people NEET at 16 were still NEET at 19 years.

Which groups of young people have NEET status?

As described above, for some young people, NEET is a fleeting status as they transition between different education, training and employment opportunities. For others, however, it is a longstanding condition that starts early and perseveres over the young adult years.

Using longitudinal data, several researchers have applied different statistical techniques to create distinct groups of young people who have NEET status. While the specifics vary, most use latent class analysis, which groups together similar young people based on their patterns of responses across a pre-determined selection of survey items related to education, employment and training including their attainment, attitudes, behaviours, experiences and motivations. These analyses provide insight into the heterogeneity of young people who are NEET, as well as some of the precursors of NEET status. In this section, we describe some of these categorisations of young people.

One analysis used data from the Longitudinal Study of Young People in England (LSYPE) to examine young people's disengagement from education (both current schooling and longer-term educational prospects) over 14-16 years (Year 9 to Year 11) (Ross, 2009). The analysis, featuring attitudes, aspirations, truancy and attitudes towards school, revealed four main types of young people:

- engaged;
- disengaged from school not (higher) education;
- engaged with school not higher education; and
- disengaged (from school and higher education).

Each is described, in turn, in Figure A2 below.

Figure A2: Engagement in education from 14-16 years using LSYPE

Engaged

Engaged young people comprised a third to 40 per cent of young people from Year 9 to Year 11. These young people wanted to continue on with higher education. Most achieved Level 2 qualifications at Key Stage 4 (i.e. end of Year 11; 87 per cent) and continued with full-time education in Year 12 (95 per cent). They had positive attitudes towards school, enjoyed different school subjects and felt confident in their ability to achieve. Doing well at school was important to them, and they were the most likely of all pupils to recognise the importance of working hard to improve their future prospects. They had positive relationships with teachers and generally accepted school rules and discipline. They did not truant or misbehave in class and were unlikely to engage in risky behaviours including substance use and fighting.

Disengaged from school not education

This group represented about a quarter of pupils from Year 9 to Year 11. Similar to 'engaged' students, these young people aimed to continue on into higher education. Indeed, most achieved Level 2 qualifications (71 per cent) and continued with full time education in Year 12 (85 per cent). Yet, they had more negative attitudes towards school and were more likely to have problems with school rules and discipline, misbehave in class, report less positive relationships with teachers and truant than their engaged peers. Relative to engaged peers, they also were less likely to believe that working hard at school will help them progress in life. A third or more engaged in substance use.

Engaged with school not higher education

This group comprised about a quarter of young people over the course of the study. These young people wanted to continue with full time education in Year 12, but not higher education. Two-fifths achieved a Level 2 at Key Stage 4, but about half achieved just a Level 1. Three-fifths continued in full time education in Year 12 and a fifth were in work with training, but a further fifth were either in work without training or NEET. They had moderate to positive attitudes to school, generally accept school rules and discipline, had very positive relationships with their teachers and were unlikely to play truant. They preferred ICT to academic subjects, and felt most confident in their ability there. These young people recognised the importance of working hard at school, although not to the extent of 'engaged' young people. They were fairly unlikely to engage in any kind of risky behaviour.

Disengaged

This group represented just 12 per cent in Year 9 and one-fifth of Years 10 and 11 pupils. Disengaged young people were the least likely to aspire to continue with full time education. Although most achieved a Level 1 qualification, over a third left school with few or no qualifications. The pathways of these young people were much poorer than their peers, with two-fifths in jobs without training and over a quarter NEET in Year 12. Hardly any recognised the importance of working hard at school to fulfil their ambitions (i.e. 30 per cent felt that working hard at school would help them get on in life vs. 67 per cent of the 'engaged' group). Over two-fifths of these young people did not think about their future much, and one fifth planned to 'wait and see' where they ended up. They were keener than other pupils to get jobs that paid well and to be their own boss. They were most likely to choose subjects in which they thought they would do well, where they liked the teacher or where friends were studying. They were the most likely to play truant, had very poor attitudes to school and were more likely to engage in risky behaviour including substance use, crimes against property and fights.

The degree of young people's engagement or disengagement from school and education was relatively stable over time. Any transitions that did occur (i.e. moving from 'engaged' to 'disengaged in school') generally occurred between Years 9 and 10, when Key Stage 4 begins, and mostly went in the direction of engaged to disengaged. Young people in the 'disengaged' group were the least likely to change group membership over time, with about 98 per cent remaining disengaged from year to year. We describe some of the key factors that explain movement from engagement to disengagement further below.

A second analysis focused on slightly older young people. Using Youth Cohort Study (YCS) data, the study tracked over 1,600 young people identified as NEET when they were 16-17 years of age for four years (Spielhofer, et al., 2009). Based on patterns of attainment, prior experiences, attitudes and re-engagement, the study identified three primary NEET subgroups, described in Figure A3 below.

Figure A3: Groups of young people NEET at 16-17 years using YCS

Open to learning

This was the largest subgroup, representing 41 per cent of the sample. This group was generally positive about learning and school and were most likely to re-engage in education or training within in a year's time. Two-thirds had a Level 1 and 22 per cent a Level 2 qualification at the end of Year 11. Relative to the other two groups, these young people felt most able to find out about future choices and supported to make them, qualified for available courses or jobs, and optimistic about their future prospects.

Sustained

Nearly two-fifths (38 per cent) were in this subgroup, who faced a lot of personal and structural barriers and were likely to remain NEET over the course of the study. They were most likely to have parents who were not employed, be young carers and be disabled or have health problems. More than half (58 per cent) had not achieved a Level 1, and just one per cent a Level 2, by Year 11. These young people had the most negative experiences of school, highest levels of truancy and exclusion and lowest educational attainment.

Undecided

The third subgroup represented 22 per cent of young people who are NEET. They had similar attainment levels at the end of Year 11 to the 'open to learning' group (71 per cent had a Level 1, and 16 per cent a Level 2). They faced no significant personal barriers to participating in education

or training, but they were dissatisfied with the available opportunities. They were as likely as the 'sustained' group to remain NEET early on in the study, though more likely to re-engage by the end.

Another report described four groups of young people with NEET status (Allen, Mehta, & Rutt, 2012), which overlapped significantly with the classification summarised above. Their additional, fourth group was defined as 'at risk'. These young people with NEET status may include 'undecided' or even 'open to learning' young people who are particularly vulnerable to the economic downturn and shifting labour market requirements and, thus, may risk long-term disengagement from education, employment or training. Given the current economic climate, this fourth group is important to consider.

