



**INCLUDE YOUTH SUBMISSION TO INQUIRY INTO
YOUNG PEOPLE NOT IN EMPLOYMENT,
EDUCATION OR TRAINING (NEETs)**

“Someone that’ll keep you on, give you a chance, let you work without making a header out of you.” (Young person)

“Make more opportunities for young people to engage in work, showing them what way to get work, job skills. Opportunities to show them life! About making it through work.”(Young Person)

“No-one wants to give you a placement if you’ve got a record.”(Young person)

June 2010

Executive Summary

In the course of preparing our response to the consultation, we held a number of consultations with young people (aged 16 – 20 yrs) from the Give and Take Scheme and with a number of young people in juvenile custody in Woodlands JJCNI and Hydebank Wood YOC. As well as drawing on direct consultations with young people specifically on the NEET inquiry, our submission also includes relevant information we have gleaned from various other policy consultations. We also facilitated a half day group discussion with a range of practitioners who are members of the YOYO Forum, along with staff from across our organisation.

While the causes of becoming NEET are complex and at times deep rooted and require action from many actors outside the remit of the DEL, we are confident that an action plan can be drawn up to move forward and address very practical solutions to improve the opportunities for some young people.

What tend to be the characteristics, experiences and barriers common to those young people who are NEET?

Characteristics and Experiences:

The young people we work with are unemployed and are unable to access mainstream training. A large number have experience of the care system and the juvenile justice system. They also may have problems with alcohol or drugs, suffer from economic and social deprivation, have learning difficulties, emotional and mental health problems and be at risk of homelessness due to living in unsettled accommodation. Many of the young people have very low self esteem and are lacking self confidence.

Barriers to education, employment and training:

‘Bouncing’ between systems: Because of the nature of their chaotic lives the young people come into contact with many aspects of the health and social care sector, the education sector, housing sector and at times the juvenile justice sector. As a result they feel that they are being ‘bounced’ between systems which do not appear to collaborate or work in a co-ordinated way for the best interests of the young person.

Lack of flexibility within current structures: Many of the young people felt that schools did not understand the difficulties they may have been experiencing at home

which was causing them problems in their ability to learn and to concentrate. **This lack of flexibility continues when young people attempt to access training in further and higher education colleges.** Practices such as running courses within the academic year only, the 4 week rule and the 40 hours puts many young people at a disadvantage. These rules do not take into account the frequency of events in some young people's lives such as hospitalisation, being taken into custody, homelessness, accommodation moves and other major crisis.

Lack of relationship with a significant adult: Unfortunately, many young people do not find a significant adult to guide them through difficulties and this lack of personal support can have a devastating impact on them.

Stigma: Many young people who are in care experience stigma and believe that they are instantly labelled as troublemakers which can lead to unfair judgements being made about them and forthcoming support being limited or non-existent.

Criminal Record: Having a criminal record is a substantial barrier to accessing both training and employment. In our experience further education colleges can be reluctant to accept young people with a background in offending behaviour.

Lack of work experience placements: There is a growing unease about the lack of work experience opportunities available to give young people a taste of employment and a real fear that this situation will only get worse with deepening economic recession. We find it particularly hard to access work experience within the public sector.

Financially unviable: Many of the young people told us that it is not worth their while working. Such is the nature of the system, they are concerned that if they do take up employment, often which can be very low paid, they will lose benefits and it becomes financially unviable to access employment. The young people on the Give and Take Scheme have repeatedly called for the need for **EMA to be made eligible for those participating on schemes like Give and Take.**

Variations in school provisions: The transition from education to training to employment can be a postcode lottery, with some schools offering more access to training opportunities than others. Schools which offer link programmes to training and employment are favoured by the young people.

Lack of trained tutors: It is our experience that many further and higher education colleges do not have the trained staff to deal with the young people we work with.

What prevention/ intervention strategies might be useful to reduce their numbers?

The young people that we work with have been failed by a number of processes from well before the age of 16 years, not least by the **education system**. It is vital that all professionals, including teachers, have the skills and knowledge to allow **early identification and appropriate intervention**. We would welcome training for teachers which would help them understand the realities of life for marginalised young people and be more sensitive to the problems and challenges they face. We would also recommend that more needs to be done to improve the delivery of careers advice within and outside of schools.

What kinds of best practice are available to those working with young people who are NEET and what has been shown to work particularly well in our local situation?

We would like to outline two projects which we feel are demonstrating a positive approach, the DHSSPS Employability Scheme and the Give and Take Scheme.

DHSSPS Employability Scheme: In recent years there have been a number of key legislative and policy initiatives that have culminated in the setting of specific Priorities for Action targets by DHSSPS. These targets require all five NI HSC Trusts to work together with agencies in the development of be-spoke employability services designed to offer tangible and concrete opportunities to specifically assist these young people prepare for, and engage in, the world of work.

Give and Take Scheme: The Give & Take Scheme is run by Include Youth and works predominately with care experienced young people (aged 16–21) from across NI who have been assessed as being unable to participate in mainstream training and employment opportunities. The following components make up the scheme: induction and assessment, supported work experiences, training, the delivery of essential skills, social education/ personal development programme, social and cultural awareness, mentoring, employment liaison and move on. For the majority of young people on the scheme literacy and numeracy training or basic ICT training is required. The scheme provides in-house training with our own trained tutors. Of the 53 young people who completed the scheme in 2009/10 60% achieved an Essential Skill qualification and 85% achieved qualifications such as Preparation for Placement (OCN Level1) and Employability Skills (OCN Level 1). The young people also gained a range of other qualifications through the scheme, including Duke of Edinburgh Bronze and Silver Awards, Getting Ahead, First Aid, Driving Test, Drugs and Alcohol Awareness.

