



**Response to the Department of Employment and Learning's
Consultation on Pathways to Success -**

**Establishing an initial broad strategic direction and supporting
cross- Departmental actions to reduce the number of young people
most at risk of remaining outside education, employment or
training (NEET)**

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Executive Summary

Introduction

1. Include Youth is an independent NGO that has been in existence since 1979. The organisation promotes the rights and best interests of and best practice with young people in need or at risk. We undertake activities aimed at influencing public policy and policy awareness in the areas of youth justice and education, employment and training of young people. Include Youth works directly with young people to support them to be engaged with policy decision making processes and to improve their employability. We produce resources and provide training, information and support to practitioners and organisations.

Include Youth's 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.

General Comments

3. Include Youth welcomes the opportunity to respond to this consultation by the Department for Employment and Learning (hereafter DEL) on 'Pathways to Success'. The issue of young people not in education, training or employment is one of the main policy priorities for the organisation and as such is one we have a considerable amount of expertise and learning which we are keen to share in our response.
4. This submission is informed by evidence from published and unpublished research, relevant international human rights standards and guidance, critical policy analysis, extensive practitioner based experience within and beyond Include Youth and the views of young people from Include Youth and other organisations.
5. Include Youth welcomes the recognition of the issue of young people who are not in education, employment or training as a high priority for the Northern Ireland

Executive and as such it will be vital that the Pathways to Success implementation is explicitly referenced in the forthcoming Programme for Government and associated Departmental Business plans.

6. The cross departmental nature of the proposed Strategy is vital to its success and therefore extremely positive. While a number of government departments have a contribution to make Include Youth would envisage the Department of Education as taking a particular lead role alongside DEL in the delivery of this Strategy.
7. In relation to Section 75 it would appear that DEL has only examined the potential impact of its Strategy on the age ground. DEL appears to have overlooked the fact that young people have multiple identities and the potential for adverse impact that the application and implementation of the Strategy may have on other Section 75 grounds. Include Youth recommends that DEL carries out a full and comprehensive screening process and an EQIA of its Pathways to Success Strategy.
8. Include Youth was surprised to find no reference to relevant human rights standards within the consultation document. The proposed Strategy would benefit from the enumeration of a set of underpinning principles based on international human rights standards. Such principles would make it clear that government is adopting a human rights based approach to addressing the issue of NEETs.

Strategic Focus

9. A major weakness of the consultation document is its failure to provide any analysis of the wider historical, social, economic, political or cultural context within which the Strategy is being developed and how it influences the proposals contained within it. The conflict and its legacy have created and/or sustained, in part or many of the underlying reasons for young people becoming NEETs as well as determining many of the key characteristics of our economy.
10. The absence of any discussion or analysis of either the local or wider economic context, beyond a passing reference to the impact of the global economic difficulties on levels of youth unemployment, is difficult to understand in the context of a Strategy that aims to reduce youth unemployment. Include Youth recommends that the Strategy include a detailed analysis of the likely impact on the government's scope to create/sustain youth employment of a range of both micro and macro

economic factors including public sector cuts, the welfare reform agenda, increasing privatisation of services and the downward push on wages.

11. While the consultation document recognises that all sectors, including employers and businesses, have a role to play in tackling the issues affecting young people who are NEET, the document does not include any plans for high level engagement with employers. Include Youth would strongly recommend that the strategy includes a specific focus on employers. The increasing difficulties in securing work placements for young people also underscores the pressing need for a concerted, high level approach to engaging with employers.
12. Disappointingly, despite being a cross-departmental Strategy, the consultation document does not convey a sense of inter-connectedness or alignment with other high level strategies. The Pathways to Success Strategy needs to be much more clearly aligned with a number of other key strategies, most notably the ten year Children and Young People's Strategy, the Care Matters Strategy and the Northern Ireland Suicide Prevention Strategy and Action Plan.
13. In addition to the lack of coherence **across** Departmental Strategies there would appear to exist a lack of an integrated, co-ordinated policy response **within** DEL - the effective exclusion of the core group of young people who are NEET, the majority of whom are below NQF Level 2, from the Success through Skills Strategy 2 is hugely concerning and must be addressed within the context of the development of the Pathways to Success Strategy.
14. Include Youth is in broad agreement with the twin foci set out in paragraph 2.1 of the consultation document i.e. to prevent young people from becoming NEET; and to focus on re-engaging those young people aged 16-19 who are already in the NEET category. The second outcome however should be more specific in what the purpose is of re-engaging young people who are in the NEET category.
15. While understanding the rationale Include Youth has concerns that the proposed prioritisation of work with 16-19 year olds will effectively mean that the Strategy's focus is limited to this age grouping. Include Youth recommends that this proposal should be re-considered with a view to developing a seamless Strategy that effectively addresses the needs of all young people from 16- 24 but also under 16s.

16. Aside from a proposal to assess the overall impact of current interventions, including preventative early interventions, the consultation document does not reflect an adequate emphasis on early intervention and preventative work. Include Youth recommends the inclusion of a strategic objective specifically targeted at preventative work with pre 16s.
17. The Pathways to Success Strategy should give primacy to a model of service provision which is predicated on generic early intervention, provision of universal services and service provision that is preventative and diversionary to the greatest extent possible.
18. Include Youth believes that the projected time frame for the Strategy of three years is inadequate for a high level cross departmental Strategy designed to tackle an issue as complex and deep rooted as youth unemployment and recommends a time frame of ten years as being more appropriate.
19. The statistical categories presented need both greater explanation and expansion in relation to which young people are envisaged as fitting within each of the three categories presented.
20. While the list of 'at risk categories' presented is reasonably comprehensive, and includes the caveat that it is non-exhaustive, there are nonetheless a number of significant omissions which warrant highlighting including the impact of conflict related inter-generational trauma, racist and homophobic discrimination, asylum seeker status, low attainment levels, emotional and behavioural difficulties, offending behaviour and geographical isolation.
21. Of concern to Include Youth in the discussion of risk factors within the consultation document is the construction of barriers as being predominantly internal to the individual rather than being located externally within the structures of society. It is Include Youth's view that the lack of any analysis of the social and economic context to the NEETs issue at the outset of the consultation document contributes to this rather individualised assessment of risk factors or barriers.

Measuring Success

22. The consultation document acknowledges that there are several possible limitations to the figures currently available for young people who are NEET, an observation Include Youth would concur with. There is a need for clarity regarding the definition of NEET utilised by different government departments and agencies i.e. what is considered 'a substantial amount of time outside of any form of education, employment or training', as it is not always clear on what basis young people either fall in or out of this categorisation.
23. The Department of Justice has a key role to play, in collaboration with other government departments, agencies and with local communities in addressing the issue of young people who are NEET. For example the Department of Justice and its agencies expend significant resources to address this issue and Include Youth would argue that resources and strategic objectives must be given due considerations when agreeing outcomes and developing services.

Current and Planned Strategic Actions

24. Include Youth is supportive of the notion of tracking young people's paths in relation to education, employment or training. However, given the ethical considerations involved in tracking, including issues around use of information, protection of personal privacy, accountability for consequences of information systems and standards to safeguard system quality, it is of utmost importance that these issues are all properly addressed in advance of the introduction of a tracking system.
25. Include Youth is supportive of plans to make access to the Careers Service available to all post-primary pupils in Northern Ireland, including those in education other than at school and those in the colleges.
26. Among the specific issues affecting 16 and 17 year olds which need to be addressed by the Strategy are lack of entitlement to social welfare benefits and difficulties obtaining appropriate accommodation. In this context outstanding proposals to amend legislation in order to give 'priority need' status to 16 and 17 year olds who are homeless but do not fall within the legislative remit of social services should be advanced without delay.

27. Include Youth welcomes the recognition in the consultation document of the role youth work can play in contributing to a range of outcomes for all young people, particularly in relation to education and employment. Yet despite this formal recognition of its value it is Include Youth's view that in practice youth work is still considered as more of an 'add-on' rather than an integral part of the education system in its broadest sense.
28. Include Youth recommends that those key elements of a youth work led approach to essential skills training which have been proven to work with young people who are NEET or at risk of becoming NEET, including the adoption of a holistic approach to learning and development, specialised training for tutors and flexible provision in a non threatening environment be incorporated into any model of provision being developed by DEL.
29. Consideration should also be given to extending such an approach to young people under 16 years of age in mainstream education but who would benefit from Essential Skills provision rather than the traditional GCSE route.
30. In view of ongoing difficulties around parity of recognition by employers of Essential Skills qualifications with other qualifications clear guidance should be given to employers and employment agencies in relation to this matter.
31. The current inequitable situation regarding entitlement to a training allowance, whereby young people participating on specialised pre-vocational training programmes are denied this allowance needs to be addressed within the context of government's response to the joint Review of Education Maintenance Allowance.
32. Recent years have witnessed a significant programme of education reforms which should impact positively on young people at risk of becoming NEET. However despite this the reality continues to be that the education system is not working for too many young people in Northern Ireland.
33. While outcomes from education for care leavers are undoubtedly moving in the right direction as a result of the strategic focus and targeted investment there remains a stark discrepancy between outcomes for looked after children and their peers.

34. The current 'cut off' at 16 years of age within education is problematic when considering many of those young people vulnerable to ending up within the NEETs category.
35. Include Youth supports the Review of Alternative Education currently underway and looks forward to its findings being released.
36. The challenge for mainstream education is how to transfer the understanding, skills, expertise and attitude from the alternative sector into mainstream education in order to ensure that all children and young people can receive a high quality, effective education within the mainstream system where at all possible.

Initial Plans for Further Work

37. The Initial Plans for Further Work section of the consultation document requires further development. There is clearly a need for some additional, focused, creative and high level strategic planning if a real reduction in the numbers of young people at risk of being NEET or already within the NEET category is to be achieved.
38. Currently specialised pre-vocational programmes such as Include Youth's Give and Take scheme, while working successfully with young people who are NEET do not get the recognition that is accorded to Registered Training Organisations and Further Education colleges.
39. Include Youth suggests that there is considerable merit in DEL reviewing its system of training provision, with a view to moving away from the current situation where all training is through a recognised training organisation with specific requirements concerning attendance and participation, to a more inclusive model which supports a continuum of service provision encompassing both mainstream training programmes such as TfS but also specialised pre-vocational training programmes such as Give and Take. Include Youth believes that a more integrated, flexible model would much better meet the needs of those young people who are NEET as well as young people at risk of becoming NEET.
40. Consideration should be given to how best to share the knowledge and skills of specialist programmes such as Give and Take in engaging with 'at risk' young people

with training organisations more generally with a view to enabling those training organisations to effectively engage these young people wherever possible.

41. A more flexible, inclusive model should also address the current limitations of training provision whereby programmes only run during 'term time' as it were, leaving those young people who are already vulnerable at increased risk during the summer months as a result of the lack of structure and focus in their lives.
42. It is well recognised that young people at risk are most vulnerable when moving from one service/situation to the next, whether that be from education into training or training to employment or from supported accommodation to independent living or indeed a range of other moves. The need for support also applies for young people moving from custody back into the community.
43. Based on its extensive experience of preparing and supporting young people to move on to other education, training or employment options Include Youth firmly believes that there is a real need for an after care service from one service to the next; such a service would fit along the continuum of service provision being advocated for by Include Youth in this submission.
44. Include Youth views as a vital component of the particular continuum of services for care experienced young people not in education, employment or training the provision of the employability services currently operated across the five Health and Social Care Trusts. Consideration should be given to the replication of these services with other group of young people who are NEET such as those involved with the criminal justice system.
45. Include Youth supports the recommendation by the Employment and Learning Committee's NEET Inquiry report which recommended that the NEET Strategy must take into account that interventions should be community based where possible and that these should be holistic, involving the young person's family where possible.
46. The merits and feasibility of providing the type of 'one stop shop' within local communities, providing the co-location of services, deserves serious examination.
47. Greater consideration needs to be given within the Pathways to Success Strategy's plans for further work as to how the additional financial, childcare and other

supports required by parents, carers and families will be put in place to ensure that they can play an effective supportive role in their children's individual pathways to success.