A recent analysis using the LSYPE data enabled examination of the extent to which young people experienced overlapping problems and indicators of disadvantage at 16-17 years including NEET, as well as low attainment, teenage parenthood, criminal behaviour, substance misuse and emotional health concerns (Barnes, Green, & Ross, 2011).⁴⁹ Nearly half (45 per cent) of the young people experienced at least one of the indicators of disadvantage, and the researchers found that the nature and extent of disadvantage tended to cluster into five groups. Four of the five groups included sizable percentages of young people with NEET status at 18 years of age. In particular, the 'socially excluded' group was defined by high proportions (95 per cent) of NEET at 16-17 years, and comprised 6 per cent of all young people. These young people had a number of risk factors at age 14 including coming from a single parent family, poor parental health and involvement in children's schooling, and low aspirations and high truancy. About a quarter had accessed welfare services, and 11 per cent experienced police involvement. At age 18, 42 per cent were NEET, 21 per cent had children and 58 per cent received benefits.

These analyses based on detailed longitudinal data help to underscore the heterogeneity of the NEET group of young people. Across the analyses, the evidence suggests that there is a core group of young people with NEET status who face significant barriers and disadvantages and are likely to remain NEET in the long-term. This group is distinct from other young people who may only be NEET for short spells as they transition between activities or those who may move in and out of NEET status as they try to find work. Understanding the differences between groups of young people with NEET status is important for developing appropriate and fit for purpose support and interventions.

The following sub-section examines in more detail some of the predictors of NEET status alluded to here.

Key characteristics, experiences, enablers and barriers of NEET

The previous sub-section helped to highlight some of the variability within the NEET group. In this section, we attempt to focus attention on some of the key precursors or concurrent factors associated with NEET. First, we focus on families' economic circumstances. Second, we look at young people's experiences, attitudes and beliefs, focusing in particular on their personal experiences and their attitudes and beliefs about school and the future. Finally, we examine the key enablers and barriers that help prevent young people becoming NEET or facilitate their return to education, employment or training.

⁴⁹The analysis also explored various predictors of disadvantage when they were 14-16 years of age and outcomes of disadvantage when they were 18-19 years.

Family economic circumstances

Several studies have examined links between various indicators of families' socio-economic status (SES) and the likelihood that young people are NEET. An analysis using Longitudinal Study of Young People in England (LSYPE) and Youth Cohort Study (YCS) data tracking young people from 16-19 years found that young people who were eligible for free school meals⁵⁰ in Year 11 were more likely to be NEET in all months than those who were not eligible (Department for Education & National Statistics, 2011). The difference in the proportion NEET between young people eligible and not eligible for free school meals doubled over time (i.e. at the end of the study, approximately 35 per cent of young people eligible for free school meals were NEET vs. about 15 per cent of ineligible pupils), suggesting a quickly widening gap between those from a low income background and those who are not. Using the same data, young people whose parents were in professional occupations were less likely to be NEET between 16-19 years than young people whose parents worked in non-professional jobs (Department for Education & National Statistics, 2011). Another analysis using LSYPE data found that 17-year-olds whose families were in the poorest fifth of the overall sample were about 7.5 times more likely to be NEET than young people from the wealthiest fifth (Chowdry, Crawford, & Goodmann, 2009).⁵¹ Similarly, young people in the 'sustained' NEET group from Figure A3 were more likely to live in workless households than young people in the 'open to learning' and 'undecided' NEET groups (Spielhofer, et al., 2009).

By and large, parental educational attainment was not a significant predictor of young people becoming NEET, once other factors were included in analytic models (Chowdry, et al., 2009).

Going beyond family SES factors, one study reported strong associations between living in a deprived neighbourhood and the risk of becoming NEET at 17 years (Chowdry, et al., 2009). This association remained even after accounting for family economic factors, suggesting that poor young people growing up in deprived neighbourhoods are more likely to be NEET than poor young people growing up in less deprived areas.

Overall, then, studies using various indicators of families' economic status have shown that young people with NEET status are more likely to come from disadvantaged backgrounds than young people in education, employment or training.

Experiences, attitudes and beliefs

In this section, we focus more closely on some of the experiences, attitudes and beliefs that have been shown to be associated with NEET. While it is not known the degree to which the presence of some of these experiences *cause* NEET, greater understanding of what young people with NEET status have undergone and felt in their lives does offer insight into potential pathways of influence.

This sub-section is structured under the following sub-headings: personal experiences, the role of aspirations and experiences at school.

⁵⁰Eligibility is based on benefits receipt, so this is often used as an indicator of disadvantage.

⁵¹Families' socio-economic position was determined by their household income, reported financial difficulties, parents' occupational class and housing tenure.

Personal experiences

Several studies have summarised some of the key 'risk factors' experienced by young people who are NEET (Audit Commission, 2010; Cusworth, et al., 2009; Department for Education & National Statistics, 2011; Ross, 2009; Spielhofer, et al., 2009). These include:

- Disability or learning difficulties;
- Teenage parenthood;
- Offending;
- Not continuing in post-16 education;

- Substance misuse;
- Responsibilities as a carer; and
- Truancy or school exclusion⁵².

One study found that 24 per cent of young people who were long-term NEET (i.e. for more than six months) were in care or were care leavers, 17 per cent were under supervision from a youth offending team, 16 per cent were disabled or had learning difficulties and 15 per cent were young parents (Audit Commission, 2010). These percentages are substantially higher than population estimates of young people with these experiences.⁵³

Evidence from interviews with young people with NEET status revealed that these young people often had negative experiences of school and had faced issues such as bullying, exclusion, behavioural difficulties, learning difficulties and stress, particularly among the group of young people who were long-term NEET (Spielhofer, et al., 2009). Other studies found that bullying and police or social services involvement for problem behaviour were all significantly linked to disengagement from school and education (Barnes, et al., 2011; Ross, 2009).

Not surprisingly, low school attainment is associated with later NEET status (Allen, et al., 2012; Barnes, et al., 2011; Spielhofer, et al., 2009). As summarised above, high proportions of young people with NEET status leave school with no qualifications or only a Level 1. One study found that over half (55 per cent) of young people NEET surveyed said that they would have been encouraged to stay in education or training if they had achieved better grades at school (Spielhofer, et al., 2010).

On a more optimistic note, two studies reported links between young people's participation in positive activities (e.g. playing a sport or musical instrument, doing community work or attending a youth club) and/or attendance at school clubs at age 14 and a reduced likelihood of being NEET (Chowdry, et al., 2009) or disengaging from school (Ross, 2009) by age 17.

Aspirations

A lot of recent attention has focused on 'aspirations' and their potential as key explanatory mechanisms for young people's education, employment and training outcomes. The LSYPE included a number of survey items related to aspirations, which makes it possible to examine their relevance. One study found that young people's aspirations towards higher education at age 14 years were protective against the likelihood of becoming NEET at age 17, but this association was weakened when

⁵²Key Stage 4 attainment may account for the associations between NEET and truancy or exclusion (Chowdry, et al., 2009).

⁵³It should be noted that obtaining accurate national statistics on NEET in these vulnerable groups is difficult, however, as they are often under-represented in large-scale, multi-purpose surveys (Cusworth, et al., 2009).