By providing psychological and social supports for young people as they learn, the scheme acts as a positive experience for such young people who characteristically have been treated as “no hoppers” by one institution after another. The experience of success can be transferred from one situation to another as the person starts to believe in his/her own capabilities. In essence, we work to help marginalised young people develop successful and creative coping strategies to enable them to live independently in the community.

Why does the Give and Take approach work?

We believe that the Give and Take Scheme is effective because it is individual needs led, provides specialist tutors who understand the complex needs of the young people, it is flexible and not linked to academic year or rigid attendance rules, it is held in neutral venues, the young people are prepared for placements, personal development and mentoring is critical to the scheme and finally, we recognise and celebrate achievement and ensure that all participants leave the scheme with something tangible.

How best might young people who disengage from the system be tracked/monitored?

The professionals we spoke to were keen to see the following criteria addressed: who will be tracked, specifically what ages of children and young people?; how will it be monitored?; how will it be maintained?; how will it be funded? A number of the professionals suggested that the age range for tracking should be wide and could include ages 12 – 25 years old. We would suggest that one tracking/information system is used across all agencies and departments (including health, education, benefits etc...)

What elements/ funding would be required within a Strategy for young people who are NEET and what cross-departmental Action/ Implementation Programmes are needed to address the situation?

Include Youth would like to make the following recommendations:

1. **Pre-vocational accreditation** – We suggest that programmes like the Give and Take Scheme are accredited (using criteria that is acceptable to all) to be providers of “pre-vocational” programmes which support the young people who currently are not having their needs met.
2. **Educational Maintenance Allowance** – The criteria for awarding EMA should be reviewed to include programmes where the focus is not always on re-entry to the formal school setting and in which work placements and learning skills in a less formal environment are more common
3. **Essential skills** currently being provided for within mainstream DEL programmes are proving to be too rigid and inflexible for many young people who are NEET. We believe that this must be addressed as a matter of urgency.
4. **Improve training** of tutors to engage with a wider range of young people and particularly those who are experiencing difficulties outside college.
5. **The development of mainstream training and education programmes which are flexible, tailored to suit individual needs and are holistic in approach.** This approach should be adopted from the moment children enter mainstream education rather than leaving it to post primary stage or later.
6. The provision of appropriate placements and employment opportunities, both within private and public sector, for this particular group of young people.

Consideration should be given to the outcomes of the evaluation of the HSCT Employability programmes and how they could be replicated.

7. In order to ensure that children and young people “enjoy, learn and achieve” and “experience economic well-being” there must be better collaboration between DEL and DE and all other government departments. The work must begin well before young people are at the stage of ‘opting out’ and have been ‘lost’ in the system. It begins with early intervention family support initiatives. This would ensure that the needs of children and their families are met earlier thereby ensuring that they are not without education, training or employment.
8. Addressing the particular educational, training and employment needs of children and young people with “additional needs” particularly those involved with the criminal justice system, those who are looked after and are leaving care.

Concluding Comments

Include Youth very much welcomes the enthusiasm and commitment which the Employment and Learning Committee have demonstrated in their efforts to tackle the problem of young people who are NEET. We are mindful of the need for the Committee to develop realistic and tangible action plans following this inquiry and anticipate that the information we have provided will assist them in that process.

FULL REPORT

Introduction

Include Youth promotes best practice with young people in need or at risk. We achieve this through the development and promotion of resources, the provision of training, information and support of practitioners and organisations. We also undertake activities aimed at influencing public policy and policy awareness – both locally and nationally.

Include Youth promotes the development of positive choices and opportunities for vulnerable and challenging young people in the community, residential care or

custody. Include Youth promotes the use of community alternatives to care and custody for children and young people.

Amongst the young people at risk with whom, and on whose behalf, Include Youth works are young people from socially disadvantaged areas, those with a learning disability, those with special needs, those who have been truanting, suspended or expelled from school, those from a care background, those who had a negative parenting experience, young people who have committed or are at risk of committing crime, misusing drugs or alcohol, undertaking unsafe sexual behaviour or other harmful activities, or of being harmed themselves.

Include Youth's Young Voices project is a way of delivering participative democracy to marginalised young people in Northern Ireland. Its main aim is to support young people at risk or with experience of the criminal justice system, as well as young people marginalised for a variety of reasons, to become involved in decision making processes which impact on their lives, particularly in social welfare, education and criminal justice matters. The project works with a range of groups of young people in the community and both juvenile and youth custody facilities in Northern Ireland.

Include Youth manages the LACE (Looked After Children in Education) Project which is a multi-agency partnership with the aim of promoting better educational outcomes for children and young people in care.

The Give and Take Scheme aims to improve the employability and increase the self esteem of young people in need or at risk from across Northern Ireland. The Scheme works with approximately 135 young people from a care or criminal justice background. The Scheme aims to support young people to overcome particular barriers that prevent them from moving into mainstream training or employment and towards independent living. 75% of people on the Scheme are care experienced and we have strong partnership with all Trusts and Careers service. The Scheme provides essential skills training (ICT, English and maths) to all of the young people. We will give more detail on all aspects of the Scheme later in the document.

In addition, Include Youth runs the YOYO Practitioners Forum, which draws together professionals from a range of statutory, voluntary and community organisations working directly with young people in need or at risk, and meets on a quarterly basis.

General Comments

Include Youth welcomes this inquiry and is pleased to have the opportunity to make this submission. We are aware that the Committee has received a number of submissions and gathered substantial evidence. Therefore our submission is solely concerned with the experiences of the young people and practitioners involved with Include Youth.