48. It is widely accepted that government alone cannot tackle the issue of young people who are not in education, employment or training. Engagement with Northern Ireland's business people and employers is absolutely central to this effort.
49. Include Youth recommends the formation of a regional Employers Forum or Task Force made up of dedicated employers that have a regional presence and can help to offer placements, training and jobs. The representation of the Equality Commission on such a body would also be required in order to provide advice and guidance on equality related matters within targeted employment initiatives which may be developed.

Steering and Implementation Mechanism

50. The lack of detail provided in the consultation document in relation to proposed steering and implementation mechanisms makes it difficult to provide an in depth commentary.
51. Include Youth has been actively involved in the Steering Group on NEETs and is supportive of the proposed forum group for stakeholders, with representation from this forum onto the joint steering and implementation body. The importance of parity of representation from the voluntary and community sector with civil servants and others on this joint body cannot be over emphasised.
52. Key to the successful implementation of the Strategy will be the existence of a high level cross departmental group to co-ordinate delivery of its objectives and actions. It will need to be included on the agenda of the Ministerial Sub-Committee on Children and Young People.
53. Include Youth believes that the new approach to children's services planning being led by the Health and Social Care Board at a regional level provides the optimal vehicle through which to take forward the implementation of the Pathways to Success Strategy. This regional approach to joint planning and commissioning of services for children and young people through the Children and Young People's

Strategic Partnership should facilitate implementation of the Strategy from regional agency level down to local level.

1. Introduction

Include Youth is an independent NGO that has been in existence since 1979. The organisation promotes the rights and best interests of and best practice with young people in need or at risk. We undertake activities aimed at influencing public policy and policy awareness in the areas of youth justice and education, employment and training of young people. Include Youth works directly with young people to support them to be engaged with policy decision making processes and to improve their employability. We produce resources and provide training, information and support to practitioners and organisations.

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.

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, Youth Justice Agency, Probation Board Northern Ireland and DEL's Careers Service. The Scheme provides essential skills training (ICT, English and maths) to all of the young people.

In addition, Include Youth runs a 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.

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 marginalised young people at risk or with experience of the criminal justice system, 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 youth custody facilities in Northern Ireland.

2. General Comments

Include Youth welcomes the opportunity to respond to this consultation by the Department for Employment and Learning on 'Pathways to Success'. The issue of young people not in education, training or employment is one of the main policy priorities for the organisation. As such is one we have a considerable amount of expertise and learning, gained from almost 30 years work at both practitioner and policy level with young people who fit within this category, which we are keen to share with a view to positively influencing the shape and content of the final Strategy.

This submission is informed by evidence from published and unpublished research, relevant international human rights standards and guidance, critical policy analysis, extensive practitioner based experience within and beyond Include Youth and the views of young people from Include Youth and other organisations.

Include Youth, along with Youth Action Northern Ireland, facilitated two consultation sessions during June 2011 with young people drawn from Include Youth and Youth Action's projects as well as from other organisations that work with young people who are NEET. The views of these young people have been integrated into this response as have the views of young people from Include Youth's Young Voices project which works with young people in community and custody settings.

Include Youth welcomes the recognition of the issue of young people who are not in education, employment or training as a high priority for the Northern Ireland Executive and as such it will be vital that the Pathways to Success implementation is explicitly referenced in the forthcoming Programme for Government and associated Departmental Business plans.

The cross departmental nature of the proposed Strategy is vital to its success and therefore extremely positive. It is expected that DEL will usefully be able to draw on the learning gained from the development, delivery and monitoring of the ten year Children's Strategy in terms of ensuring the effectiveness of this cross departmental strategy. While a number of government departments have a contribution to make Include Youth would envisage the Department of Education as taking a particular lead role alongside the Department for Employment and Learning in the delivery of this Strategy.

While Include Youth recognises that the term 'NEETS' is accepted by government and other agencies we believe that it can be viewed as pejorative and dehumanising. However we shall for ease of reference be using it in this response.

The consultation document states that the Pathways to Success Strategy will have a positive impact on young people and that the targeting of the Strategy at 16 to 19 year olds will address an imbalance and should not have a detrimental impact on other age groups. While the consultation document does not make any reference to the carrying out of a screening of the Pathways to Success Strategy we assume, given its Section 75 obligations, that such a process was carried out.

It would appear however that the document has only examined the potential impact of its Strategy on the age ground. DEL appears to have overlooked the fact that young people have multiple identities and the potential for adverse impact that the application and implementation of the Strategy may have on other Section 75 grounds including gender, race, disability, those with dependents and sexual orientation. There is also potential for adverse impact on the age ground for young people under 16 years of age.

A failure to assess and if necessary address such potential adverse impacts may result in the development of a Strategy which, however unintentionally, fails to proactively promote equality of opportunity and allows adverse impacts to continue within education, training and employment. Include Youth therefore recommends that DEL carries out a full and comprehensive screening process and an EQIA of its Pathways to Success Strategy.

The UK government is a signatory to a wide range of international human rights instruments which provide the wider human rights framework within which all government strategies and policies must fit. We were surprised therefore to find no reference to any human rights standards within the consultation document. This was particularly so given the involvement of OFMDFM in the development of this Strategy and their role in providing both support and challenge to government departments on the application of human rights.¹ Below are outlined those we believe to be of the most relevance to the Pathways to Success Strategy.

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child², which applies equally to all children under 18, and in particular article 2 on non-discrimination, article 3 on best interests; article 12 on

¹ <http://www.ofmdfmi.gov.uk/index/equality/human-rights.htm>

² <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/law/crc.htm>

participation; article 18 support for parents; article 20 children deprived of their family environment; article 27 on an adequate standard of living; articles 28 and 29 on education and article 32 on protection from economic exploitation. The standards contained in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child are intended to guide and inform the implementation of the 10 year Strategy for Children and Young People in Northern Ireland;

A range of supplemental guidance on children’s rights standards in the form of commentaries, rules and General Comments, many of which focus on the issue of juvenile justice ; these include the UN General Comment on Juvenile Justice³, the Riyadh Guidelines⁴the Beijing Rules⁵ and the Tokyo Rules⁶;

The UN Covenant on Social, Economic and Cultural Rights⁷ and in particular Article 6 on the right to work; Article 7 on just and favourable conditions of work; Article 9 on the right of everyone to social security; Article 10 on protection of young people within employment and Article 13 on the right to education. In its most recent assessment in 2009 of the UK government’s compliance with this Covenant the UN Committee on Social, Economic and Cultural Rights made specific reference, in the context of Section 75, to youth unemployment in Northern Ireland, recommending that:

“The human rights framework, including the Equality Impact Assessment, be effectively implemented in NI, particularly in the context of urban regeneration programmes by ensuring the participation of the affected populations and the development of adequate policies and targeted measures to promote substantive equality, provide for improved health care, as well as an increase in skills training and employment opportunities for young people and adequate housing programmes for the poor, and , in particular for Catholic families.”⁸ (Emphasis added)

In addition the International Labour Organisation (ILO), the international organisation responsible for drawing up and overseeing international labour standards sets out a number

³ UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (2007) *General Comment No 10 on Children’s Rights in Juvenile Justice*, UN Committee on the Rights of the Child

⁴ UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (1990) *United Nations Guidelines for Prevention of Juvenile Delinquency* (Riyadh Guidelines)

⁵ Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (1985) *UN Standard Minimum Rules for the Administration of Juvenile Justice* (the Beijing Rules)

⁶ UN General Assembly (1990) *United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for Non-custodial Measures* (Tokyo Rules) General Assembly Resolution 45/110

⁷ <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/law/cescr.htm>

⁸ UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights 42nd Session *Concluding Observations in respect of the UK government* E/C.12/GBR/Co/5 paragraph 31

of specific international labour standards on the protection of young workers , a number of which the UK government has ratified, including No 1238 Minimum Age Convention 1973 and No 182 Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention 1999.

The ILO has observed that young working women and men frequently find themselves working under poor conditions, often including long hours at low wages, or working under precarious, short term contracts, frequently in the informal economy with no social security or other benefits.

Against this decent work deficit, ILO Conventions and Recommendations call for specific protective measures for young workers in relation to areas such as minimum age, working conditions (e.g. pay, working time, night work and medical examinations), occupational safety and health and labour inspection.

The Director General of the ILO, Juan Somavia, opening the 100th International Labour Conference on 1 June 2011 highlighted what he described as “ unacceptably high levels of youth unemployment” and called for a “ a new era of social justice”.⁹

The proposed Strategy would benefit from the enumeration of a set of underpinning principles based on international human rights standards, in a similar approach to that taken by the 10 year Children’s Strategy.¹⁰ Such principles would make it clear that government is adopting a human rights based approach to addressing the issue of NEETs.

Suggested principles should include but not be limited to the right of young people not to be discriminated against, the right of all young people to education and/or vocational training that enables them to develop to the fullest of their potential, the right to a decent standard of living, the right to decent conditions of work and pay, the right not to be exploited, the right to special protection for young people deprived of their family environment and protection of their rights within all state interventions in their lives including within the criminal justice system.

⁹ http://www.ilo.org/ilc/ILCSessions/100thSession/media-centre/news/WCMS_156272/lang--en/index.htm

¹⁰ OFMDFM (2006) *Our Children and Young People – Our Pledge A Ten Year Strategy for Children and Young People in Northern Ireland 2006-2016* p11

3. Strategic Focus

Before commenting on the strategic focus set out in the consultation document Include Youth believes it is important to highlight some areas that require further consideration.

Northern Ireland Context

A major weakness of the consultation document is its failure to provide any analysis of the wider historical, social, economic, political or cultural context within which the Strategy is being developed and how it influences the proposals contained within it.

The conflict and its legacy has created and/or sustained, in whole or in part many of the underlying reasons for young people becoming NEETs as well as determining many of the key characteristics of our economy. The Childhood in Transition and Social Justice Initiative (2010) in a discussion of work and worklessness noted that:

“Limited (employment) opportunities are in part a product of the conflict – a low wage economy, historical underinvestment, service and employer withdrawal and limited job replacement or creation.”¹¹

Include Youth believes that this strategy would benefit from an analysis of the impact of the conflict to the lives of the young people who now find themselves not in employment, education or training.

While the young people Include Youth works with did not experience the height of the conflict directly nonetheless the shadow of the conflict is all too readily apparent. The young people routinely raise conflict related issues including paramilitarism and vigilantism (intimidation, violence and recruitment), ‘control’ of housing estates and physical space, segregated space and sectarianism, differential policing including police use of informers or ‘touts’ and the security-led culture within prisons:

“Religion stops young people from going into other areas that there may be jobs in.”

¹¹ Childhood in Transition and Social Justice Initiative (forthcoming) *Response to the Centre for Social Justice 'Breakthrough Northern Ireland'*. Belfast: Childhood Transition and Social Justice Initiative, QUB

The ever present threat posed by paramilitarism to vulnerable young people is underscored by figures released recently by the PSNI under a Freedom of Information request: out of a total of 272 paramilitary attacks carried out between 2008-2010 129 or 47% of these were against children and young people under the age of 25 years, with 8 of them being against under 16s.¹²

Less obvious but no less connected to the conflict and its legacy are a wide range of issues which frequently underlie the reasons for young people entering the NEETs category. These include poverty, mental health issues, inter-generational trauma, domestic violence and education.¹³

The inter-relationship between poverty and the conflict is deep rooted and enduring. Horgan (2005) considers that:

“There is a marked concentration of poverty in a relatively small proportion of Northern Ireland’s electoral wards. Many of these wards are in and around the areas most impacted by the conflict.”¹⁴

Child poverty levels in Northern Ireland are higher than in other jurisdictions within the UK. 29% or 122,000 children in Northern Ireland live in poverty¹⁵ and 10% of children or 44,000 children live in severe poverty.¹⁶

Northern Ireland has a much higher proportion of children living in persistent poverty than is the case in Britain and poverty is experienced at some point by a lot more families. Over 1 in 5 (21%) of children and young people in Northern Ireland live in persistent poverty, twice the proportion in Britain (9%).¹⁷ In 2006, for example, of 566 wards 25 recorded child poverty above 75% (4.4%) compared with 180 out of 10,000 wards (1.8%) in Britain.