Key Stage 4 attainment was included in analytic models. This finding suggests that the influence of young people's aspirations on NEET status is indirect, operating through GCSE attainment (i.e. aspirations influence attainment, and attainment influences education, employment and training outcomes) (Chowdry, et al., 2009). Qualitative evidence based on interviews with young people with NEET status indicated that many had typical aspirations for the future, but that they lacked a 'planned trajectory' for achieving their aspirations (Hayward, Wilde, & Williams, 2008).

The influence of parents' aspirations on young people's outcomes are fairly mixed. One study using LSYPE data reported that parents' educational aspirations and expectations for their children post-16 were unrelated to the young person's chances of being NEET at age 17 (Chowdry, et al., 2009). Yet, another study reported that young people whose parents wanted them to learn a trade or take up an apprenticeship or employment without training (vs. continue with full time education), seen as indicators of low parental aspirations, were more likely than other young people to become disengaged from school and from higher education (Ross, 2009). Beliefs aside, parents' actions may also be important. Parents' involvement in their children's school life, and positive relationships and routines within the home tended to be protective in keeping children engaged in school (Ross, 2009), although another study found that family interactions did not predict the probability that young people were NEET at 17 years (Chowdry, et al., 2009).

Interestingly, young people's beliefs about their friends' aspirations seem to matter: believing their friends will stay on in full time education post-16 was associated with a significantly lower chance of young people being NEET (Chowdry, et al., 2009) or disengaging from education (Ross, 2009) at age 17.

Recent research reviews, however, have not found much evidence on the impact of aspirations on attainment, calling into question whether interventions aimed at changing young people's aspirations will have a significant impact on their ultimate outcomes (see Carter-Wall & Whitfield, 2012; Cummings, et al., 2012; Gorard, Huat See, & Davies, 2012). The exceptions, albeit tentative, seem to be interventions focusing on parent involvement in education and school, mentoring and extracurricular activities, where there was evidence of impact both on aspirations and attitudes towards school and on educational attainment (Carter-Wall & Whitfield, 2012; Cummings, et al., 2012).

Linking back to the findings on family SES summarised above, young people's experiences, attitudes and beliefs towards school, taken as a whole – including self-concept, enjoyment of school, educational aspirations and expectations, experience of bullying, truancy or school exclusion, anti-social behaviour, substance use, relationships with teachers and participation in positive activities – played a key role in explaining why young people from the most affluent families were significantly less likely to be NEET at 17 years of age than young people from the poorest families (Chowdry, et al., 2009).

In sum, the findings on the direct links between young people's and parents' educational aspirations and the likelihood of young people becoming NEET are somewhat mixed. Aspirations seem to be linked to future outcomes in simpler analytic models, but these relationships tend to attenuate in more sophisticated models including background characteristics or prior attainment. It may be that part of the difficulty in understanding the influence of aspirations is due to the challenge of measuring a rather nebulous concept quantitatively.

School experiences

Young people's experiences in schools and with their teachers do seem to play a role in understanding young people with NEET status. One study using LSYPE data reported that young people who were disengaged from school were more likely than other young people to perceive that their teachers treated them unfairly and blamed them for trouble, were not effective in controlling pupils in their classrooms and did not take an interest in their work (Ross, 2009). Further, young people whose teachers ensured that the young people completed their homework were less likely to disengage from school and education.

Enablers and barriers

This section summarises research that examined the key enablers and barriers that help prevent young people becoming NEET or facilitate their return to education, employment or training.

One analysis using LSYPE and YCS data reported that when asked for the primary reasons that they were unable to find work at age 18, 27 per cent of young males with NEET status indicated lack of relevant experience and 25 per cent, lack of qualifications for available jobs (Department for Education & National Statistics, 2010). Evidence from interviews with young people who are NEET revealed that lack of experience was cited as one of the main barriers young people faced: they were unable to get a job until they had experience, but without a job could not get that experience (Spielhofer, et al., 2009).

For females who are NEET, the most common barrier, mentioned by a fifth, was their need to work flexible hours, followed by lack of relevant experience cited by 16 per cent (Department for Education & National Statistics, 2010).

Data from both surveys and interviews with young people revealed that young people with NEET status (particularly those who spend more time NEET) tended not to have considered what to do when leaving school, had not spoken to anyone other than their parents about their choices, and felt they had not received adequate support or were equipped with necessary information to plan their futures (Spielhofer, et al., 2009; Spielhofer, et al., 2010). One study reported that young people with NEET had similar levels of knowledge about their post-16 options as other young people, but the former was less confident about the support available (including funding) to help them continue in education or training (Spielhofer, et al., 2010). Indeed, only half of young people with NEET status felt they had received enough support and had enough information to plan their futures relative to about three-quarters of other young people.

Looking at what might enable young people to enter into education, employment or training after a spell of being NEET, one study found that among young people who moved into employment at age 19, a fifth indicated that assistance from friends or family helped them, and 18 per cent said that their own motivation provided the help they needed (Department for Education & National Statistics, 2011). Survey findings indicated that the option to gain a qualification while working was the factor identified by young people with NEET that was most likely to encourage them to enter education or training (Spielhofer, et al., 2010). Financial support was also important.

What resonates from these findings is that many young people who are NEET feel trapped by lack of experience: they are excluded from jobs because they do not have relevant experience, but to get relevant experience, they need employers to take a chance with them. The evidence also suggests that some young people did not receive adequate information or support to make informed choices for their futures. Assistance from family and friends and financial support seem to be important enablers of entry into education, employment or training.

Conclusions

The research reviewed in the previous sections summarised recent research on young people who are NEET including prevalence, different subgroups of young people who are NEET and some of the key characteristics and experiences consistently associated with NEET status. This research focused primarily on young people from England who participated in recent longitudinal surveys.

Some of the key points from the review include:

- About 7-10 per cent of young people aged 16-18 years in England are NEET.
- Slightly more females than males are NEET, probably due to females' caring responsibilities.
- While some young people transition out of NEET status quickly, for many young people, NEET status is fairly persistent: nearly half of young people NEET at 16 were still NEET at 19 years.
- Young people NEET are a heterogeneous group. Evidence from several analyses suggests that there is a group of young people who are NEET who faced a number of risk factors growing up and showed evidence of disengagement early, including truancy and low aspirations.
- Young people with NEET status are more likely to grow up in economically disadvantaged families and are more likely to be disabled, be young parents, have a history of offending, misuse substances, have been excluded from school and have low prior attainment.
- Participation in positive activities and parents' involvement in young people's schooling may be protective against later NEET status.
- The influence of young people's and parents' aspirations for young people's futures is believed to be very important for understanding future education and employment outcomes. Recent reviews, however, have found fairly limited (existing) evidence of their influence on NEET status. This could be due, in part, to the difficulty of measuring aspirations accurately using surveys.
- Young people's perceptions of their relationships with their teachers seemed to be important in understanding later NEET status, although this may be because young people who end up as NEET have already started disengaging in school, which affects their relationships with teachers.
- Lack of work experience – and lack of opportunities to gain work experience – are key barriers faced by young people NEET who are trying to find work. Lack of jobs and flexible work are other barriers.
- Young people who are NEET often were not equipped with the necessary information to plan their futures. Support from family and friends, jobs that offer qualifications and financial support are all potential enablers to get young people back into education, employment or training.