In the course of preparing our response to the consultation, we held a number of consultations with young people (aged 16 – 20 yrs) from the Give and Take Scheme and those in juvenile custody in Woodlands JJCNI and Hydebank Wood YOC. As well as drawing on direct consultations with young people specifically on the NEET inquiry, our submission also includes relevant information we have gathered from our work generally and various other policy consultations.

We also facilitated a half day group discussion with a range of practitioners who are members of the YOYO Forum, along with staff from across our organisation. The various roles represented at the meeting were Education Welfare Officers, staff from various Alternative Education Projects, Fostering Network, Youth Justice Agency, Rural Community Network, Homeless projects, the Princes Trust and various voluntary sector and health and social services representatives.

We have used direct quotes from both young people and practitioners to inform our response.

Whilst Include Youth has a wealth of knowledge and experience of the many complex issues faced by children and young people in need or at risk, we have focused our current response to this inquiry on the particular issues facing children and young people who face barriers to learning and work. Our comments seek to inform the future education, training and employment opportunities for children and young

people based on our many years of delivery of services directly to children and young people at risk, through the Give Take Scheme and also based on our proven track record as a children's rights advocacy organisation.

Include Youth welcomes the Committee's efforts to ensure that the needs of this particularly vulnerable group of young people are addressed. Include Youth firmly believes that all young people should have the opportunity to reach their full potential. We also concur with the aim to prioritise early intervention, provision of appropriate support and collaborative working.

While the causes of becoming NEET are complex and at times deep rooted and require action from many actors outside the remit of the DEL, we are confident that an action plan can be drawn up to move forward and address very practical solutions to improve the opportunities for some young people.

Specific Comments

What tend to be the characteristics, experiences and barriers common to those young people who are NEET?

Include Youth works with many young people who have experienced difficulties in learning and barriers to accessing training and employment. Some of the **characteristics and experiences** of the young people we have worked with who are NEET include young people:

- who have been or are currently in care
- with experience of the juvenile justice system, including being in custody
- from an economically disadvantaged background
- who have experienced family breakdown
- with negative educational experiences
- who have been suspended or excluded from school
- who have behavioural problems
- who have mental health issues which have not been addressed

- with learning difficulties
- who are carers
- who lack stability in their lives
- who have experienced multiple moves and changes in living circumstances

Many of the young people we work with have the majority of the characteristics listed above.

Include Youth has found the following attributes present within the lives of the young people who work with.

Lack of confidence, motivation and self esteem:

Unsurprisingly, the combination of living on a daily basis with the myriad of issues listed above results in young people who:

- Have extremely low self esteem
- Lack confidence
- Have low aspirations
- Experience isolation
- Have poor coping skills
- Can display challenging behaviour

These factors leave young people feeling unmotivated and lacking direction.

“no motivation – didn’t want to do anything.”(young person)

“no confidence and not believing in yourself.”(young person)

There have been specific concerns with regards the educational attainment of children who are looked after. DHSSPS statistics provide us with the details of the educational underachievement of care leavers in particular.

- Almost one quarter of those leaving care in 2008/09 had received a statement of SEN, compared with 4% of the population.
- 11% of care leavers left care with 5 GCSEs (Grade A* - C) or higher, compared with 67% of general school leavers.

- Just below half (48%) of care leavers had no qualifications at all, compared to 3% of NI school leavers.
- Care leavers who had obtained no qualifications were over two and half times as likely as those with qualifications to be unemployed or economically inactive.

(Care Leavers Aged 16-18 Statistical Bulletin 2008/09, DHSSPS, 29th January 2010)

The reasons for these difficulties are many and varied. It can be as a result of difficulties at home, of emotional and psychological needs not being identified, of a learning disability, issues related to being in care, behavioural problems etc. This multiplicity of factors results in the chances of doing well at school being stacked up against our most vulnerable children and young people. The young people appear to become disaffected from an early age and very often their experience at school only serves to reinforce that alienation. Include Youth on behalf of a multi-agency steering group runs the Looked After Children and Education (LACE) project which seeks to address some of the systemic barriers which prevent the challenges that looked after children experience in their education not being overcome.

Barriers to education, employment and training:

There are many barriers which exist to prevent some young people entering and remaining in education, employment or training. Many of the barriers fall outside the remit of the DEL but we feel it is vital that the Department receives a full response which reflects the feedback we received from both young people and practitioners. They include the following:

‘Bouncing’ between systems:

Because of the nature of their complex needs and issues the young people come into contact with many aspects of the health and social care sector, the education sector, housing sector and at times the juvenile justice sector. As a result they feel that they are being ‘bounced’ between systems which do not appear to collaborate or work in a co-ordinated way for their best interests. The young people are in contact very often with numerous professionals and have become accustomed to having to fill out a

myriad of forms asking them questions about their income, housing arrangements, educational background, health, family circumstances etc. Too often these systems do not appear to communicate. This can sometimes result in decisions being taken which inadvertently impact in a negative way on the young person's life. So while one aspect of government policy or practice is designed to assist and support these vulnerable young people another may actually act as a barrier to them fulfilling their potential.

In order to be able to participate and achieve in education, employment and training, young people need to have as much stability as possible in other aspects of their lives including their housing needs, health needs, financial arrangements and family circumstances. These parts of young people's lives are often in a constant state of flux.