¹² PSNI Response to a Freedom of Information Request F-2011-00341 Paramilitary Style Incidents

¹³ See Commissioner for Children and Young People (2009) *Children’s Rights: Rhetoric or Reality A Review of Children’s Rights in Northern Ireland 2007/08*: NICCY and McAlister, S. et al (2010) *Childhood in Transition Experiencing Marginalisation and Conflict in Northern Ireland*, Belfast: Queen’s University Belfast, Save the Children and Prince’s Trust for detailed explorations of the social and economic impact of the conflict on children and young people within disadvantaged and marginalised communities

¹⁴ Horgan, G. And Kilkelly, U. (2005) *Protecting children and young people’s rights in the Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland Why? How?* Research commissioned by Children’s Law Centre and Save the Children, p7

¹⁵ Magadi, M. and Middleton, S. (2007) *Measuring Severe Child Poverty in the UK*. Save the Children UK

¹⁶ Ibid

¹⁷ Monteith, M. Lloyd, K. and McKee, P. (2008). *Persistent Child Poverty in Northern Ireland*. Belfast: Queen’s University Belfast and Save the Children

The Chief Medical Officer estimated that over 20% of young people in Northern Ireland are suffering “significant mental health problems” by their 18th birthday.¹⁸ Yet there has been a gross failure to recognise and respond to the long term consequences of trans-generational trauma. McAlister et al (2009) note:

“The inter-relationship of unaddressed conflict related trauma, interpersonal violence within families, continuing paramilitary intimidation, forced exiling, economic marginalisation and social exclusion constitute ‘special circumstances’ for children, young people and their families in Northern Ireland.”¹⁹

The operation for over half a century of a system of academic selection within education in Northern Ireland had been widely recognised as contributing to hugely unequal educational outcomes among children, largely but not exclusively along social class lines. Academic selection for post-primary education was discriminatory in a way that it impacted on some of the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children in Northern Ireland and was described as constituting a ‘two-tier culture’ within the education system by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child in its 2008 Concluding Observations in respect of Northern Ireland’s compliance with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.²⁰

The most commonly voiced concern among parents, education practitioners and NGOs was that children may be discriminated against on the basis of their socio-economic background in circumstances where their parents do not have the academic ability, or financial resources to pay for private tuition, to assist them in preparing for the transfer tests. This view was borne out by research which showed that there was a clear link between performance in the test and social disadvantage; summed up succinctly by one young person in Include Youth as “posh v. poor”.

Following extensive consultation and an announcement by the Minister for Education in 2007 that academic selection would be abolished new post primary admissions arrangements were introduced in 2009. This guidance prioritised children from socially and economically disadvantaged backgrounds for admission to post primary schools.

¹⁸ Chief Medical Officer (1999) Health of the Public in Northern Ireland: report of the Chief Medical Officer, 1999: *Taking care of the next generation* Belfast DHSSPS

¹⁹ McAlister, S. et al (2010) *Childhood in Transition Experiencing Marginalisation and Conflict in Northern Ireland*, Belfast: Queen’s University Belfast, Save the Children and Prince’s Trust

²⁰ <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/crc/docs/AdvanceVersions/CRC.C.GBR.CO.4.pdf>

However the continued operation of academic selection by the majority of grammar schools in Northern Ireland, in breach of the Department of Education's guidance, will further perpetuate social and economic inequalities, is socially divisive and extremely undermining of children's self esteem and self worth; as one community representative described it:

"70 per cent (of children) are told that they are failure at 11, so why are we surprised when they feel failures at 17?" ²¹

Analysis of the economic context

The absence of any discussion or analysis of either the local or wider economic context, beyond a passing reference to the impact of the global economic difficulties on levels of youth unemployment ²², is difficult to understand in the context of a Strategy that aims to reduce youth unemployment. This would be the case generically but it must be particularly so given the combination of the particular circumstances and characteristics of the economy in Northern Ireland coupled with the global economic recession.

Include Youth would have expected the consultation document, given its intention to establish a broad strategic direction within which to tackle the issue of young people who are NEET, to include a detailed analysis of the likely impact on the government's scope to create/sustain youth employment of a range of both micro and macro economic factors including public sector cuts, the welfare reform agenda, increasing privatisation of services, the downward push on wages etc.

Such an expectation was also articulated by the DEL Committee in its NEET Inquiry report:

"the NEET Strategy for Northern Ireland must ensure cognisance of issues such as economic and social context, which are beyond the NEET young person themselves so that provision for this group is more holistic."²³

Research has highlighted that young people have been affected more than any other age group in both Britain and Northern Ireland by the economic downturn.²⁴ This is perhaps not

²¹ Op cited at note 19 p57

²² Department for Employment and Learning (2011) *Pathways to Success, Establishing an initial broad strategic direction and supporting cross-Departmental actions to reduce the number of young people most at risk of remaining outside education, employment or training*, DEL, p. 15

²³ Committee for Employment and Learning (2010) *Official Report (Hansard) Inquiry into Young People not in Employment, Education or Training (NEETs)* 15 December 2010 paragraph 73

surprising given that young people have tended to more often be in low-value, low-wage and often part time jobs and once these jobs disappeared with the recession so too did much of the employment for young people. However even for those young people who are highly qualified the challenges involved in finding employment are not insignificant, with anecdotal evidence of graduates with PhDs and masters degrees working as cleaners in hospitals.²⁵

Young people are very aware of the current realities of the labour market:

“There’s no point doing it (further education) cos the jobs are all took anyway, cos of the global economy, slowing down and all.”

Young people have highlighted the cost-benefit quandary attached to taking up such low paid insecure work, pointing out that it can be financially unviable for them to work as they lose their benefits and end up in a worse position in monetary terms:

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

Attention also needs to be paid to the genderised dimension to youth unemployment in Northern Ireland. Research with young women revealed that post 16 training options open to them are more limited than those available to young men.²⁶

Efforts to address the issue of young people not in education, employment or training in Northern Ireland must take cognisance of global trends in relation to youth unemployment. The global situation is certainly not encouraging, with some experts describing the effect of long spells of unemployment while young as ‘scarring’. In 2009 the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) reflected that:

“Even for those youth already in the labour market but with temporary jobs, the short term outlook is grim, they have been among the first to lose their jobs and are finding it

²⁴ McQuaid, R et al. (2010) *Employment Inequalities in an Economic Downturn*. Belfast: Equality Commission Northern Ireland

²⁵ <http://www.thisislondon.co.uk/standard/article-23639017-youll-work-for-free-or-not-at-all-graduates-warned.do>

²⁶ McAlister, S, Gray, A. and Neill, G. (2007) *Still Waiting: the Stories behind the statistics of young women growing up in Northern Ireland*. Belfast: Youth Action Northern Ireland.

particularly difficult to get another one. More importantly, low-skilled youth, who even before the crisis faced multiple barriers in finding work, are now at high risk of long term economic inactivity and exclusion.”²⁷

While this assessment underlines the challenge involved in addressing the issue of young people who are NEET what is more instructive are the kinds of responses the OECD suggests. These include, as a first line of defence the provision of income support to unemployed youth to help them sustain their job search, the more extensive promotion of apprenticeship contracts for young people with low skills and seeing the jobs crisis as an opportunity to tackle the underlying factors affecting the school to work transition.

A further challenge identified by the Scottish Government is the concern that due to labour market constraints making young people more ‘employable’ would be insufficient to ensure a successful transition to the labour market following participation in programmes,²⁸ an issue which requires factoring in to the Pathways to Success Strategy.

Focus on Employers and Businesses

Include Youth would strongly recommend that the strategy includes a specific focus on employers. Although there is a recognition by the then Minister Danny Kennedy MLA in the consultation document’s Foreword that all sectors, including employers and businesses, have a role to play in tackling the issues affecting NEETs, the document does not include any plans for high level engagement with employers. Current actions being undertaken by the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (DETI) outlined in the consultation document are limited to a small number of initiatives by Invest NI designed to assist young people to become self employed. These programmes while valuable fall far short of the level of intervention required by DETI.

By contrast the Scottish Strategy to tackle the issue of young people who are NEET ‘ More Choices, More Chances’ by contrast has given high priority to employer focused engagement. Under its five key areas of activity it has identified ‘Engaging Employers –

²⁷ Scarpetta, S., Sonnet, A. and Manfredi, T. (2009) Directorate for Employment, Labour and Social Affairs OECD Social, Employment and Migration Papers, No.106 *Rising Youth Unemployment during the Crisis: How to prevent negative long-term consequences on a generation?* : OECD.

²⁸ Scottish Government (2005) *Literature Review of the NEET Group*
<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2005/10/27175707/57078>

working with the public and private sector employers to improve employment and work based training opportunities for young people.”²⁹ It recognises that:

“Engagement with Scotland’s business people is absolutely central to this effort (to tackle NEETs)...they can provide an expertise, resources and the opportunities to help young people.”

As a result it has established a high level partnership of Scotland’s most senior business people and respected educators, chaired by Sir Robert Smith, Chancellor of the University of the West of Scotland, to tackle NEET.

The increasing difficulties in securing work placements for young people, were described thus by one young person:

“There’s no one to give you a placement – especially now with the recession.”

This underlines the pressing need for a concerted, high level approach to engaging with employers. This lack of work placements was highlighted recently by Springvale Learning in West Belfast which was forced to buy a derelict house for renovation by its trainees due to 40% drop in work placements as a result of the severe downturn in the construction industry.³⁰

Alignment with other high level strategies

The Department of Employment and Learning Committee’s Inquiry report specifically recommended that those developing the NEET strategy ensure the provisions offered by individual Executive Departments in respect of NEET young people should be referenced in the Strategy, particularly where there is a need to align with other strategies. The Committee was especially concerned that there should be reference to the ‘Protect Life and Suicide Prevention’ strategy, the Children and Young People Strategy and the Care Matters Strategy.³¹

Disappointingly, despite being a cross-departmental Strategy, the consultation document does not convey a sense of inter-connectedness or alignment with other high level

²⁹ Scottish Government (2006) *More Choices, More Chances: A Strategy to Reduce the Numbers of Young People not in Education, Employment or Training in Scotland*

³⁰ <http://www.u.tv/News/Trainees-rebuild-house-on-work-scheme/50922384-9945-4abf-85c6-c6aeec049580>

³¹ Op cited at note 23 paragraph 407

strategies. There is no reference to the 10 year inter-departmental Children's Strategy which covers young people up to the age of 18, or for children who are/have been in care or with a disability up to the age of 21. The Children's Strategy is intended to be the overarching framework within which all relevant governmental strategies and policies should fit.

Given the proportionally high numbers of care experienced young people who fall within the NEET category one would have expected to have seen more detail as to how the proposals in the current consultation document align with the Care Matters Strategy. Again, disappointingly there is only a single reference to the Care Matters Strategy outlining the DHSSPS's funding for the establishment of individual employability services within each Health and Social Care Trust.³²

The worryingly high level of suicide among young people here, and particularly among young men was an area of particular concern to the DEL Committee Assembly NEETs Inquiry and we would suggest that particular reference is made to the Protect Life, the Northern Ireland Suicide Prevention Strategy and Action Plan 2006-2011.

In addition to the lack of coherence **across** Departmental Strategies there would appear to exist a lack of an integrated, co-ordinated policy response even with the Department of Employment and Learning itself. Include Youth critiqued the Success Through Skills 2 Strategy in its consultation phase³³ for its apparent failure to address the skills needs of those young people in the NEETs category.