Based on recent research, recommendations for tackling the NEET issue include (Nelson & O'Donnell, 2011; Spielhofer, et al., 2009):

- Intervene early with families at risk of poor outcomes, especially in disadvantaged areas.
- Offer alternative and flexible learning opportunities, particularly for young people who do not benefit from a conventional classroom experience.
- Offer more informal learning opportunities to help young people learn outside of the classroom.
- Offer better information, advice and guidance before leaving learning to increase their awareness of the learning options available to them and enable them to make more informed choices.
- Provide taster courses and opportunities to sample different employment opportunities and guidance about opportunities to accumulate qualifications over time.
- Offer financial support.

Appendix B: Members of the Adult Steering Group

Member	Organisation
Adele McCauley	OFMDFM
Alison McNulty	Parenting NI
Christine Bell	Craigavon Senior High School
Caroline Karayiannis	Movilla High School
David Smith	South Eastern Regional College
David Vint	Southern Regional College
Dr John Hunter	Education and Training Inspectorate
Heather Hedley	Belfast Metropolitan College
Janice Clarke	Belfast Model School for Girls
Joanne Neill	Bryson House (representing the NEETs Strategy Forum)
Joe Shannon	Education and Training Inspectorate
John Ferguson	Lisnagarvey High School
Linda Bradley	Department of Employment and Learning
Lorraine Boyd	Bryson House
Margaret Monaghan	Belfast Education and Library Board
Pamela Woods	Belfast Education and Library Board
Pauline Donnan	OFMDFM
Richard Armstrong	South Eastern Regional College
Tom Heaney	Northern Regional College

Appendix C: Detailed school sampling table

The table below provides further detail on the school sampling strategy employed. In particular, it details the characteristics of the schools with the highest proportion of young people who are NEET according to School Leaver data for the school year 2010/11. From this, the NCB research team identified a target sample of schools for which the data suggested that young people were at a particularly high risk of becoming NEET. It is from this target sample that schools were recruited for the research. It illustrates that in terms of Board area, school type, management type and FSM entitlement the profile of the achieved sample varies little compared to the target sample.

Table C1: School sampling

	Population	Schools with high % of NEETs	NEETs target sample	NEETs achieved sample
Board area				
Belfast	16%	16%	17%	16%
North Eastern	23%	31%	40%	42%
South Eastern	17%	19%	17%	16%
Southern	24%	18%	14%	16%
Western	20%	15%	11%	11%
School type				
Secondary	69%	99%	100%	100%
Grammar	31%	1%	0%	0%
Management type				
Controlled	34%	49%	60%	63%
Integrated	9%	13%	12%	11%
RC Maintained	33%	36%	29%	26%
FSM entitlement				
Yes	19%	27%	31%	33%
No	81%	73%	69%	67%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%
Base	216	67	35	19

Appendix D: Strategies and initiatives relevant to issue of NEETs

Together: Building a United Community (TBUC)⁵⁴ – 2013

Together: Building a United Community Strategy is being implemented as part of the PfG 2011-2015 and reflects the Executive's commitment to improving community relations and building a united and shared society. Whilst the focus is on improving community relations between those of different backgrounds, the strategy includes a provision for getting 10,000 young people not in education, employment or training on to a youth volunteering programme. This programme would enable a young person to access structured employment, work experience, volunteer and leisure opportunities, along with a dedicated programme/ designed to foster good relations and a shared future. The initiative is currently at pilot stage.

Enabling Success – supporting the transition from economic inactivity to employment – 2015⁵⁵

This strategy aims to increase Northern Ireland's competitiveness through the process of labour market diversification and inclusion and is also seeking to address the root causes of a number of difficult societal problems. Whilst the strategy is not solely targeted at those who are NEET, it contains a provision for the establishment of young people's advocates who would engage with young people who are at risk of becoming NEET and economically inactive in the future. The role of the young people's advocate is to inspire young people and promote positive life choices.

Generating our Success: The Northern Ireland Strategy for Youth Training– 2015⁵⁶

The Department for Employment and Learning (DEL) introduced this strategy in 2015. Unlike a number of the schemes it replaces, this new framework allows those who are unemployed as well as those who are employed to study towards a Level 2 qualification (defined as the equivalent of 5A*-C grades at GCSE) through structured work-based learning. In addition, and unlike other schemes implemented by DEL, the new framework provides careers advice and guidance before, during and after the qualification has been delivered, as well as pastoral care, financial support and increased flexibility.

Our children and young people, our pledge – A ten year strategy for children and young people in Northern Ireland (2006-2016)⁵⁷

This strategy puts in place a framework for improving outcomes for children over the period 2006-2016 in a range of domains (e.g. health, education). The strategy emphasised the need for greater levels of partnership working to improve outcomes and shifted the focus of debate towards prevention and early intervention. The strategy contained a number of pledges around partnership working and supporting parents in their parenting role etc.

The Big Lottery – Reaching Out and Empowering Young People (ROEYP)

The Big Lottery Fund in Northern Ireland, through its Reaching Out and Empowering Young People programme, is making £20 million available over the next two years to ensure young people at risk have the necessary support structures, capacity, improved personal development and improved skills to help them negotiate the transitions in their life. ROEYP supports projects that focus on young people aged between 8 and 20 and in particular those projects that target young people 'at risk' such

⁵⁴ <http://www.ofmdfmi.gov.uk/together-building-a-united-community-strategy.pdf>

⁵⁵ <https://www.delni.gov.uk/publications/enabling-success-northern-ireland-strategy-reducing-economic-inactivity>

⁵⁶ <https://www.delni.gov.uk/publications/generating-our-success-northern-ireland-strategy-youth-training>

⁵⁷ OFMDFM (2005)

as those in care, leaving care or who have been in care and those who have become disengaged from education. Projects are therefore very much targeted at those who are at high risk of becoming NEET.

The Big Lottery - Reaching Out and Supporting Families: The Big Lottery Fund is investing £25 million in projects to help families in Northern Ireland to improve their children's lives. The projects will focus specifically on families facing challenges such as separation, absence of a key family member, poverty, substance abuse, disability, social isolation, homelessness, physical and/or emotional abuse. It is hoped that by working with families, this will improve the children's experiences in their early childhood and is expected therefore to improve children's life chances when they progress from school into early adulthood. Funded projects are expected to support a wide range of activities such as getting parents more involved in their children's learning, reducing family isolation from the wider community, and strengthening family relationships and communication. Again, it is expected that this initiative might make a positive contribution towards reducing the number of young people at risk of becoming NEET.