Lack of flexibility within current structures:

As we have already stated the young people we work with have complicated and chaotic lives which are not characterised by routine or order. Each day can bring a new obstacle for these young people and their ability to fit in with rigid and inflexible systems are severely challenged as they try to cope with what life throws at them. **The system as it stands at present does not allow flexibility for a young person who is in a crisis situation and very often this results in the young person falling out of the formal system.**

Many of the young people felt that **schools did not understand the difficulties they may have been experiencing at home which was causing them problems in their ability to learn and to concentrate.** The general perception was that schools were more interested in keeping to rules and regulations rather than providing support when it might have been needed most. Too often this results in children and young people who are struggling to keep up in class not being given the time, support and appropriate interventions they need. As they fall further behind their classmates they become more and more disillusioned and often get labelled as a 'troublemaker'.

"They didn't get on with me and I didn't get on with them." (Young person)

“The system cannot deal with children who, through no fault of their own, live in very difficult and and traumatic circumstances. Therefore, those children are ignored, excluded, or encouraged not to attend. That is how those children find themselves in what we call NEET.” (Include Youth Staff)

This lack of flexibility continues when young people attempt to access training in further and higher education colleges. Colleges currently run courses within the academic year between September and June. The current requirement by the colleges state that 40 hours must be completed before the end of June to obtain the essential skills training qualification. However, young people’s lives do not run by academic year and they are unable to keep to a rigid timetable as they are balancing their training with trying to sort out housing issues, family issues, personal health needs and financial worries.

“I can speak for most people who take part in the [Give and Take] programme when I say that normal tech does not meet our needs – it does not work for us.”(Young person)

“Our essential skills class is small and the tutors are really good, so you get more one-to-one time and more work done. If you miss more than 4 classes you do not get kicked out, because the staff know about your needs and circumstances.” (Young person)

In the mainstream sector, if some of the young people miss a couple of sessions they do not receive the qualification. Similarly, the 4 week rule, which leads a young person who did not attend the training for 4 weeks to be expelled from the course, puts many young people at a disadvantage. It does not take into account the frequency of events in some young people’s lives such as hospitalisation, being taken into custody, homelessness, accommodation moves and other major crisis.

“Because the course I was on was supposed to be for two years, but I couldn’t finish it because of family problems. I was always visiting me brother and Dad in jail, so I missed too much and got put off the course.” (young person in custody)

Young people do not feel that they are given the support and encouragement they need to continue their learning within the further education mainstream sector. Many of these young people have experienced difficulty in mainstream primary sector and need considerable encouragement and support to help them cope with entering formal education again. As Essential Skills Tutors have said in relation to young people in care:

“A lot of young people in the care system have never been used to mainstream setting for anything. Most were not able to finish mainstream education because they were not able to cope with the demands and self discipline required within the mainstream system. The result of this is that most of these young people do not have the social skills never mind the study or concentration skills required to succeed within a mainstream setting. Placing them cold back into this setting is enormously intimidating and in most cases fails as the young person simply won’t attend.”(Essential Skills Tutor)

“Most mainstream settings are inflexible ... things have to be completed by set target dates, classes have to be attended at set times and minimal amounts of work completed within these times etc...” (Essential Skills Tutor)

This rigid approach does little to address the essential skills of the young people we work with. This means that rather than working in partnership with local colleges to address essential skills needs, Give and Take have been forced to purchase independent tutors to deliver this service.

There are a number of issues which were brought up time and time again by both young people and practitioners which are **relevant to the overall delivery of formal education and the need to address barriers which do little to help all children, but are particularly harmful to vulnerable children. These include the impact of large class sizes, the limited number of classroom assistants and the lack of focus in delivering on special educational needs. Other wider and more general issues which many thought acted as a barrier to children’s learning included: the lack of pastoral support and counselling expertise within schools, limited teacher training on how to deal with children with complex lives, teachers lack of knowledge about what resources they can draw on outside the school system,**

overemphasis on academic achievement and finally, the formal education's reluctance to sometimes see pupils as active partners in the process rather than passive recipients who must adhere to a set of rules and regulations.

Lack of relationship with a significant adult:

Having one person who understands and is willing to offer support can be a turning point for many young people. Unfortunately, some young people do not find a significant adult to guide them through difficulties and this lack of personal support can have a devastating impact on them.

Stigma:

Many young people who are in care experience stigma and believe that they are instantly labelled as troublemakers which can lead to unfair judgements being made about them and support being limited or non-existent. This stigma is also very much apparent for young people who have come into conflict with the law.

Criminal Record:

Having a criminal record is a substantial barrier to accessing both training and employment. In our experience further education colleges can be reluctant to accept young people with a background in offending behaviour. It is increasingly difficult to find employers who are willing to offer placements and opportunities to young people with a criminal record.

"I hoped I would get a good job but I don't know really know why. There were very few jobs and I had a criminal record." (young person)

The young people we spoke to who are currently in custody do have aspirations for the future and are seeking the chance to enter employment. When asked how we can help young people who have criminal convictions to get jobs one young man replied:

*"Well, you just can't throw them to the wall like, everyone makes mistakes. Give them a chance and maybe when they get their first pay packet, they'll say "F*** me, this is great!" and they'll stick with it, they'll want to do it. Like my Granny used to say "Do it the honest way son". But I didn't, I made mistakes. But I will now, when I get out, if I get the chance." (young person)*

“If you’ve got a criminal record and you’re coming out of custody, give them jobs to get experience and give you something to do – to help keep them out of trouble.”
(young person)

While this inquiry does not ask specifically about the educational and training employment **experiences of young people in custody with the law, this group do represent an element of the NEET population.** As Include Youth has considerable experience of working with young people in the criminal justice system we have included some detail on evidence we have previously gathered on this groups educational and employment experience.

The young people were asked what their educational provision had been like since their arrival into Hydebank Wood YOC. Many of them said that they had had an initial assessment after a few weeks but had not received any formal education. They complained that it took a long time for them to be assessed and expressed their regret that more effort was not made to educate them and support them to find employment on their release. Seven out of the eight young people who took part in discussion on this topic said they had not had any education at the YOC.