Despite the consultation document purporting to place equal emphasis on the twin goals of increased productivity and enhanced social inclusion it was abundantly apparent that the balance weighed heavily in favour of productivity, to the exclusion of those most marginalised young people who needed the most support to develop their skills and realise their potential. Include Youth's concern was borne out by the Strategy launched in May 2011.

The effective exclusion of the core group of young people who are NEET, the majority of whom are below NQF Level 2, from the overarching strategy for the development of skills in

³² Op cited at note 22 paragraph 4.45

³³ Include Youth (2010) *Response to the Department for Employment and Learning's consultation on Success Through Skills 2: The Skills Strategy for Northern Ireland*, available from Include Youth

Northern Ireland in the next decade is hugely concerning and must be addressed within the context of the development of the NEETs Strategy.

Outcomes

Include Youth is in broad agreement with the twin foci set out in paragraph 2.1 of the consultation document i.e. to prevent young people from becoming NEET; and to focus on re-engaging those young people aged 16-19 who are already in the NEET category. The second outcome however should be more specific in what the purpose is of re-engaging young people who are in the NEET category.³⁴

Include Youth has concerns regarding the proposed prioritisation of work with 16-19 year olds as articulated in the consultation document. Although the document does acknowledge that a follow on focus up (to 24) and down (to pre-16) the age brackets, realistically within a three year time frame if the initial strategic focus is identified as the 16-19 year age bracket this will set the parameters for intervention. The concern is that rather than simply prioritising work with 16-19 year olds in the first instance the focus will be limited to this age grouping.

A further issue identified by practitioners³⁵ in relation to the proposed age banding in relation to vulnerable young people was that these young people, once out of the education system, are often at least 19 or 20 years of age before they are 'ready' to engage and to consider positive choices for themselves in relation to education, employment or training. This 'readiness to engage' by young people is critical to the potential success of intervention programmes, an observation made quite forcefully by a young person Include Youth worked with:

"You have to *want* to do it yourself, you can't make people do something, like training or education, they have to *want* to do it."

Prioritisation of the 16-19 year age band within policy and funding mechanisms risks missing these young people and being in a position to respond to their readiness to engage positively with interventions.

³⁴ Op cited at note 23 " the Committee considers that a strategy that does not look at specific age groups will be less effective and somewhat unwieldy"

³⁵ Raised by practitioners at NICVAs roundtable 'Pathways to Success' consultation event held in NICVA on 10 May 2011 and endorsed by Include Youth's Give and Take practitioners

The importance of an integrated strategy was emphasised by the House of Common’s Children, Schools and Families Committee in its Inquiry into NEETs. While welcoming the work of the UK government in introducing flexibility into its Strategy the Committee recommended that:

“Greater stress should be placed on the creation of an over-arching and seamless Strategy for 16-24 year olds.”³⁶

Include Youth is also strongly of view that much greater emphasis should be placed on preventative work pre 16 years of age. There is considerable research evidence to indicate that it is possible to recognise at an early age when a young person is in danger of entering the NEET group in the future. There is evidence³⁷, confirmed by the experience of Give &Take practitioners, that the average age of when young people in this potential NEET group stop ‘trying at school’ is between 14 and 15 and that more help with deciding options, along with other support and interventions needs to be provided earlier.

The importance of focusing specifically on the pre 16 age group was recognised in the Scottish Government’s NEETs Strategy ‘More Choices, More Chances’ through its inclusion of a targeted objective for this age group. The Pathways to Success consultation document provides some detail as to current preventative actions being undertaken by the Department of Education. While all of this work is clearly important it also needs to be acknowledged that more needs to be done by a range of government departments.

Aside from a proposed assessment of the overall impact of current interventions, including preventative early interventions, the consultation document does not reflect an adequate emphasis on early intervention and preventative work. Include Youth recommends the inclusion of a strategic objective specifically targeted at preventative work with pre 16s.

The consultation document indicates that the projected time frame for the Strategy is three years. Include Youth considers this to be significantly too short a time frame for a high level cross departmental Strategy designed to tackle an issue as complex and deep rooted as youth unemployment. The current global economic recession, and its severe impact on Northern Ireland as discussed earlier, makes this task even more difficult. There is a need

³⁶ House of Commons (2010) Children, Schools and Families Committee, *Young People not in Education, Employment or Training*. Eight report of Session 2009-10 Volume 1. Paragraph 35

³⁷ Department of Communities and Local Government (2008) *Digital Exclusion Profiling of Vulnerable Groups – NEETs A Profile*

for long term thinking in relation to this issue, and a commitment that transcends the four year governmental cycle. Include Youth believes that a time frame of ten years, similar to that attached to the Children's Strategy would be more appropriate.

Statistical Categorisation and Risk Categories

The consultation document indicates that the statistical categorisation has been 'borrowed' from England. As such these categories need both greater explanation and expansion in relation to what young people are envisaged as fitting within each of the three categories presented. This is particularly pertinent given that the consultation document suggests that the initial strategy direction will be to focus on those young people currently within Group 'b' i.e. those young people with an identifiable barrier.

The taxonomy used by the UK Department of Communities and Local Government may be more helpful in this regard i.e. core NEET, floating NEET and Transition/gap year NEET.³⁸ This is also the classification used by the Department of Education/International Fund for Ireland /Youth Council Northern Ireland in their Youth Works Initiative.

Given that the vast majority (66%) of young people who are NEET are identified as falling within Group 'c', defined as those young people with no identifiable barrier, there is a need for a much more information as to the reasons young people in this Group may end up being NEET.

While the list of 'at risk categories' presented on page 21 of the consultation document is reasonably comprehensive, and includes the caveat that it is non-exhaustive, there are nonetheless a number of significant omissions which warrant highlighting. In particular the lack of recognition of the impact of conflict related inter-generational trauma needs to be redressed within the document. Other causes or contributing factors to young people becoming or remaining NEET which have been overlooked include racist and homophobic discrimination, asylum seeker status, low attainment levels, emotional and behavioural difficulties, offending behaviour which falls short of committing a crime but leads to involvement with the youth justice system and geographical isolation.

³⁸ Ibid

Of concern to Include Youth in the discussion of risk factors within the consultation document is the construction of barriers as being predominantly internal to the individual rather than being located externally within the structures of society. It is Include Youth's view that the lack of any analysis of the social and economic context to the NEETs issue at the outset of the consultation document contributes to this rather individualised assessment of risk factors or barriers.

Recent research³⁹ with young people in Northern Ireland revealed the following structural barriers to post 16 education, training and employment:

- Poverty – the relationship between poverty and low educational attainment, hence impact on later employment opportunities
- Poor quality, inadequate or lack of vocational education and training opportunities, often with limited employment prospects
- Lack of effective identification of skills or options before leaving school, hence young people moving between courses and schemes, some of which they have no interest in
- Limited job opportunities and a youth labour market that revolves around low paid shift work
- Limited job opportunities in rural areas and the added cost of (low paid) employment due to a lack of affordable transport⁴⁰

Some young people interviewed for this research noted that they had to take whatever education or training course was available locally or risk unemployment and effectively 'doing nothing' which none wished to do.

These are structural rather than individually based barriers. Young people consulted with by Include Youth readily identified a range of structural type barriers within their communities. These included sectarianism, racism, homophobia, vandalism and bullying.

³⁹ Op cited at note 19

⁴⁰ Research carried out by The Consumer Council Research by the Consumer Council and YouthAction Northern Ireland has highlighted the barriers to young people accessing education, employment, leisure and health facilities presented by a lack of 'adequate, affordable transport' *Transport Matters: Young people's experiences, attitudes and ideas for improving public transport*, The Consumer Council, 2011. <http://www.consumerCouncil.org.uk/publications/?id=582>

Supporting Rationale

Include Youth recommends that much greater emphasis should be placed in this section of the consultation document on the right of all young people to be provided with opportunities to have a substantially better life. The overriding emphasis is on the monetary cost of NEET rather than the personal and social costs of NEETs to our society.

While not denying that the financial cost of the issue of young people who are NEET must be addressed and this provides an obvious driver for the Strategy, the personal impact of being NEET on the huge numbers of young people who fall within that category far outweighs the economic costs to society.

The Northern Ireland Assembly Research and Library Service has estimated that the economic cost of youth unemployment in Northern Ireland is somewhere in the region of £250 million a year.⁴¹ Yet the personal and societal costs are much deeper, broader, of much longer duration and often irreversible. In a discussion paper on rising unemployment in the UK, Bell and Blanchflower (2009) found evidence that spells of unemployment when young often create permanent scars.⁴² Moreover, spells of unemployment tend to be particularly harmful to the individual, and to society, when those young people who are most disadvantaged become unemployed.

Research in England has uncovered evidence that for some young people being NEET can be life limiting. The Director General of Schools for the UK Department for Communities, Schools and Families, John Coles, speaking at a conference on NEETs in August 2009 referred to a piece of research that had been carried out in a city in the North of England on behalf of the Department. The researchers, he said:

“had found one profoundly shocking thing...that of their long term NEETs of ten years ago, those who had been outside of the system for a long period of time, whether because they were permanently excluded or simply because they had dropped out at the end of compulsory schooling and had not got into anything else, 15% of those young people of 10 years ago were dead by the time that the research was being done.”⁴³

⁴¹ Northern Ireland Assembly Research and Library Services (2009) *Young People not in Education, Employment or Training (NEETs)* Research Paper 110/09

⁴² Bell, D. and Blanchflower, D.G. (2009) *‘What should be done about rising unemployment in the UK?’* IZA Discussion Paper No 2020, Bonn

⁴³ <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/education/98189498.stm>

These figures underline the huge personal and social cost attached to young people being NEET and bring a gravity and sense of urgency, if one were needed, to government's concerted efforts to address this issue in Northern Ireland.

4. Measuring Success

Currently figures for young people who are NEET are obtained through the Labour Force Survey for 16-19 year olds in Northern Ireland who are not in employment, government training schemes or full-time education. The consultation document acknowledges that there are several possible limitations to these figures, an observation Include Youth would concur with. There is an underlying need for clarity regarding the definition of NEET utilised by different government departments and agencies i.e. what is considered 'a substantial amount of time outside of any form of education, employment or training', as it is not always clear on what basis young people either fall in or out of this categorisation.

Existing and Potential Resources

The Department of Justice has a key role to play, in collaboration with other government departments, agencies and with local communities in addressing the issue of young people who are NEET. For example the Department of Justice and its agencies expend significant resources to address this issue and Include Youth would argue that resources and strategic objectives must be given due considerations when agreeing outcomes and developing services.

5. Current and Planned Strategic Actions

a. Information

Tracking

Include Youth is supportive of the notion of tracking young people's paths in relation to education, employment or training. From its experience of working with young people who are NEET Include Youth recognises the challenges involved in maintaining contact with or knowledge of young people's progression from the Give and Take scheme. However, given the ethical considerations involved in tracking, including issues around use of information, protection of personal privacy, accountability for consequences of information systems and standards to safeguard system quality, it is of utmost importance that these issues are all properly addressed in advance of the introduction of a tracking system. Among the questions raised in a Practitioners Forum run by Include Youth were:

- Who will be tracked, what ages children and young people?
- How will it be monitored?
- How will it be maintained?
- How will it be funded?

Careers

Include Youth is supportive of plans to make access to the Careers Service available to all post-primary pupils in Northern Ireland, including those in education other than at school and those in the colleges. The DEL Committee Inquiry Report into NEETs recommended that there should be more intervention with young pupils, particularly those in Year 10 who are making decisions about their GCSEs. Such a development was also endorsed by young people consulted with – they recommended that they should have a key worker or mentor from Year 10 to help pick GCSEs, provide advice for careers and support for leaving school.