14-19 Policy: The Department of Education (DE) and the Department for Employment and Learning (DEL) work closely together on cross-cutting issues related to the education and training provision for 14 to 19 year olds. Examples of initiatives include: Shared focus on young people; Preparing for success, and; Common funding scheme.

Appendix E: Detailed methodology

Table E1 provides a detailed account of the methodology employed for delivering this research project.

Table E1: Detailed methodology

Activity	Timing	Detail
1. Literature review	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Undertaken at the beginning of the study 	<p>Purpose</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> As there are no large-scale longitudinal studies of young people in Northern Ireland, relatively little is known within a Northern Ireland context of the different sub-groups of young people who are NEET; their key characteristics, experiences and enablers and barriers. The purpose of the literature review was to examine literature available in other parts of the UK to provide a context for this study. Drawing upon large-scale longitudinal studies such as the Youth Cohort Study (YCS) and the Longitudinal Study of Young People in England (LSYPE) we describe the characteristics and experiences of young people who are NEET and the barriers they face. These findings are useful as they help to unpick some of the key characteristics of these young people and the barriers they face and have helped to inform the development of the research instruments. <p>Method</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Our methodology entailed searching for relevant UK reports on NCB’s ChildData and various websites including: Audit Commission; Department for Education (DfE); Institute of Education; Joseph Rowntree Foundation; National Centre for Social Research (NatCen); National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER); and Nuffield Foundation. We also relied on our knowledge of the topic and data sources to harvest other documents and recent data. Our key search term was ‘NEET’, and all sources included in the review included samples of young people NEET. Sources were screened for content, and sources that focused on any of the topics below were read and summarised in more detail: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> — Background and demographic characteristics of young people NEET; — Experiences, beliefs and aspirations; — Activities and participation; — Formal and informal support; — Negative behaviour; and — NEET subgroups.

Activity	Timing	Detail
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The full literature review is available in Appendix A
2a.Pupil survey	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Undertaken once per year over the course of the three years, namely: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sep-Dec 2013; Sep-Dec 2014; and Feb-May 2015. 	<p>Purpose</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The pupil survey was the largest activity undertaken as part of this study and sought to elicit detailed background information on those who completed it; their family background; their experiences both inside and outside of school and their future job and career aspirations. The purpose of asking these questions was to be able to identify the characteristics, experiences, barriers and enablers of those who had become NEET and make comparisons between this and other groups of young people. <p>Method</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>School selection:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Sampling criteria:</i> Schools were sampled according to two key agreed criteria: Schools with the highest proportion of school leavers whose destination was recorded as unemployed, and; schools where 70% or more of Year 12 pupils did not attain 5 or more GCSE grades at A*-C. <i>Target sample:</i> A total of 35 secondary schools in Northern Ireland were approached to participate in the research. <i>Achieved sample:</i> A total of 19 schools agreed to take part in the project⁵⁸. <i>Profile of target sample:</i> A profile was compiled of the characteristics of the achieved sample against the characteristics of the target sample. Analysis revealed that the achieved and target sample did not vary by more than 3 percentage points in terms of Board area, school type (secondary/ grammar), management type (controlled, maintained and integrated) and level of FSM eligibility. <i>Pupil selection:</i> All Year 11 pupils in each of the 19 schools were selected to participate in the pupil survey. This cohort of young people was tracked⁵⁹ throughout the three years of the study. <i>Survey administration:</i> <p><u>Years 1 and 2</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Prior to the visit:</i> a batch of information and consent forms were sent to each of the schools and addressed to the designated point of contact. The form provided information about the aims and methods of the research. The designated point of contact was asked to distribute these forms to all Year 11 pupils. Pupils were asked to give their consent by signing the consent form to say that they were opting into the research

⁵⁸ One school withdrew from the research in Year 2 of the study. This was replaced with a school that had a similar profile.

⁵⁹ Please note the cohort was tracked throughout the three years of the study. As the survey was completed anonymously (i.e. without any information that would enable identification of the individual), data from Years 1, 2 and 3 have not been matched at an individual level.

Activity	Timing	Detail
		<p>and their parents/carers were asked only to sign the form if they wish their child to opt out of the research. The designated point of contact monitored the returns of the consent forms and handed over the completed consent forms on the day of the visit.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> — <i>During the visit:</i> NCB visited all 19 schools to administer the questionnaire in Years 1 and 2 and NCB staff supervised the completion of the survey in each of the schools. At the visit, pupils were verbally informed about the Next Steps project, its aims and objectives and were reminded to answer questions honestly and accurately. They were also informed that they did not have to answer any question that they were uncomfortable with and were allowed to opt-out at any time. <p><u>Year 3</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> — The survey was administered using a postal survey method. A cover letter and paper copy of the survey was sent to all those who provided their contact details in Year 2. The survey went live on 20th February 2015 and closed on 29th May 2015. Follow-up texts and emails were sent on eight separate occasions in an effort to maximise the response rate. <p>Scale/Response rate</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In Year 1, a total of 1,590 pupils completed a survey representing a response rate of c.64%. • In Year 2, a total of 1,728 pupils completed a survey representing a response rate of c.70%. • In Year 3, a total of 389 young people completed a survey out of a total of 1,654 young people who had provided contact details. This represented a response rate of 24% which, whilst reduced from previous, is a healthy response rate for a postal/electronic survey. The survey returns were over-represented by females (67% of survey respondents were female vs. 44% of all the young people in the schools that took part in the study). In addition, the survey was slightly underrepresented in terms of those entitled to FSM (30% of survey respondents reported being entitled to FSM vs. 34% of all all of the young in the schools that took part in the study). <p>Analysis</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All survey data for the pupils was cleansed and entered into the statistical software package PASW Statistics 18 for analysis.
2b.Pupil interviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Undertaken once per year over the course of the three years, namely: 	<p>Purpose</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The purpose of the pupil interviews was to elicit detailed qualitative information and data about each individual child including their background; what they like or dislike about school and life in general; their experiences inside and outside of school; what pathways they are following, and; future career aspirations. <p>Method</p>