“I’ve not been properly yet cos you have to do assessments first to see if you’re dumb or smart – I’ve been in 3 ½ months and I haven’t had any education. I’d like to, I can’t read or write.”

It is clearly a cause for concern that the educational needs of the young people in the YOC are not being met and signifies a lost opportunity to provide education and training to our most disaffected young men.

“You need help with a job; teach you how to do job interviews, training for it. If you got out and you got a job, you wouldn’t want to lose it, you’d try hard not to lose it, and so you wouldn’t get into any trouble. Plus, you’d have no time to re-offend.”

While some of the young people appeared to shun the idea of receiving any support to stop offending, the majority are open to it and want help to change their ways.

“They could try to get you more qualifications, offer more things for you to do, other classes.”

“Get us into workshops, not just education, to get some experience and learn about a trade. You’re not allowed into workshops until you’re 18, cos we’re juveniles.”

Young people in custody are generally not particularly hopeful about their employment prospects.

“Cos ones like us [in YOC], we’ve no hope, if you’ve a bad background, there is no hope of getting a job.”

But at the same time as recognising the challenges ahead for getting a job the young people in custody acknowledge the importance of gaining employment to help them reach their full potential.

“Make more opportunities for young people to engage in work, show them what way to get work, job skills. Opportunities to show them life! About making it through hard work” (Young person).

Lack of work experience placements:

There is a growing unease about the lack of work experience opportunities available to give young people a taste of employment and a real fear that this situation will only get worse with deepening economic recession. We find it particularly hard to access work experience within the public sector.

“Nobody will accept us.”

“I’m really scared that if I can’t get a job, then I won’t have a career.”

“You need some experience to get a job, a chance.”

“No-one wants to give you a placement if you’ve got a record.”

Financially unviable:

Many of the young people told us that it is not worth their while working. Such is the nature of the system, they are concerned that if they do take up employment, often which can be very low paid, they will lose benefits and it becomes financially unviable to access employment.

“Financially, it’s not worth it – you lose benefits.”

The young people on the Give and Take Scheme have repeatedly called for the need for **EMA to be made eligible for those participating on schemes like Give and Take.**

Variations in school provision:

The transition from education to training to employment can be a postcode lottery, with some schools offering more access to training opportunities than others. Schools which offer link programmes to training and employment are favoured by the young people. Those schools which remain rigidly academic in their outlook cannot provide some young people with the opportunities they need. If young people do not receive the training they want and which is best suited to them they can become school refusers and eventually drop out of the system.

“There should be better choices for training schemes.” (young person)

Lack of trained tutors:

It is our experience that many further and higher education colleges do not have the trained staff to deal with the young people we work with. Give and Take previously worked with further education colleges to access training for the young people that had been referred to the scheme. However, over a long period it became clear that this provision was not working for our young people. As one member of the Give and Take team states:

“The young people were being set up to fail again. We were putting them into classes and, because of the structures; they failed and felt like failures yet again. Quite often towards the end the Department was sending tutors who were not skilled in engaging our young people. The tutors found it difficult to work with the young people, and vice versa.”(Include Youth staff)

What prevention/ intervention strategies might be useful to reduce their numbers?

This inquiry is concerned with what action the DEL can take with regard to young people NEET, but it is clear that any prevention/ intervention strategy must take account of what happens to young people before they fall under the remit of the DEL.

The young people that we work with have been failed by a number of processes from well before the age of 16 years, not least by the **education system**.

We appreciate that many of our suggestions for intervention and prevention are under the responsibility of the DE and we are constantly in discussion with them but we hope the Committee will find it informative to know more about the detail of our position on this and use this information to influence the work of their colleagues in other departments.

It is vital that all professionals, including teachers, have the skills and knowledge to allow **early identification and appropriate intervention**. It is our opinion that too many children who are struggling at school are not having their underlying needs identified soon enough. We understand that there is always a reason why a child is not performing well in school, either at an academic level or in terms of the quality of their social interaction. We work with young people who have not benefited from early identification and intervention and as a result have not had learning difficulties diagnosed until much later in years, have not had behavioural and emotional difficulties picked up, have not had their mental health needs recognised, have not had any understanding in the school environment that the problems they are facing at home are affecting their behaviour and learning at school. Include Youth sees the end result of this oversight and lack of timely intervention at the extreme end it can mean a young person eventually gives up on school, opts out of the entire system and can run the risk of coming into conflict with the law and entering the juvenile justice system and being NEET.

'For 6 months, you couldn't hold me there, I didn't really care and I felt they didn't really care about me.'

We would welcome **training for teachers which would help them understand the realities of life for marginalised young people and be more sensitive to the problems and challenges they face.**

“They should do some things like in youth work e.g. anger management for young people, dealing with situations, problems that young people experience and on conflict handling.” (young person)

“Some teachers can’t understand young people’s behaviour, especially if you have ADHD and you can’t help it and how they react to it.” (young person)

“They need better training, especially how to deal with young people.” (young person)

There is also a need for teachers to receive general training on adolescence and how to deal with young people experiencing various moods and emotions.

Through direct work with young people at risk of social exclusion and practitioners Include Youth have developed **a general set of recommendations in relation to educational improvement.** If implemented we believe they would significantly reduce the number of young people NEET. These recommendations are outlined in our Manifesto for Youth Justice.:

- inclusive, mainstream education for all (other than in exceptional circumstances) aimed at developing the individual abilities and interests of all children
- sufficiently flexible curricula to: respond to the needs of a diverse school population, encourage personal and social development, safeguard physical health and emotional well-being (including provision of sex and relationships education)
- resources to respond to challenging and disruptive behaviours
- suspension and exclusion is used in the most exceptional circumstances and then as a last resort, for the shortest period of time

- alternative provision for the few not in mainstream education which is responsive to individual needs and abilities
- discreet, high quality therapeutic services including specialised counselling
- children/young people are involved in school decision-making processes, including those relating to discipline and policy or practice development.