The DEL Committee's Inquiry Report also noted that DEL Committee members heard from a number of respondents who suggested that current provision of careers advice and guidance in schools and colleges was not always consistent or adequate. This is a view that is borne out by the experiences of young people consulted with by Include Youth, as reflected by the following comments:

“Don’t get a chance to build relationships with careers advisors, only met weekly –a bit dated!”

“A week before leaving school we met the careers people. It was all near the end and was just put in because there was nothing else to do.”

Include Youth has welcomed the Career’s Service willingness to work with initiatives to address young people who are NEET. A very positive development from Include Youth’s perspective has been the establishment of an ‘Operational Partnership Agreement’ between Include Youth’s Give and Take scheme and the Careers Service, thereby providing the Give and Take scheme with a menu of services available from each local careers service office. Recognition of this partnership came in the form of a national award at the 2010 ICG Annual Careers Conference.

The establishment of a Regional Partnership Agreement between the Health Trusts and DEL to specifically address careers information, advice and guidance needs of looked after children within the 16 plus age bracket was also a positive development. However Include Youth’s experience of the rolling out of these protocols was that they did not appear to operate as consistently as required. Include Youth understands that a new revised Partnership Agreement has been endorsed and issued between the Trusts and DEL which emphasises partnership working to ensure that all looked after children from age 16 are appropriately referred to Careers Service for ongoing advice and assistance with the goal of supporting these young people into adulthood and into employment.

An overarching regional steering group co-chaired by the regional Health and Social Care Board and DEL will have a lead role in monitoring the effectiveness of implementation and interventions in promoting improved outcomes in education, training and employment for this group of young people. It is hoped that this development will lead to more uniform and systematic provision of the Careers service to all looked children in the 16 plus bracket.

Specific issues in relation to 16-18 year olds

The consultation document acknowledges that specific issues exist in relation to the 16-18 year age group, with many of these young people appearing to ‘fall through the cracks’. Issues include lack of entitlement to social welfare benefits and difficulties in obtaining appropriate accommodation; the example of the 16 year old with no family, in full time

education but with no social security allowance was raised by young people consulted with by Include Youth.

There is a lack of data on the proportion of 16 and 17 year old children living in poverty, whether temporarily or persistently. It is unlikely that the family of a child growing up in persistent poverty would somehow escape poverty when he/she turned 16 or 17. Indeed, Lifetime Opportunities, the anti poverty strategy for NI does not include young people aged 16-17 as children. The strategy defines specific goals and targets for 4 key stages in life Early Years 0-4), Children and Young People (5-16) and Working Age Adults and Older Citizens.

The provision of stable, appropriate accommodation for young people at risk of becoming NEET or who are already NEET is a key factor in enabling them to participate in education, training or employment.

Include Youth supports ongoing work by a Regional Reference Group to address the needs of homeless 16-17 year olds, including those under 18s who are released from Hydebank Wood Young Offenders Centre with no accommodation. Outstanding proposals to amend legislation in order to give 'priority need' status to 16 and 17 year olds who are homeless but do not fall within the remit of social services, similar to legislative provisions which exist in Scotland and England, should be advanced without delay.

b. Key current and planned interventions

Value of a youth work approach

Include Youth welcomes the recognition in the consultation document of the role youth work can play in contributing to a range of outcomes for all young people, particularly in relation to education and employment. The acknowledgement of the particular benefits of a youth work approach for engaging with marginalised young people who may be at risk of entering the NEET category is also welcome.

The DHSSPS, through its strategy for looked after children, ‘Care Matters in Northern Ireland – A Bridge to a Better Future strategy’ endorsed the use of a youth work approach for working with looked after children:

“It is an important form of non-formal education which makes a distinct and vital contribution to the development of young people. It is particularly relevant to those at risk of disengaging from society; those who become disaffected at school, those at risk of offending, those who will end up as non-stakeholders in their own community. Without effective intervention the outcomes for these young people are poor compared to their peers; however, youth workers engaging with some of the most troubled children are helping them to achieve much better outcomes.”⁴⁴

More recently the Department for Education along with the International Fund for Ireland has invested funding into a Youth Works Programme which will evaluate the contribution a youth work methodology can make to engaging young people in the core NEETs group to support them to gain recognised qualifications that will make a positive difference to their long term employment, education and training prospects.

Yet despite this formal recognition of its value it is the view of Include Youth’s practitioners that in practice youth work is still considered as more of an ‘add-on’ rather than an integral part of the education system in its broadest sense.

Young people were in no doubt as to the importance that should be attached to youth work:

“they need better training, especially how to deal with young people.”

⁴⁴ DHSSPS (2007) *Care Matters in Northern Ireland – A Bridge to a Better Future* DHSSPS: Belfast

“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)

Recommendations from young people regarding the integration of youth work principles into service provision were not confined to education but extended to training and employment related services:

“make job centres focus on individuals instead of rating people like dirt-they have no manners when dealing with the public. Maybe they should be trained youth workers.”

Essential Skills

Include Youth welcomes the indication in the consultation document that consideration will be given to the development of a programme which focuses on the wider literacy, numeracy, ICT and employability requirements of a target group to include young people who are in the NEET category and who have additional barriers to learning and are considered most at risk. Include Youth would urge DEL to draw on the valuable learning from practitioners’ experience of Essential Skills training to young people who are in the NEET category.

In Include Youth’s experience the standard provision of essential skills via the Further Education colleges is quite often not a model that works for young people who fall within the NEET category. This is due to the rather rigid, inflexible teaching model, designed for large numbers which is adopted by the further education colleges, a model which does not meet the needs of young people who are NEET particularly well. For example training had to be in a group setting and failure to turn up to three classes resulted in expulsion from that class. Most of these young people will have been unable to complete mainstream education – expecting them to return to a similar teaching environment, one in which they have previously experienced failure, is both unrealistic and counterproductive.

Include Youth’s assessment of the impact of such provision for young people on the Give and Take scheme was that young people were being set up to fail, albeit unintentionally. Tutors provided by DEL were not specifically skilled in engaging with these young people, with the result that they found it difficult to work with the young people and vica versa.

In 2009, following a number of years of Further Education college provision of Essential Skills with attendant poor outcomes for the young people, Essential Skills tutors were employed directly by the Give and Take programme to deliver in house training for young people. The table below shows the considerable impact of this move in that as a result of bringing essential skills in house the success of young people in attaining their essential skills qualifications has grown significantly year on year.

Skill	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11
Literacy	9	19	47	42
Numeracy	3	17	63	51
ICT	2	14	28	23

The critical difference between Further Education provision of Essential Skills and provision within a specialised pre-vocational training scheme such as Give and Take lies in the teaching methodology. The pedagogical approach adopted by Give and Take is one based on youth work principles and practice, working with each young person at their pace, whether in small groups or on a one to one basis, as well as an emphasis on the holistic development and well being of the young person rather than a narrow focus on attainment.

The benefits of this approach is underlined by the awarding of Learner of the Year by the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessments to two young people on the Give and Take scheme two years running as documented in the following two case studies.

Case Study 1

A was a participant on the Give and Take scheme from September 2008 to November 2009. A should have been in year 12 at secondary school but had not been attending for some time, thus was at risk of leaving formal education without any qualifications, on completion of Give and Take he had gained a total of 12 qualifications.

A expressed a very negative experience of formal education stating that he felt he was ignored by the teacher and left to do his own thing rather than disrupt the rest of the class. A had missed out on a lot of work due to this and consequently his literacy and numeracy skills were quite limited. He had a very low opinion of himself and his academic ability, as well as lacking in confidence in all aspects of his life.

A responded extremely well to the informal setting and atmosphere in classes and his attendance was excellent for the duration. He achieved the literacy, numeracy and ICT qualifications in June 2009 and these assisted him in achieving the CCEA L1 Employment skills in November as he had to complete C.V's, application forms, letters to employers and budgeting/money management skills, hence this would not have been achievable without the relevant essential skills.

A's achievements were recognised through the awarding of a CCEA Learner of the Year award for Employability Skills in May 2010. On completion of the Give and Take Scheme A secured full time work in a garage as a tyre fitter.

Case Study 2

B joined the Give and Take Scheme in DATE with extremely poor literacy and numeracy skills and non-existent computer skills; his tutor explained that B couldn't even switch a computer on.

Initially B resisted getting engaged with the learning but through the building of a relationship with the tutor and encouragement his confidence improved and he began to engage. His fast progression with computer skills also helped to develop his confidence with the literacy and numeracy work.

B gradually developed more self-esteem and confidence. His tutor entered him for the Learner of the Year Awards which he subsequently won based on the amount of progress with his learning he had made and in recognition of the barriers he had to overcome.

Include Youth recommends that those key elements of a youth work led approach to essential skills training which has been proven to work with young people who are NEET or at risk of becoming NEET, including the adoption of a holistic approach to learning and development, specialised training for tutors and flexible provision in a non threatening environment be incorporated into any model of provision being developed by the Department of Employment and Learning. Consideration should also be given to extending such an approach to young people under 16 years of age in mainstream education but who would benefit from Essential Skills provision rather than the traditional GCSE route.

There is also an issue in relation to the lack of consistent recognition of Essential Skills by employers and even by Jobs Centres which quite often stipulate that a particular post requires GCSEs without mentioning 'or equivalent in terms of Essential Skills.

This lack of acceptance of Essential Skills qualifications as acceptable alternatives to GCSEs may be as a result of lack of knowledge on the part of employers but it is clearly one which needs to be addressed urgently by the Department for Employment and Learning with clear direction being given to employers and to Jobs and Benefits offices. The potential detrimental impact on young people's sense of self esteem and confidence, as well as their motivation to apply for employment opportunities, when their hard earned qualifications are not recognised, can only be guessed at.

Education Maintenance Allowance

The consultation document sets out the current situation and likely next steps in relation to the joint Review of EMA commissioned by DEL and the Department of Education carried out by PWC.

Include Youth provided a briefing to the Employment and Learning Committee in September 2009 on the specific issues regarding the lack of provision of a training allowance for young people on specialised pre-vocational programmes such as the Give and Take scheme.⁴⁵ As a direct result of this briefing the Employment and Learning Committee brought forward a successful motion to the Assembly recommending the widening of access to Education Maintenance Allowance.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Northern Ireland Assembly Committee for Employment and Learning Minutes of Proceedings 16 September 2009

⁴⁶ http://news.bbc.co.uk/democracylive/hi/northern_ireland/newsid_8307000/8307507.stm

Include Youth subsequently raised the issue of EMA in its oral and written evidence to DEL's Inquiry into NEETs.⁴⁷

Include Youth has studied the findings of the joint review of EMA with interest. Overall the review findings, while recommending that EMA funding should be better targeted showed that there was broad support for the principles of EMA and for the provision of support for learners, particularly those from low-income backgrounds who may experience barriers to learning.⁴⁸ It also found that the original rationale for EMA remains valid. The objective is to introduce a revised scheme for the beginning of the academic year 2012-13.

A review of literature in relation to the NEET Group by the Scottish Government found that financial incentives appear to be important to the NEET group in encouraging their consideration of education, employment or training options.⁴⁹

In its evidence to the EMA Review Include Youth raised the currently inequitable situation regarding the position of young people on the Give and Take scheme or similar programmes vis-a-vis their peers on training programmes within Registered Training Organisations. Unlike their peers who receive a weekly non-means tested training allowance the young people participating in the Give and Take scheme are not entitled to a training allowance. This is clearly discriminatory and it is an issue which is keenly felt by the young people participating in Give and Take. Young people consulted with were in no doubt as to the value of EMA or a similar incentive to remain in education:

“Incentives could be given to the young person such as money (EMA) top up vouchers for mobiles, clothes vouchers.”

“EMA was helpful.”

“Financial incentives would make people more willing to stay on at school.”

“If they stop EMA they would lose a lot of young people.”