Activity	Timing	Detail
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> — Sep-Dec 2013; — Sep-Dec 2014; and — Feb-May 2015. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Pupil selection:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> — In Year 1, a total of 10 pupils were randomly selected to participate in an interview. — In Year 2, all of these pupil were approached to participate in an interview. In addition to this, we also approached another group of 10 young people who were potentially at risk of becoming NEET. In total, 18 young people agreed to participate in an interview. — In Year 3, all of the young people who had participated in an interview in Year 2, were approached again for an interview. A total of 15 young people took part in an interview. • <i>Administration:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> — In Year 1, all of the interviews were conducted on site by an NCB researcher. — In Years 2 and 3, interviews were undertaken using a combination of face-to-face and telephone interviews. <p>Scale/Response rate</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A total of 43 interviews were undertaken over the course of the three years of the study. <p>Analysis</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All interview transcripts were loaded onto NVivo, a software package for analysing qualitative interview data. All of the data was coded and analysed thematically.
3. Teacher interviews		<p>Purpose</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The purpose of the interviews was to understand, amongst other things, their views on why certain groups of young people underperform, the groups that are most at risk of becoming NEET and what steps are put in place to help prevent young people from becoming NEET. <p>Method</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All least one member of staff was selected for interview for each of the schools that participated in the study. Those who have responsibility for careers guidance or careers activities (e.g. Head of Careers) were selected for interview. <p>Scale/response rate</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A total of 21 teachers were interviewed over the course of the three years of the study. <p>Analysis</p>

Activity	Timing	Detail
4. Parent interviews		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All interview transcripts were loaded onto NVivo, a software package for analysing qualitative interview data. All of the data was coded and analysed thematically. <p>Purpose</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To obtain parent’s views on their son’s/daughter’s strengths/weaknesses and like/dislikes about school and life in general and also to discuss their child’s potential careers options. <p>Method</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All of parents and the young people were approached for interview. Interviews were conducted via. telephone or face-to-face depending on the preference of the parent. <p>Scale/Response rate</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A total of 26 interviews were undertaken over the course of the three years of the study. <p>Analysis</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All interview transcripts were loaded onto NVivo, a software package for analysing qualitative interview data. All of the data was coded and analysed thematically.

Appendix F: Year 3 Survey Instrument



NEXT STEPS

WE NEED

YOU!

Why am I being asked to complete this survey?

We selected 19 schools in Northern Ireland to take part in the research. You attended (and may still attend) one of these schools. You completed a survey for us in Year 12 and you provided us with your contact details so we could follow up with this survey. You may also have completed a survey for us in Year 11.

The National Children's Bureau Northern Ireland (NCB NI) is carrying out a research project called Next Steps. The information you provide in this questionnaire will be helpful to others (e.g. the Government) to understand what your needs are following completion of Year 12 and how best you can be supported in the future.

Before you complete the questionnaire, please remember the following:

- Answer the questions as honestly as you can.
- You do not need to answer any questions you are uncomfortable with and are free to stop at any time.
- Follow the instructions on how to give an answer for **each question.**

The information you provide is private and no one will know how you have answered these questions.

What if I'm having difficulty with the form or need more information?

We're always happy to help! Please contact Helen McNamee, Research Officer on **028 9089 1730** or **07595 272 114** or by email **hmcnamee@ncb.org.uk**

Year 3 Survey 2015



Office of the
**First Minister and
Deputy First Minister**

www.ofmdfmrni.gov.uk

DELIVERING SOCIAL CHANGE

Section 1: About you

1. Are you... ✓ Tick one

- Male
 Female

2. What age are you? Please write in space provided

3. Which one best describes you? ✓ Tick one

- White
 Chinese
 Irish Traveller
 Indian
 Pakistani
 Bangladeshi
 Black
 Mixed ethnic group
 Other, please state

4. Is English your first language? ✓ Tick one

- Yes
 No

5.a Do you belong to any particular religion? ✓ Tick one

- Yes ⇒ Go to Q5.b
 No ⇒ Go to Q6

5.b Which religion do you belong to? ✓ Tick one

- Catholic
 Protestant
 Other, please state

6. Do you consider yourself to have any of these difficulties? ✓ Tick one box for each row

	Yes	No
I have a medical condition (for example, asthma, diabetes, epilepsy)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I have a physical and/or sensory disability (for example, deaf, visually impaired)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I have a special education need	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other, please state	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

7. Who do you live with most of the time? ✓ *Tick one*

- I live with my mum and dad
- I spend some time living with my mum and some time living with my dad
- I live just with my mum
- I live just with my dad
- I live with my mum and her partner
- I live with my dad and his partner
- I live with grandparents/ other family members
- I live with a foster family
- I live in a children's home
- I live with other people (e.g. my friends)
- I live by myself
- Other living arrangements, please state

8.a Do you have any caring responsibilities? i.e. Do you have a child or do you provide unpaid care to a family member, partner or friend who needs help because of illness, mental health, addiction, disability or old age.

✓ *Tick one*

- Yes ⇒ *Go to Q8.b*
- No ⇒ *Go to Q9.a*

8.b Who do you have caring responsibilities for? ✓ *Tick all that apply*

- I care for a parent
- I care for a brother/sister
- I care for my own child(ren)
- I care for an older family member
- Other, please state

9.a How well off do you think you or your family is in terms of having enough money to pay bills? ✓ *Tick one*

- Very well off
- Well off
- Average
- Not very well off
- Not at all well off
- Don't know

9.b Were you entitled to Free School Meals in Year 12 (i.e. in 5th year)? ✓ *Tick one*

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

10.a Have any of your family members gone to university in the past OR currently attend university? ✓ *Tick one*

- Yes ⇒ *Go to Q10.b*
- No ⇒ *Go to Q11.a*
- Don't know ⇒ *Go to Q11.a*

10.b Which of the following members of your family have gone to university in the past OR currently attend university? ✓ Tick all that apply

- My mum
- My dad
- My brother(s)/step-brother(s)
- My sister(s)/step-sister(s)
- Other, please state

11.a Does your mum currently have a job? ✓ Tick one

- Yes ⇒Go to Q11.b
- No ⇒Go to Q12.a
- Does not apply to me ⇒Go to Q12.a

11.b What kind of job does your mum have? (e.g. Teacher, cleaner, officer worker) Please write in space provided

11.c Roughly how many hours does your mum work in a typical week? ✓ Tick one

- Full-time (35 hours or more)
- Part-time (More than 16 hours and less than 34 hours)
- Part-time (Less than 16 hours)

12.a Does your dad currently have a job? ✓ Tick one

- Yes ⇒Go to Q12.b
- No ⇒Go to Q13
- Does not apply to me ⇒Go to Q13

12.b What kind of job does your dad have? (e.g. Teacher, cleaner, officer worker) Please write in space provided

12.c Roughly how many hours does your dad work in a typical week? ✓ Tick one

- Full-time (35 hours or more)
- Part-time (More than 16 hours and less than 34 hours)
- Part-time (Less than 16 hours)

13. Do you currently attend school? ✓ Tick one

- Yes ⇒Go to Section 2A, Q14
- No ⇒Go to Section 3A, Q26

Section 2A: Your school experiences

ONLY ANSWER THIS SECTION IF YOU CURRENTLY ATTEND SCHOOL. IF YOU DO NOT ATTEND SCHOOL GO TO SECTION 3A.