Improved Careers Advice

Include Youth is aware of the significant development that has been undertaken by the careers service in Northern Ireland and applauds the efforts made to reach out to social excluded groups. We enjoy a very productive relationship with the Careers service and we have been very impressed by the ability of Careers advisors to adopt a young people centred approach in their work. We would however recommend that more needs to be done to improve the delivery of careers advice within and outside of schools. Many of the young people we work with did not receive adequate advice while at school.

“not knowing what opportunities are there because you left the school on bad terms – model students get more support.”

“I didn’t get any advice because I was kicked out.”

What kinds of best practice are available to those working with young people who are NEET and what has been shown to work particularly well in our local situation?

There are currently a number of examples of good practice working with young people who are NEET. We are aware that the Committee has heard the details of many of these projects, including those run by our colleagues in the Prince’s Trust and VOYPIC. We would like to outline two projects which we feel are demonstrating a positive approach and are promising, the DHSSPS Employability Scheme and the Give and Take Scheme.

DHSSPS Employability Scheme

It is worthwhile to highlight a regional cross-sector initiative breaking new ground in reducing the numbers of young care leavers not in ETE. Many of these young people

in and leaving the care system are some of the most disadvantaged and socially excluded young people in Northern Ireland therefore in recent years there have been a number of key legislative and policy initiatives that have culminated in the setting of specific Priorities for Action targets by DHSSPS.

These targets require all five NI HSC Trusts to work together with agencies in the development of be-spoke employability services designed to offer tangible and concrete opportunities to specifically assist these young people prepare for, and engage in, the world of work.

Include Youth has been commissioned to set up and manage this service within the WHSCT and also within the BHSCT in partnership with Opportunity Youth. There is a particular responsibility on Health Trusts and other public sector bodies to lead the way in opening opportunities as part of their unique role as Corporate Parent while other key players include DEL Careers Service.

Give and Take Scheme:

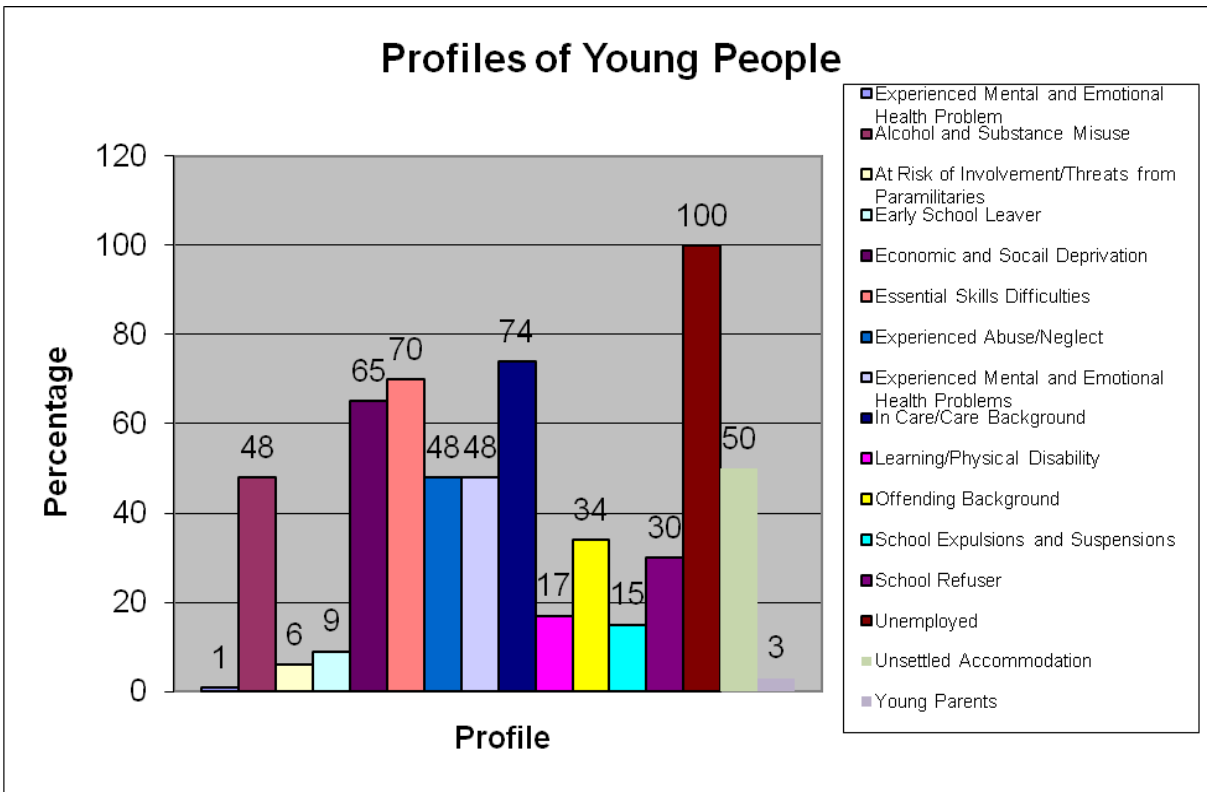
The Give & Take Scheme is run by Include Youth and works predominately (but not exclusively) with care experienced young people (aged 16–21) from across NI who have been assessed as being unable to participate in mainstream training and employment opportunities

The aims of the Give and Take Scheme are:

- to improve young people's long-term employability by giving them appropriate support and access to work experience and training
- to improve the self-esteem and confidence of marginalised young people so that they can learn to live independently in the community

This is achieved in the following ways:

- 1. Induction and Assessment** – Between 1st April 2009 and 31st March 2010, 140 young people attended the scheme. The graph below gives a detailed profile of the young people on the scheme for this period.