⁴⁷http://archive.niassembly.gov.uk/record/committees2009/EmploymentLearning/100519_NEETs_NIACRO.pdf

⁴⁸ Northern Ireland Assembly's Employment and Learning Committee Hansard Report for 19 January 2011 Review of Education Maintenance Allowance

⁴⁹ Op cited at note 28

There was unanimous agreement among a group of young people consulted with as part of the joint Include Youth/Youth Action NI Let's Talk event in Armagh on 9 June 2011 that EMA should be available for those up to 25 years and that it should cover not just formal education but voluntary and other training programmes run by NGOs.

Include Youth recommends the provision of a non means tested training allowance for young people on pre-vocational schemes such as Give and Take and other schemes and urges DEL to urgently address this discriminatory situation and to ensure that those young people who most require this financial support mechanism in order to participate and complete pre-vocational training do receive it.

ODFMDFM's Targets to Address Child Poverty

According to the consultation document ODFMDFM's Child Poverty Strategy includes a priority action area around NEET. However the priority action areas in the Child Poverty Strategy are not linked to the Northern Ireland Executive Budget or to any future budget proposals. As a result it's difficult to see what difference this inclusion of NEET in the Child Poverty Strategy will have in material terms.

A particular issue in relation to children under 18 who are NEET is the lack of data on the proportion of 16 and 17 year olds living in poverty, whether temporarily or persistently. Yet the Lifetime Opportunities, the anti poverty strategy for Northern Ireland excludes children aged 16 and 17 from its classification of children (5-16 years).

c. Prevention

Include Youth was surprised to note that only the Department of Education and DEL featured under the Prevention heading in terms of actions which will help reduce the in-flow of young people most at risk who end up in the NEET category. As a cross departmental strategy other Executive Departments such as DHSSPS, DSD and DOJ must also have a role to play in bringing forward a co-ordinated approach to preventative work.

As stated earlier in this response Include Youth believes that much greater priority needs to be afforded in the document to the whole area of prevention and early intervention, from early years onwards. While Include Youth welcomes the acknowledgement in the

consultation document that preventative measures will be long term by their nature there is insufficient weighting given to preventative work throughout the document.

Within the broad efforts of government and others to prevent young people from becoming NEET there is a particular challenge involved in preventing young people at risk of offending from ending up within the youth justice system and thereby significantly increasing their chances of remaining within the NEET category for long periods or indeed indefinitely.⁵⁰

The key elements of an effective model of service provision, one which prioritises prevention and is grounded in children and young people's rights, whether it be one designed to address the needs of young people generally at risk of becoming NEET or those specifically at risk of offending who constitute a specific grouping within the overall at risk population, can be summed up as follows⁵¹:

- Generic early intervention (at the point of need and regardless of age)
- Provision of universal services to ensure that children and young people fulfil their potential, families are supported and the best interest of the child or young person are paramount regardless of age
- Service provision that is preventative and diversionary

Such an approach was recommended by the DEL Committee's NEETs Inquiry report, when it recommended that those developing the NEET Strategy look at interventions in young people's lives at primary and pre primary level and ensure that these are referenced in the Strategy.⁵² It was also articulated in the overarching Children and Young People's Strategy with the inclusion of prevention as a Supporting Theme for that Strategy.⁵³

Include Youth suggests that DEL take cognisance of a number of holistic models of service provision which have been developed with communities across Northern Ireland.

⁵⁰ See Include Youth's submission to the Youth Justice Review Team's Review of the Youth Justice System in Northern Ireland (April 2011) for a detailed exploration of the issues for those young people who are NEET or at risk of becoming NEET and who are involved with the youth justice system. The particular difficulties for these young people in accessing education, training and employment are explored in depth within this response

⁵¹ Ibid for a more detailed discussion on prevention, early intervention and family support

⁵² Op cited at note 23 paragraph 309

⁵³ Op cited at note 10 "making a gradual shift to preventative and early intervention. approaches without compromising those children and young people who currently need our services most" page 13

Education

Recent years have witnessed a significant programme of education reform, encompassing the introduction of, if not the adherence to, new transfer arrangements to post-primary schools, the extended schools programme, the introduction of the revised curriculum and the entitlement framework, the review of special education and inclusion, the review of alternative education and area based planning, all of which are recognised as developments with the potential to impact positively on the educational experiences and outcomes of young people who are at risk of becoming NEET.

Yet despite all of these positive developments within education the reality continues to be that the education system, which is of critical importance in preventing young people from becoming NEET, is not working for too many young people in Northern Ireland.⁵⁴ In this context it must be noted that the planned cuts of £400 million to the Aggregated Schools Budget over a four year period will undoubtedly impact negatively on those young people for whom the system is already failing.

While outcomes from education for care leavers are undoubtedly moving in the right direction as a result of the strategic focus and targeted investment there remains a stark discrepancy between outcomes for looked after children and their peers. In 2009-2010 17% of care leavers achieved 5 GCSEs or higher, compared with 70% of their peers, while 43% of care leavers left with no qualifications compared with 2% of the general population.

The current 'cut off' at 16 years of age within education is problematic when considering many of those young people vulnerable to ending up within the NEETs category. It is unrealistic to expect young people whose education has been disrupted or negatively impacted by a wide range of factors, including numerous placement moves for looked after children, to achieve 5 GCSEs or more and to seamlessly move into further or higher education, training or employment.

The Assembly Committee for Employment and Learning noted that:

“while Northern Ireland has some considerable successes in education there is also considerable underachievement in our education system.”

⁵⁴ See Include Youth's response to Every School a Good School: A Strategy for Raising Achievement in Literacy and Numeracy' November 2008. www.includeyouth.org/policy

Serious issues were raised about an education system which sees so many young people leave compulsory education with few if any qualifications and who have such a negative attitude towards mainstream structured education or training provision.”⁵⁵

This assessment is echoed by Give and Take practitioners and by young people on the Give and Take Scheme:

“Legally, young people have to remain in school until the age of 16 but we are working with a group of young people for whom that is just not the reality. They left school at quite a young age. A common theme is that many of them have had really negative school experiences. Even going back into the classroom is a big deal for them. As far as they are concerned it is a case of ‘I am not as far on as other people my age’. For them, addressing and overcoming that problem is difficult.”⁵⁶

The young people had very definite views as to the teaching approach adopted within schools as well as the power differential between teachers and pupils:

“It’s all routine, kids don’t like routine, it messes them up. Kids are rebellious; they don’t like looking the same, that’s why they don’t like wearing uniforms.”

“Teachers assume everybody is at the same level. If you didn’t know something it was a bother to them.”

An overriding recommendation coming from young people who have had a negative experience of school and education was for the integration of a youth work approach into teaching methodologies:

“Informal educators should be invested in more in school. These methods work better for many.”

“Everybody has circumstances and they all need to be treated differently at school – some people need to be spoken differently to others. Teachers need to be more aware as to why some young people behave the way they do. They need more youth work type of training.”

⁵⁵ Op cited at note 23

⁵⁶ Committee for Employment and Learning (2010) Official Report (Hansard) Inquiry into Young People not in Employment, Education or Training 19 May 2010, oral evidence provided by Ms. Claire Meenehan Include Youth

“If you’re playing up they should let you out, into a wee room to chill- maybe get someone in to speak to you, a counsellor or something. That’d stop you playing up cos they could talk to you, find out **why** you’re playing up and help you deal with the problem.”

Education and Training Provision with youth custody settings

Those young people within the youth justice system that include Youth works with, whether in the Juvenile Justice Centre or Hydebank Young Offenders Centre, have overwhelmingly had negative experiences of formal education prior to entering the youth justice system; this has often been a contributing factor to their offending behaviour. The experience of this group of young people would appear to be fairly representative of all young people in the youth justice system.

Recent improvements in education provision within the Juvenile Justice Centre, as highlighted in the Criminal Justice Inspectorate’s inspection report⁵⁷, are to be welcomed. It is hoped that progress will continue to be made in those areas identified in the report as requiring work, including the strengthening of procedures to provide a more robust link between the Education and Learning Centre in the Juvenile Justice Centre and community services, including links with the Education and Library Boards and Health Trusts.

The current situation regarding provision of education and training for juveniles in Hydebank Young Offenders Centre and Prison is in marked contrast to Woodlands Juvenile Justice Centre.

The Criminal Justice Inspectorate for Northern Ireland’s inspection of Hydebank Wood Young Offenders Centre in 2007 concluded that:

“there was no strategic approach to the provision of education and training for young people’ and noted that ‘juveniles had few opportunities to acquire useful work-related skills.”⁵⁸

⁵⁷ Criminal Justice Inspectorate for Northern Ireland (2008) *Inspection of Woodlands Juvenile Justice Centre in November 2007: CJINI*. paragraph 6.10

⁵⁸ Criminal Justice Inspectorate for Northern Ireland (2008) *Report on an Announced Inspection of Hydebank Wood Young Offender Centre 5-9 November 2007: CJINI*. Paragraph 5.1

In response to a further critical report by the Independent Monitoring Board in 2009/2010 the Northern Ireland Prison Service instituted a protocol which allows under 18s to attend classes alongside adults, an entirely unacceptable arrangement.

At the core of this issue is the continued detention of juveniles under 18 with adult prisoners, in contravention of international human rights standards and recommendations from various oversight bodies and inspectorates, most recently the Prison Review Team.⁵⁹

The consultation document highlights the intersect between the Review of Youth Justice and the NEETs Strategy. Addressing the issue of the continued detention of under 18s with adults, which impacts detrimentally on their education and training chances, is key to reducing the numbers of these young people who remain within the NEETs category post release.

Closing the Achievement Gap – Alternative Education Provision

Include Youth supports the review of alternative education currently underway and looks forward to its findings being released. While the teaching model adopted by Alternative Education Projects is one that works particularly well for those young people regarded as/at risk of becoming NEET, there are nonetheless difficulties in the provision of alternative education which Include Youth would expect the Review to address. Some of these relate to lack of flexibility regarding admissions while others relate to under resourcing.

Research into Alternative Education Projects in Northern Ireland⁶⁰ concluded that students responded very positively to the teaching style, methods and learning environments of AEPs.

The Alternative Education Providers Forum has identified the following as key factors in the ability of the AEPs to work successful with young people regarded as/at risk of becoming NEET:⁶¹

- Key Worker system;

⁵⁹ Prison Review Team (2011) *Review of the Northern Ireland Prison System, Conditions, Management and Oversight of all Prisons, Interim Report*, Department of Justice

⁶⁰ Kilpatrick, R., McCartan, C. and McKeown, P. (2007) *Out of the Box- Alternative Education Provision in Northern Ireland*. Research Report No 45. Department of Education

⁶¹ Alternative Education Providers Forum (2010) *Submission to the DEL Committee Inquiry into 'NEET' young people*

- Individualised Education Programmes;
- Formative assessments;
- Involving pupils more actively in their learning – thus giving them additional responsibility for it;
- Young people agree challenging but achievable individual targets;
- Progress and achievements monitored effectively and celebrated;
- Tutorial Support / Supported study;
- Targeted support for families – home-link worker/s;
- Summative assessments;
- Progression tracking.

The challenge for the mainstream education is how to transfer the understanding, skills, expertise and attitude from the alternative sector into mainstream education in order to ensure that all children and young people can receive a high quality, effective education within the mainstream system where at all possible.

Young people themselves have many suggestions as to how this can be facilitated:

“More youth work based projects should be in school. Kids that often get to do these (youth work based projects) are down as ‘bad behaviour’, a negative connotation in itself.”

“If schools could offer things in a more alternative way that would be better.”

6. Initial Plans for Further Work

This section of the consultation document requires further development. While acknowledging that many of the current actions and none of the planned actions are as yet at the stage of demonstrating results, nonetheless it must be said that there is clearly a need for some additional, focused, creative and high level strategic planning if a real reduction in the numbers of young people at risk of being NEET or already within the NEET category is to be achieved within the next three years. In view of this the list of proposed actions lacks the elements of strategic and innovative thinking one would have expected to have seen shining through.