14. What is the name of the school you currently attend? Please write in space provided

15. How much do you agree with these statements about your school experiences? ✓ Tick one box for each statement

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
I am happy at school	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I often struggle with school	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I am bored most of the time in school	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I complete my homework most of the time	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I get on well with most of my teachers	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I feel that teachers in this school care about me and my future	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I enjoy learning	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I enjoy school work that is challenging	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
My friends look down on people who work hard at school	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I like to see how much I can get away with at school	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I do the opposite to what people tell me, just to make them mad	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I ignore rules that get in my way	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I have got into fights at school in the last 12 months	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

16.a How often have you been bullied at school in the last year? (i.e. the last 12 months) ✓ Tick one

- Never
- Only once or twice
- About once a week
- Two or three times a week
- Several times a week

16.b How often have you bullied someone else in the last year? (i.e. the last 12 months) ✓ Tick one

- Never
- Only once or twice
- About once a week
- Two or three times a week
- Several times a week

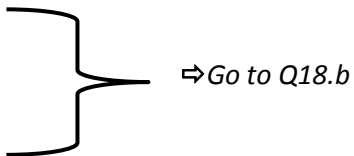
17.a Were you suspended from school in the last year? (i.e. the last 12 months) ✓ Tick one

- Yes ⇒ Go to Q17.b
- No ⇒ Go to Q18.a

17.b How many days have you missed by being suspended from school in the last year? ✓ Tick one

- 1-5 days
- 6-10 days
- 11-15 days
- 16 or more days

18.a How often have you skived or bunked off school in the last year? ✓ Tick one

- Never ⇒Go to Section 2B Q19
 - For the odd day or class
 - For particular days or classes
 - For a few days at a time
 - For a few weeks at a time
- 

18.b What was the main reason for bunking or skiving off school? ✓ Tick one

- Couldn't be bothered going to school generally
- Did not like a particular teacher
- Did not like a particular subject
- Had not completed my homework
- Because my friends were doing it too
- Other, please state

Section 2B: Your Future *(for those who currently attend school)*

ONLY ANSWER THIS SECTION IF YOU CURRENTLY ATTEND SCHOOL. IF YOU DO NOT ATTEND SCHOOL GO TO SECTION 3A.

19. When you think about your future, how much do you agree with these statements? ✓ *Tick one box for each row*

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I stayed on in school because my friends did	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
It was my decision to stay on in school	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Having a career or job in the future is important to me	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I stayed on in school because I wasn't sure what I would have done otherwise	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I now have a clearer idea of what I want to do when I leave school than I had a year ago	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Raising a family in the future is important to me	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Having a well paid job is important to me	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Having a job that is interesting and not routine is important to me	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Having any job is better than being unemployed	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Studying to gain qualifications is important to me	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I don't really think much about what I might do in a few years time	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Having to borrow money or get a student loan would put me off going to university	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

20. What would you MOST like to do when you leave school? ✓ *Tick one box only*

- Study at a Further Education (FE) college/tech
- Study at a university
- Get a job
- Enroll on a training course
- Join the armed forces
- Take an apprenticeship
- I am unsure
- Nothing
- Other, please state

21.a. Is there anything that would stop you from doing what you would like to do when you leave school? ✓ *Tick one*

- Yes ⇒ *Go to Q21.b*
- No ⇒ *Go to Q22*
- Don't know ⇒ *Go to Q22.*

21.b What would stop you from doing what you want to do? *Please write in space provided*

22. On a scale of 1 to 10, where 1 is not worried and 10 is very worried, please tell us how worried you are that you might not be able to get a job when you finish your education?

✓ Tick one box

**Not at all
Worried**

**Very
worried**

1

2

3

4

5

6

7

8

9

10

23.a Do you have a part-time job at the moment? ✓ Tick one

Yes ⇒ Go to Q23.b

No ⇒ Go to Q24.a

23.b What kind of job do you have? (e.g. Office work, paper round, shop assistant) Please write in the space provided

24.a Have you received careers advice since the start of the school year (i.e. since September 2014)? ✓ Tick one

Yes ⇒ Go to Q 24.b

No ⇒ Go to Q25

Don't know ⇒ Go to Q25

24.b How would you rate the quality of careers guidance you received? ✓ Tick one

Very good

Good

OK

Poor

Very Poor

25. Have you taken part in any of the following career guidance activities since the start of the school year (i.e. since September 2014)? ✓ Tick one box for each statement

	Yes	No
Accessed careers advice online	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Had a mock interview	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Attended a careers talk in school	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Attended a careers talk outside of school	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Attended a careers/jobs fair	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Talked to my family about my future	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Talked to a member of staff in school/tech about my future	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Talked to a careers advisor about my future	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Went on a work experience placement	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Visited a place of work	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other, please state	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

⇒ Now go to Section 4, Q40.a

Section 3A: Your school experiences (for those who currently do not go to school)

ONLY ANSWER THIS SECTION IF YOU ARE NOT IN SCHOOL THIS YEAR

26. Thinking about your **last year** in school (i.e. Year 12 / 5th Year), how much do you agree with these statements? ✓ Tick one box for each statement

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
I was happy at school	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I often struggled with school work	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I was bored most of the time at school	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I completed my homework most of the time	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I got on well with most of my teachers	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I felt that teachers in the school cared about me and my future	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I enjoyed learning	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I enjoyed school work that was challenging	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
My friends looked down on people who worked hard at school	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I liked to see how much I could get away with when I was at school	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I did the opposite to what people told me at school, just to make them mad	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I ignored rules at school that got in my way	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I got into fights in my last year of school	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

27.a How often were you bullied in your last year at school? i.e. Year 12 / 5th year ✓ Tick one

- Never
- Only once or twice
- About once a week
- Two or three times a week
- Several times a week

27.b How often did you bully someone else in your last year of school? i.e. Year 12 / 5th Year ✓ Tick one

- Never
- Only once or twice
- About once a week
- Two or three times a week
- Several times a week

28.a Were you suspended from school in your last year of school? i.e. Year 12 / 5th Year ✓ Tick one

- Yes ⇒ Go to Q28.b
- No ⇒ Go to Q29.a

28.b How many days did you miss by being suspended from school? ✓ Tick one

- 1-5 days
- 6-10 days
- 11-15 days
- 16 or more days

29.a How often did you skive or bunk off school in your last year of school? ✓ Tick one

- Never ⇒ *Go to Q30*
- For the odd day or class ⇒ *Go to Q29.b*
- For particular days or classes ⇒ *Go to Q29.b*
- For a few days at a time ⇒ *Go to Q29.b*
- For a few weeks at a time ⇒ *Go to Q29.b*

29.b What was the main reason for skiving or bunking off school? ✓ Tick one

- Couldn't be bothered going to school generally
- Did not like a particular teacher
- Did not like a particular subject
- Had not completed my homework
- Because my friends were doing it too
- Other, please state

Section 3B: Your school experiences (for those who currently do not go to school)

ONLY ANSWER THIS SECTION IF YOU ARE NOT AT SCHOOL THIS YEAR

30. Thinking back to when you were in your last year of school, what did you want to do MOST when you finished Year 12 (5th Year)? ✓ Tick one box