All young people and their Give and Take key workers undertake a detailed induction and assessment programme where a work plan is agreed between the Scheme, the young person and the young person’s social worker. This plan is based on the needs, capabilities and aspirations of each young person and includes a formal introduction to the Careers Service.

- 2. Supported work experiences**– Young people are offered opportunities to sample the world of work. These work experiences are varied and suit the individual needs and ability of all the young people. ‘**Work Prep**’ offers young people the opportunity to ‘plan’, ‘do’ and ‘review’ a group task. ‘**Work Ready**’ sees young people on taster days in an employment situation of their choice while ‘**Work Able**’ offers young people the opportunity for extended placements with employers. Here young people are given graduated exposure to responsibility in particular areas of work that interest them. Each placement is individually

tailored to address the specific needs of the young person. Skills are learnt in such a way that they build self-esteem. Types of placement include; work with children, the elderly and people with disabilities, manual work such as painting/decorating, mending bikes etc., office work including computer training, plus catering and shop work. Between April 2009 and March 2010, 16 young people had maintained placements of between 1 and 4 weeks and 33 young people were on placement for more than 4 weeks.

- 3. Essential skills** - For the majority of young people on the scheme literacy and numeracy training or basic ICT training is required. The scheme provides in-house training with our own trained tutors. All young people are assessed to identify level of need and are then offered training at Entry levels 1,2 or 3 or Level 1 or 2. Tutors operate with small numbers of young people guaranteeing more individualised support. Of the 53 young people who completed the scheme in 2009/10 60% achieved an Essential Skill qualification.
- 4. Training** –Young people on the scheme can gain qualifications in Preparation for Placement (Level1) and Employment Skills (Level1). Where appropriate young people are assisted and supported to access job specific technical skills needed to achieve sustained employment. Of the 53 young people who completed the scheme in 2009/10, 85% achieved qualifications such as Preparation for Placement (OCN Level1) and Employability Skills (OCN Level 1)..
- 5. Social education/personal development programme** – Young people are supported to explore the wider issues impinging on their lives. This involves a variety of activities both informal and formal. These may include regular drop-ins, assertiveness training, drug and alcohol use, relationships, sexual health, sexuality, independent living skills, identity etc. Young people also have the opportunity to gain a Level 1 qualification in an accredited personal development programme. In 2009/10 the following courses were completed and qualifications gained.

Courses/Programmes Completed/Qualifications Gained	
Course/Programme Title	No of Qualifications Gained
Duke of Edinburgh Section Award (Bronze)	49
Duke of Edinburgh Section Award (Silver)	5
Essential Skills Numeracy	63
Essential Skills Literacy	47
ICT	199 credits
Preparation for Placement	63
Getting Ahead	45
First Aid	15
Driving Theory	7
Driving Test	4
HARTE	26
Employability	13
Drugs & Alcohol Awareness	5
Leadership Award	1
CSR Card	11

6. Social/cultural awareness – Young people are provided with the opportunity for positive social contact in a non-threatening environment. As well as undertaking formal work in areas such as gender awareness and cross community issues we attempt to provide a flexible programme structure that can respond to the needs of young people as they arise, whether it is helping an individual to resolve a crisis situation, or participating in a shared groupwork or leisure activity. We aim to build the self-esteem of young people through this process as well as improve a young person's co-operation skills through the provision of team building activities.

- 7. Mentoring** – All young people will be given the opportunity for additional support by a personal mentor. The mentoring relationship will focus on the personal development of the young person addressing key issues such as interpersonal skills, independence skills and coping skills. The relationship with the mentor will assist the young person in setting and achieving personal goals that will help them towards sustained employment.

- 8. Employer Liaison** – We will develop relationships with employers in both the public and private sectors to increase awareness of the needs of the young people on Give and Take. We will also work with employers to help them create a more supportive working environment for our young people while on placement. This may include the provision of employment mentors from within the employer organisation.

- 9. Move-on-** through continuous engagement with the Careers Service young people are supported to access mainstream opportunities including Training for Success, full and part-time further education and employment. Between April 2009 and March 2010 73 young people left the scheme. 30 (41%) young people moved on to education/ training/ employment, 7 (10%) young people were referred to careers, 7 (10%) were applying to jobs/ courses, 6 (8%) young people left because of family commitments and 22 (30%) left for other reasons: lack of interest/ refused to engage (15), ill health (3), and prison(4).

By providing psychological and social supports for young people as they learn, the scheme acts as a positive experience for such young people who characteristically have been treated as “no hopers” by one institution after another. The experience of success can be transferred from one situation to another as the person starts to believe in his/her own capabilities. For example, young people on the scheme often become much better at advocating for their rights in different situations in their lives, whether it is to do with employment, training, accommodation, or relationships. Furthermore, by placing them in a work setting near their home young people are able to build networks of support for the future, a crucial preventive measure. In essence, we work to help marginalised young people develop successful and creative coping strategies to enable them to live independently in the community.

Why does the Give and Take approach work?

Firstly it is important to state that the Give and Take Scheme is not the only project working in this area there are others. We would strongly urge that the scheme is one of a menu of interventions available for young people who are not in education, employment or training.