The list provided reads more as a menu of potential actions and less as the key additional constituents of a high level strategy. There is also a lack of detail provided in relation to actions being proposed e.g. ‘demonstrate that selected solutions can work on a bigger scale and provide further learning for dissemination’. Many of the proposed actions e.g. ‘translate the latest Audit Commission figures into more direct Northern Ireland terms’, while important and necessary in and of themselves do not seem like the kind of strategic actions one would expect to see included in this section of the document. We anticipate that the detail will be added following analysis of the consultation responses.

Include Youth has provided the following information and recommendations and asks that they be given serious consideration in the framing of additional priority areas for action within the planned Strategy.

Developing a continuum of service provision

While the consultation document highlights current mainstream training provision by the Department for Employment and Learning such as Training for Success there is no real acknowledgement, beyond a reference to European Social Funding for projects with a NEETs focus, to those service providers outside of mainstream provision who are positively and effectively engaging with young people who are NEET and for whom mainstream training programmes do not work for various reasons; descriptions by young people of their difficulties with participating in a mainstream training and education programme included:

“You might not have the essential skills to get into a training course. Or learning difficulties or maybe not the confidence to ask for help.”

“Training organisations pushed too much and made me feel inadequate and if I changed course I would have to start again.”

Specialised pre-vocational programmes such as Include Youth’s Give and Take scheme, while working successfully with young people who are NEET, do not get the recognition that is accorded to Registered Training Organisations and Further Education Colleges.

Yet despite this lack of formal recognition or accreditation schemes like Include Youth are achieving very positive outcomes with young people who are in the core NEETs category. Over three quarters of the young people engaged on the scheme are from a care background and all of the young people participating tend to have multiple barriers to overcome. The profile of young people on the Give and Take scheme during 2010 was as follows:⁶²

- 76% of young people have essential skills difficulties
- 73% are from a socially and economically deprived background
- 60% are in unsettled accommodation
- 61% have experienced abuse or neglect
- 56% have experienced mental health/emotional health problems
- 42% engage in alcohol or substance abuse
- 35% have an offending background
- 54% left school early
- 22% have a learning/physical disability
- 17% are at risk of suicide or self harming
- 15% are at risk from paramilitaries
- 7% are young parents

Despite these barriers the outcomes from the Give and Take scheme are extremely positive. 78% of all participants complete induction and successfully achieve at least one qualification. Critically 70% of all participants achieved their essential skills in numeracy and 67% achieved their essential skills in literacy. In terms of move on options programme monitoring records show that in 2008 and 2009 approximately two thirds of young people who completed induction moved on to either further education, training or employment, with some young people also engaging in voluntary work.

⁶² Include Youth (2010) *Give and Take scheme Report 1 April 2010- 31 December 2010* Appendix 1

A recent independent evaluation of the Give and Take Scheme concluded that it is a model that works and should be sustained, with the success of the model being communicated widely to inform discussion and debate in respect of meeting the needs of NEET young people.⁶³ The core elements of this programme are outlined in detail in the Evaluation summary appended but they can be summarised as follows:

- Person centred approach which ensure that each young person engages at a level and ability that meets their needs
- Flexibility of one to one and group based activities to meet the needs of the young people
- Support structures available to the young people in terms of project worker/personal development /mentoring worker and mentor
- Empathy of the staff and their approach and interaction with the young people
- Focus on both academic and personal development qualifications
- Accessibility of scheme locally across Northern Ireland
- Fact that the programme lasts for one year, with the option of extending for those most in need

This assessment of what the successful ‘ingredients’ of the Give and Take model are is illustrated by the following quotes from participants on the programme:

“Far better than school, more easy going, explains things better, they take more time with you.”

“There is more to do, it gets us out of the classroom, so relaxed and laid back, yet you cover so many things.”

“More freedom, not as repetitive as college, doing different things.”

“More confident at Give and Take because I could trust staff and build relationships with them.”

“I was on the Give and Take scheme – it’s not as formal as school. You’re learning without realising you’re learning, because you do activities and stuff.”

“Smaller groups and more one to one support.”

⁶³ Curran, M. and Boylan, C. (2011) *Give and Take Scheme Evaluation Report 2008-2010*. Belfast: Include Youth

Among the outcomes identified by the young people themselves are:

“I am much more motivated and have plans for my future.”

“I already have two qualifications and I have only been on the programme 4 months.”

“Getting qualifications, rather than sitting in the house.”

“Give and Take is about giving young people support to deal with their lives and their childhoods. It also helps young people to plan their futures.”⁶⁴

The case studies included in the Evaluation of the Give and Take Scheme, illustrate the positive, life changing impact the Give and Take Scheme has had on the lives of young people who are NEET.

Increasingly there is recognition that people furthest away from the labour market require support to assist them along the employability continuum rather than expecting them to be ‘job ready’ and it being simply a case of helping them to secure employment. Include Youth’s Give and Take Scheme provides the kind of specialised support, with the success of the programme not being entirely reliant on employment outputs alone but on helping the young people become more employable.

There is also a general acceptance that while the provision of specialist type intervention such as that provided by Give and Take usually requires a greater front loading of investment, the cost benefit analysis is extremely favourable in the medium to longer term⁶⁵.

Include Youth also acts as a specialist support provider (SSP) for the Department of Employment and Learning run Training for Success. Typically training organisations will ask

⁶⁴ Op cited at note 56, oral evidence provided by Ms. Ann Shultz, Give and Take Scheme

⁶⁵ Early prevention through low-cost interventions can bring large savings. £4,000 of short-term support to a teenage mother can be repaid twenty times over through net lifetime tax contributions. The same successful intervention can reduce public service costs by nearly £200,000 over a lifetime. Financial payback from some interventions is visible at the age of 25 through reduced public finance costs. Payback for most interventions is in the medium term, when young people have been in employment for longer and made tax and national insurance contributions. (Source: Audit Commission (2010) Against The Odds: Re-engaging young people in education, employment or training.

for Include Youth to work with young people who have additional needs which they cannot provide for. The profile of these young people is of those most at risk, difficult to work with, marginalised and vulnerable. Among the reasons for referral for specialist support provision are family breakdown, domestic violence, homelessness, paramilitary threats, drug misuse, sexual abuse, mental health problems, attempted suicide and bereavement.

Specialist support interventions have proved to be extremely successful⁶⁶ and have enabled those young people to remain engaged with TfS and thus outside of the NEET category. In addition to enabling young people to remain on TfS, among the associated positive outcomes secured have been referrals onwards to a range of agencies including Gateway Teams, addiction treatment programmes and community support programmes, improved family relationships and improved self esteem and confidence.

Include Youth suggests that there is considerable merit in the Department for Employment and Learning in reviewing its system of training provision, with a view to moving away from the current situation where all training is through a recognised training organisation with specific requirements concerning attendance and participation, to a more inclusive model which supports a continuum of service provision encompassing both mainstream training programmes such as TfS but also specialised pre-vocational training programmes such as Give and Take.

Include Youth believes that a more integrated, flexible model would much better meet the needs of those young people who are NEET as well as young people at risk of becoming NEET, some of whom could participate in mainstream training with the appropriate supports and some who would require more specialised pre-vocational programmes.

In this context consideration should be given to how best to share the knowledge and skills of specialist programmes such as Give and Take in engaging with 'at risk' young people with training organisations more generally, with a view to providing those young people with the supports they need to participate in mainstream training.

A more flexible, inclusive model should also address the current limitations of training provision whereby programmes only run during 'term time' as it were, leaving those young people who are already vulnerable at increased risk during the summer months as a result

⁶⁶ Op cited at note 63 paragraph 4.1.3

of the lack of structure and focus in their lives. Young people consulted with by Include Youth highlighted the need for a continued focus during the summer months:

“I worked in the Mace – a summer job – it got me out of the house, it was something to do and it was money in my pocket. Summer’s s***, there’s nothing to do; I’d have been lying in my bed otherwise. A job keeps you out of trouble and its good craic.”

The Employment and Learning Committee’s Inquiry Report recommended that not only should those developing the NEET Strategy ensure that it provides ‘a continuum of intervention’, they should ensure that interventions are also available during the traditional school/college holidays during the summer months,⁶⁷ a recommendation endorsed by Include Youth and others in the voluntary sector working with young people at risk.

Transitions

It is well recognised that young people at risk are most vulnerable when moving from one service/situation to the next, whether that be from education into training or training to employment or from supported accommodation to independent living or indeed a range of other moves; in the words of one young person:

“They should have something set up for all young people so that when they leave school they have some kind of job or training course to go on to afterwards. Like, more support so it isn’t left up so much to the young people on their own.”

The need for support also applies for young people moving from custody back into the community. The importance of ongoing support pre and post release has been identified by young people as a critical element in their ability to make a successful transition back into the community and to accessing further education, training or employment options.

Based on its extensive experience of preparing and supporting young people to move on to other education, training or employment options Include Youth firmly believes that there is a real need for an after care service from one service to the next; such a service would fit along the continuum of service provision being advocated for by Include Youth in this submission. It would provide the additional support the young people need on a short term basis until such as time as they feel confident and secure in their move. The service could

⁶⁷ Op cited at note 23 paragraph 81

take the form of mentors who continue to work with the young person as they move from one service to the next.

Some literature has suggested that policies to date have paid insufficient attention to the promotion of peer mentoring programmes, especially at pre-transition stages. The development of a longer term timescale in preparing for transition decisions might help support more effective decision making for this group of young people.⁶⁸

In addition the Employment and Learning Committee's NEETs Inquiry report recommended that:

“Those developing the NEET Strategy ensure that the pivotal role of mentors/key workers/support workers is deeply embedded within the systems of the Strategy.”⁶⁹

Young people interviewed for the evaluation of the Give and Take scheme were very positive in relation to the importance of the mentoring support they had received through the scheme:

“Mentors are good, someone you can talk to outside of the family and the programme.”

One young person described his mentor as ‘brilliant’ and someone he can really trust.

The following case study effectively demonstrates the real difference the provision of an after care service can make to young people's chances of progressing successfully from one type of provision to another.

⁶⁸ Op cited at note 28

⁶⁹ Op cited at note 23 paragraph 121

Case Study 3

C, aged 19, was referred to the Give & Take scheme by his Social Worker in March 2009. C was unable to sustain his place at a mainstream college due to sporadic attendance, caused by a breakdown in his care placement and recurring health concerns. C initially presented with low confidence and limited confidence, yet was willing to commence one-to-one work with staff.

C, with the intensive support of a Project Worker, explored a range of career options with the Careers Service and successfully completed two work placements in different administrative settings. Having built rapport with a Personal Development Worker, C began to engage with the full range of Give & Take programmes, attending Essential skills classes, participating in health and fitness activities and engaging in a number of issue-based groups. C was also matched with a Mentor, who he met on a weekly basis, providing him with additional support and further opportunities to set and achieve goals.

In September 2010, C moved on from the Give & Take scheme to a Traineeship programme in his local Health and Social Care Trust. As part of the programme, C was placed in a full-time administration placement in a nearby Trust facility. From the outset, C struggled with the increased physical, intellectual and emotional demands of his new role. This transition coincided with C moving into his own house for the first time and also a breakdown in his relationship with his family. As a consequence, C's performance in the workplace suffered and his attendance became sporadic, thus raising serious concerns about the sustainability of his placement.

This situation, however, became known to Give & Take staff through their ongoing contact with C and his weekly involvement with his Mentor. Despite C having left the Scheme, Give & Take staff responded immediately, providing a heightened level of direct support to him and advocating on his behalf to his work placement provider.

10 months later, C remains in his work placement, attending regularly and contributing effectively to his team. He continues to attend the local college, working towards achieving the required qualifications for his career in administration. C is settled in his own flat and is working at his relationships with family. He has just completed his Mentoring relationship but is still in regular contact with Give & Take staff.

Include Youth recommends that the relevant statutory agencies ensure the provision of after care services specifically designed to support young people to move successfully from one education, training or employment placement to the next.