- Stay on at school
- Study at a further education (FE) college/tech
- Study at university
- Go on a training course
- Join the armed forces
- Take an apprenticeship
- Get a job
- I was unsure
- Other, please state

31. Are you currently working (full-time or part-time), in education or in training? ✓ Tick one

- Yes ⇒ go to Q32
- No ⇒ go to Q33

32. What are you currently doing?

✓ Tick one box for each row

	Yes	No		
I go to a Further Education (FE) college/tech	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	If yes, what course are you doing at FE college?	
I am on a training course	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	If yes, what training course are you doing?	
I am doing an apprenticeship	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	If yes, what is your apprenticeship in?	
I work full-time	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	If yes, what kind of job do you have?	
I work part-time	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	If yes, what kind of job do you have?	
I am in the armed forces	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		
Other	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	If yes, please state	

⇒ Now go to Q38.a

33. Roughly how long have you been unemployed (and not in education or training)? ✓ Tick one

- Less than 1 month
- 2 to 3 months
- 4 to 5 months
- 6 months or more

34. Are you receiving Job Seekers Allowance (JSA) (unemployment benefits)? ✓ Tick one

- Yes
- No

35.a Over the next 6 months, how confident are you that you will be able to move out of unemployment and into a job, education or training? ✓ Tick one

- Very confident
- Quite Confident
- Confident
- Not very confident
- Not at all confident

35.b Why do you say that? Please write in the space provided

36. What would you like to do MOST within the next 6-12 months? ✓ Tick one

- Get a job
- Go back to school
- Go to FE College/Tech
- Go on a training course
- Join an apprenticeship
- Join the armed forces
- Stay as I am
- Other, please state

37.a We have identified some things that may stop young people from moving out of unemployment (into a job, education or training). Please tell us which ONE of these things is stopping you the most?

✓ Tick one

- | | |
|---|--------------------------|
| I don't have any work experience | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| I don't have the right kind of work experience for what I want to do | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| I don't have the qualifications that I need (to get a job or onto a course) | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| I am not able to get the hours in a job that suit me | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| I don't know enough about possible options | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| I lack confidence and belief in myself | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| I have an illness that prevents me from doing certain things | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| I have caring responsibilities (e.g. for another family member/my child) | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| I find it difficult to motivate myself | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| I don't have enough support from other people (e.g. family, friends) | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| I find it difficult to adapt to new situations (e.g. a new workplace or FE college) | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| I am finding it hard to get a job | <input type="checkbox"/> |

37.b Please tell us more about the things that are stopping you from moving out of unemployment (into a job, education or training)? *Please write in the space provided*

38.a Have you received any careers advice since you left school? ✓ *Tick one*

- Yes ⇒ *Go to Q38.b*
- No ⇒ *Go to Q39*
- Don't know ⇒ *Go to Q39*

38.b How would you rate the quality of the careers advice you received? ✓ *Tick one*

- Very good
- Good
- OK
- Poor
- Very Poor

39. Have you taken part in any of the following career guidance activities since you left school? ✓ *Tick one box for each statement*

	Yes	No
Accessed careers advice online	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Attended a careers talk in FE college/tech	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Attended a careers talk outside of school, FE college/tech	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Attended a careers/job fair	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Talked to my family about my future	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Talked to a member of staff in FE college/tech about my future	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Talked to a careers advisor	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Went on a work placement	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Visited a place of work	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other, please state	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Section 4: Your Future *(continued)*

40.a Do you see yourself studying at a Further Education (FE) college in the future? ✓ Tick one

- Yes ⇒ Go to Q40.b
 No ⇒ Go to Q41.a
 Don't know ⇒ Go to Q41.a

40.b What would you like to study at a Further Education (FE) college in the future? Please write in the space provided

41.a Do you see yourself studying at a university in the future? ✓ Tick one

- Yes ⇒ Go to Q41.b
 No ⇒ Go to Q42.a
 Don't know ⇒ Go to Q42.a

41.b What would you like to study at a university in the future? Please write in the space provided

42.a Have you decided on the type of job or career you would like to have in the future? ✓ Tick one

- Yes ⇒ Go to Q42.b
 No ⇒ Go to Q43

42.b What type of job or career would you like in the future? Please write in the space provided

42.c Please explain the reason why you want this job or career? Please write in the space provided

Section 5: Year 12 Qualifications

43. Did you complete any of the following qualifications in Year 12 (5th Year)? ✓ Tick one

- BTEC Yes
 No
- Occupational Studies Yes
 No
- GCSEs Yes ⇒ Go to Q44
 No ⇒ Go to Q45

44. Did you take any of the following GCSEs?

	✓ Tick one			✓ Tick one	
	Yes	No		Yes	No
English	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	If yes, did you achieve a Grade C or above?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Maths	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	If yes, did you achieve a Grade C or above?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
ICT	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	If yes, did you achieve a Grade C or above?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Science	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	If yes, did you achieve a Grade C or above?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Section 6: Life and social activities

45. Do you drink alcohol? ✓ Tick one

- No
 Once or twice in my life
 Once or twice a month
 Once or twice a week
 Most days

46. Do you smoke cigarettes? ✓ Tick one

- No
 Once or twice in my life
 Once or twice a month
 Once or twice a week
 Most days

47. Have you taken illegal drugs before? ✓ Tick one

- No
 Once or twice in my life
 Once or twice a month
 Once or twice a week
 Most days

48.a In the past 12 months, have the police contacted you because they thought you had done something wrong? ✓ Tick one

- Yes
 No

48.b Have the police ever asked you to stop doing something which they thought you should not be doing? ✓ Tick one

- Yes
 No

49. Have you taken part in any of these activities or groups in the last three months? ✓ Tick one box for each activity/group

	Yes	No
BB/GB/Guides/Scouts	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Church Groups	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Drama/Art/Music Group	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sports Team/Exercise/Dance Class	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Volunteering	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Youth Groups	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other, please state	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

50. Are you working towards any other achievements at the minute? ✓ Tick one box for each achievement

	Yes	No
Duke of Edinburgh Award	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Essential Skills (basic literacy and numeracy)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
First Aid (e.g. St John's Ambulance)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
ICT Qualification (e.g. ECDL)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Language Qualification/ Music grade exams	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
OCN Qualifications	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sports Awards (Karate Belts, Gymnastics)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other, please state	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

If you have any questions or further comments about this research or NCB NI please contact Helen McNamee, email: hmcnamee@ncb.org.uk, phone: 028 9089 1730, text or phone: 07595 272 114 OR tell us in the box below

Any further comments or questions:

THANK YOU

Please return your survey in the enclosed Freepost envelope by 31st March 2015
To enter into a prize draw to win shopping vouchers please complete the enclosed Prize Draw Entry Form and return it with your survey.