There are a number of key reasons why we believe that the Give and Take Scheme is effective:

- The approach is driven by the needs of the individual young person. With an increase in skills and confidence the young person will be able to cope more as time goes on. Our approach is based on the premise that it is better to support a young person to take small steps that will eventually lead to progress rather than confronting them with an unrealistic challenge that further demoralises and leads them to opt out again. This incremental approach has been proved to work for young people on the Scheme.

“The approach is different, around your own needs and work around you, at your own pace.” (Young person)

“You get support with other issues – confidence and motivation.”(Young person)

- Tuition is delivered by specialist tutors who understand the complex needs of the young people.
- Flexibility is built into service delivery and provision is not linked to academic year or rigid attendance rules.
- The interactions are held in venues that young people feel comfortable in.
- We prepare the young people for work placements.
- Personal development and mentoring is a key lynchpin of the scheme. If young people are to access employment and training then they must have the necessary personal, life and social skills.
- We recognise and celebrate achievement and ensure that all participants leave the scheme with something tangible.

How best might young people who disengage from the system be tracked/monitored?

We accept that it is a difficult task to keep track of young people who disengage from the system and agree that the development of any tracking system must be well thought out at inception stage. The professionals we spoke to were keen to see the following criteria addressed:

Who will be tracked, specifically what ages of children and young people?

How will it be monitored?

How will it be maintained?

How will it be funded?

A number of the professionals suggested that the age range for tracking should be wide and could include ages 12 – 25 years old. We would suggest that one tracking/information system is used across all agencies and departments (including health, education, benefits etc...)

It was agreed that one to one contact was ideally needed to keep in touch with young people and that resources within the voluntary and community sector could be drawn upon to assist the process. The young people we consulted suggested that tracking could be done through social workers and also came up with the idea of using social networking sites.

Some of our young people 18+ do not have social workers. There is a suggestion that Careers Advisors could be used to track young people because they are an all age service.

What elements/ funding would be required within a Strategy for young people who are NEET and what cross-departmental Action/ Implementation Programmes are needed to address the situation?

Include Youth would like to make the following recommendations:

1. **Pre-vocational accreditation** – some consideration must be given as to whether it is reasonable to expect mainstream programmes (eg TfS, FE and HE) to meet the needs of young people with challenging and complex needs. We suggest that programmes like the Give and Take Scheme are accredited (using criteria that is acceptable to all) to be providers of “pre-vocational” programmes which support the young people who currently are not having their needs met. Resourcing support should be identified for these programmes.
2. **Educational Maintenance Allowance** – we believe that it is unacceptable that the endeavours of young people participating in projects like the Give and Take Scheme are not recognised. Young people who have been assessed as being unable to participate in mainstream programmes but are involved in pre-vocational schemes should be eligible to EMA. It is important that we try and increase the retention of young people in such schemes by offering them EMA. The criteria for awarding EMA should be reviewed to include programmes where the focus is not always on re-entry to the formal school setting and in which work placements and learning skills in a less formal environment are more common. The young people’s efforts should not be ignored just because they are pursuing an alternative route to employment and training. They must be encouraged and supported in their goal to improve their lives.
3. **Essential skills** currently being provided for within mainstream DEL programmes are proving to be too rigid and inflexible for many young people who are NEET. We believe that this must be addressed as a matter of urgency.
4. **Improve training** of tutors to engage with a wider range of young people and particularly those who are experiencing difficulties outside college.

5. The **developments of mainstream training and education programmes which are flexible, tailored to suit individual needs and are holistic in approach.** This approach should be adopted from the moment children enter mainstream education rather than leaving it to post primary stage or later.
6. The provision of appropriate **placements and employment opportunities,** both within private and public sector, for this particular group of young people. Consideration should be given to the outcomes of the evaluation of the HSCT Employability programmes and how they could be replicated.
7. The **NI Strategy for Children and Young People** attempts to place the achievement of 6 high level outcomes across government. The Strategy offers an opportunity and a blueprint for how government should work together to agree a unified plan of action to support our children, from birth until their teenage years. There is a recognition within the Strategy that if we are to improve the lot of children and young people, we must firstly, start early, and secondly, we must all agree our differing yet complimentary roles in achieving the game plan. In order to ensure that children and young people “enjoy, learn and achieve” and “experience economic well-being” there must be better collaboration between DEL and DE and all other government departments. The work must begin well before young people are at the stage of ‘opting out’ and have been ‘lost’ in the system.. It begins with early intervention family support initiatives. This would ensure that the needs of children and their families are met earlier thereby ensuring that they are not without education, training or employment. We would encourage the DEL to seek collaboration with their colleagues in all relevant departments including DE, DHSSPS, DOJ, DSD, DARD, and DOE.
8. Addressing the particular educational, training and employment needs of children and young people with “**additional needs**” particularly those involved with the criminal justice system, those who are looked after and are leaving care. These young people have a plethora of concerns that impede their ability to learn. The education, employment and training sectors need to

connect with the realities of these young people's lives and ensure they do not continue to be 'lost' in the system.

Concluding Comments

Include Youth very much welcomes the enthusiasm and commitment which the Employment and Learning Committee have demonstrated in their efforts to tackle the problem of young people who are NEET. We, along with our colleagues working in this field, appreciate the genuine effort the Committee has made to inform themselves on the issues and in particular to listen directly to the views of young people. We hope that this written submission will compliment the evidence we gave at our recent presentation to the Committee. We are mindful of the need for the Committee to develop realistic and tangible action plans following this inquiry and anticipate that the information we have provided will assist them in that process. Include Youth is more than happy to provide any further information as required. We wish the Committee well in the next stages of the inquiry and look forward to hearing the outcome of the inquiry.

Include Youth

June 2010