Employability

Include Youth views as a vital component of the particular continuum of services for care experienced young people not in education, employment or training the provision of the employability services currently operated across the five Health and Social Care Trusts. This service is designed to enhance the education, training and employment outcomes and wellbeing for young care leavers. The Equality Commission Northern Ireland has played a key role is assisting the Trusts, as 'corporate parents' for these young people to proactively create employment opportunities within their own Trust bodies. Consideration should be given to the replication of these services with other group of young people who are NEET such as those involved with the criminal justice system.

While this regional service is still at the early stages of delivery its positive impact in securing opportunities for young care leavers is already apparent. The following case study illustrates the vital role the Employability Service plays along a continuum of service provision.

Case Study 4

D was referred to The Give and Take Scheme on 19 February 2009. He commenced the scheme on 23 February 2009. D came to Give and Take with no qualifications and multiple issues around living in care, family breakdown, alcohol misuse and contact with the youth justice system.

From the outset this young person showed an immense potential with his personal qualities and commitment to the programme. It was widely recognized that D needed intensive support to motivate him and enable him to deal with the various issues that were in many ways preventing his progression.

During his time on Give and Take, D gained 8 accredited qualifications, OCN Level 1 Preparation for work Placement, OCN Level 1 Getting Ahead (personal development), CCEA

Level 1 Employability, Duke of Edinburgh Bronze Award, Essential Skills Literacy and Numeracy and First Aid. D also completed two work placements and had a mentor for a year who explored other social avenues as a diversion from using alcohol.

In his closure from Give and Take D was referred to The Employability Service where he has been placed in the Directors office within one of the Health and Social Care Trusts.

D provided the following testimony which provides evidence of the valuable role played by the Employability Service in helping him secure and sustain a work placement:

“Before my work placement, I completed the Give and Take Scheme with Include Youth, I loved it and was worried I’d never find anything I would enjoy as much and which would give me real opportunities when I finished.

“I met with Trust/Include Youth Employability Worker and we talked about the Administration Placement and training which I could do. That seems such a long time ago. I’m now working 5 days a week using all the skills and experience I had gained from the Give and Take Scheme and my various experiences of work. I hadn’t been in a job for a while and although I was tired at the start, I really enjoy the work and appreciate the opportunity.

“I know that the training and work experience will give me the chance I deserve to get a decent well paid job and not the temporary low wage jobs I had struggled to get before.

This placement means a lot to me, it has given me the confidence to know I can achieve greater goals when I put my mind to it.

“I know there will be times when I will find this hard, but I also know that I have the support to help me when I need it. My work mentor has been a great support and is always encouraging and explains things really well, I feel part of the team.”

Role of families and communities

Young people who fall within the 'at risk' categories for becoming NEET often find it difficult to move outside of their own local community to participate in education, training or employment opportunities. This is for a combination of reasons including lack of confidence and self esteem, living within segregated communities, fear of violence, literacy difficulties, or financial reasons.

Include Youth's practitioners have observed that these young people respond best to an informal youth work approach within their own communities, an approach which starts with where the young people are at.

Include Youth supports the recommendation by the Employment and Learning Committee's NEET Inquiry report which recommended that the NEET Strategy must take into account that interventions should be community based where possible and that these should be holistic, involving the young person's family where possible.⁷⁰ Again we suggest that DEL take cognisance of services such as the Family Support Hubs currently being piloted in the Western Health and Social Services Trust Area and the Integrated Services for Children and Young People operating in West Belfast and the Shankill.

The consultation document acknowledges that many young people who are at risk of becoming NEET or are already in the NEET category are "only reachable by operating outside formal government agencies"⁷¹ and recognises the importance of community involvement coupled with family support in successfully engaging with these young people. It is disappointing therefore that greater consideration is not given as to how families and local communities can be supported to become actively involved in action to reduce the numbers of their young people who are NEET or at risk of becoming NEET.

Include Youth recommends that the Pathways to Success strategy should include a range of innovative actions designed to facilitate and support the development of organic, community based provision.

⁷⁰ Op cited at note 23 , paragraph 63

⁷¹ Op cited at note 22 paragraph 2.20

When asked young people readily articulated the kinds of education, training and employment related services and supports they would like to see provided within their own community:

“Stuff you can use so you can get a job *in* your community, because all young people would be more relaxed.”

“A drop in centre with information for young people looking for courses or training.”

“Each community centre could install a kiosk similar to those in the job centre which would have information about training, education, courses or employment.”

The merits and feasibility of providing the type of ‘one stop shop’ within local communities, providing the co-location of services as suggested by young people and also as recommended by the House of Commons Children, Schools and Families report on Young People not in education, employment or training⁷² deserves serious examination.

Young people also drew attention to the **responsibility** of their community to proactively address the issue of young people not in education, employment or training:

“The community needs to come together and make more opportunities for young people by listening to what it is the young people want to do.”

Young people consulted with also attached much importance to the positive role that parents, carers and families have to play in addressing the issue of NEETs. However there was a shared view among young people consulted that parents and families required greater support than was currently being provided to them:

“Some parents struggle to bring their kids up, but they are not **bad** parents, they just need support.”

“Help for parents, someone to help them and show them how to help their kids do well, most parents don’t know how to do that.”

“Support when you have difficult kids, like kids who are headers - people to take them away for weekends so parents can get a break.”

⁷² Op cited at note 36 paragraph 44

Greater consideration needs to be given within the Pathways to Success Strategy's plans for further work as to how the additional financial, childcare and other supports required by parents, carers and families will be put in place to ensure that they can play an effective supportive role in their children's individual pathways to success.

Employers

As outlined earlier in this response the lack of a strategic focus on employers within this consultation document represents a significant omission and is one which needs to be urgently addressed.

It is widely accepted that government alone cannot tackle the issue of young people who are not in education, employment or training. Engagement with Northern Ireland's business people and employers is absolutely central to this effort. They can provide expertise, resources and the opportunities to help young people secure work placements and employment.

It is clear to Include Youth however those employers will need incentives to take young people on for work placements or to proactively target them in recruitment drives. Young people consulted with also placed emphasis on the need for employer incentives:

"If employers have one bad experience with someone on a placement, then it wrecks everyone. So government should be offering incentives for business people to want to provide opportunities."

"Government need incentives in jobs for young people, specifically, apprenticeships and a policy that employers need to have a certain ratio of young people employed."

Include Youth recommends the formation of a regional Employers Forum or Task Force made up of dedicated employers that have a regional presence and can help to offer placements, training and jobs. The representation of the Equality Commission on such a body would also be required in order to provide advice and guidance on equality related matters within targeted employment initiatives which may be developed.

7. Steering and Implementation Mechanism

This section of the consultation document provides insufficient detail making it difficult to comment in any depth. As stated elsewhere in this document we would fully expect that those charged with developing and taking forward the steering and implementation mechanisms for this Strategy will have the benefit of the learning gained from the ongoing implementation mechanisms of another high level cross departmental strategy for young people, the ten year Children and Young People's Strategy for Northern Ireland.

Include Youth has been actively involved in the Steering Group on NEETs and is supportive of the proposed forum group for stakeholders, with representation from this forum onto the joint steering and implementation body. The importance of parity of representation from the voluntary and community sector with civil servants and others on this joint body cannot be over emphasised.

Key to the successful implementation of the Strategy will be the existence of a high level cross departmental group to co-ordinate delivery of its objectives and actions. The consultation document provides little detail as to how it is envisaged that this cross departmental collaboration and co-operation will happen but clearly it will need to be included on the agenda of the Ministerial Sub-Committee on Children and Young People.

The likelihood that increasingly government interventions with and funding for work with young people will be required to demonstrate how they are addressing the specific issue of NEETs makes the need for co-ordinated cross departmental responses all the more necessary.

The particular challenge involved in securing real collaboration across Northern Ireland's government Departments was underlined by the DEL Committee, "(the) difference in other jurisdictions is that they have more powerful local authorities, which can lend themselves to more joined up government, and the presence of Junior Ministers in these jurisdictions whose work cuts across a variety of government departments is also helpful for strategic co-operation between departments."⁷³

While this observation is undoubtedly true Include Youth believes that the new approach to children's services planning being led by the Health and Social Care Board at a regional level

⁷³ Op cited at note 23

provides the optimal vehicle through which to take forward the implementation of the Pathways to Success Strategy. This regional approach to joint planning and commissioning of services for children and young people through the Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership should facilitate implementation of the Strategy from regional agency level down to local level and should ensure that the Strategy aligns to and supports delivery of the outcomes framework for the 10 year Strategy for Children and Young People.

8. Recommendations

1. Include Youth recommends that the Pathways to Success Strategy is underpinned by a set of human rights principles in line with international human rights obligations.
2. The strategy needs to be informed to a much greater degree by an analysis of the specific social and economic context for the development of the Pathways to Success Strategy.
3. The Pathways to Success Strategy and related implementation plans needs to be explicitly referenced in the forthcoming Programme for Government and the associated Departmental Business plans.
4. There is a need for much greater alignment of the Pathways to Success Strategy with other high level Strategies which directly impact on young people at risk of becoming or already in the NEET category.
5. Include Youth recommends that DEL carries out a full and comprehensive screening process and an EQIA of its Pathways to Success Strategy.
6. There is a need for a greater focus on structural rather than individualised barriers facing young people in accessing education, employment and training opportunities.
7. Greater emphasis should be placed within the consultation document on universal service provision, preventative work and early intervention.
8. The time frame for the Pathways to Success Strategy should be expanded from 3 to 10 years.
9. Include Youth recommends that the proposed age bands, with the proposed prioritisation of the 16-19 year age band, should be re-visited with a view to ensuring the development of a seamless strategy that effectively addresses the needs of all young people from 16-24 years but also those of under 16s.
10. Include Youth recommends that much greater emphasis should be placed on preventative work pre 16 years of age.

11. There is a need for clarification regarding the definition of NEET utilised by different government departments and agencies for counting purposes i.e. what is considered a 'substantial amount of time outside of any form of education, employment or training'?
12. There is a need for clarification of the taxonomy used; in particular there is a need for more information on the kinds of young people and the barriers they face who are envisaged as falling into Group C i.e. 'no identifiable barrier.'
13. The list of at risk categories should be expanded to include inter-generational trauma, low attainment levels, emotional and behavioural problems, homophobic and racist bullying, asylum seeker status, rural isolation and offending behaviour.
14. While Include Youth is supportive in principle of plans to explore the tracking of young people's paths in relation to education, employment or training but given all of ethical considerations involved it is of utmost importance that these are properly addressed in advance of the introduction of a tracking system.
15. Include Youth recommends that DEL review its system of training provision, with a view to moving away from the current situation where all training is through a recognised training organisation, to a more inclusive model which supports a continuum of service provision encompassing both mainstream training programmes such as TfS, with built in specialist support where required, but also specialised pre-vocational training programmes such as Give and Take Scheme.
16. A more flexible, inclusive model of training provision should also address the current limitations of training provision whereby programmes only run during 'term time' to ensure provision throughout the year.
17. The ongoing review of Alternative Education should address some of the difficulties young people experience in accessing its provision; some of these relate to lack of flexibility regarding admission while others relate to under resourcing.
18. Include Youth recommends the provision of a non means tested training allowance to young people who are on the Give and Take scheme or similar schemes.

19. Include Youth recommends that those key elements of a youth work approach to Essential Skills training which has been proven to work with young people who are NEET or at risk of becoming NEET be incorporated into any model of provision being developed by DEL.
20. Consideration should also be given to extending such an approach to young people under 16 years of age in mainstream education but who would benefit from Essential Skills provision rather than the traditional GCSE route.
21. Clear guidance should be given to employers and employment agencies on the equivalency of Essential Skills qualifications with other qualifications.
22. Include Youth recommends that government ensure the provision of after care services specifically designed support young people's transition from one service to the next; such a service would fit along the continuum of service provision recommended above.
23. Specific issues/barriers for 16-18 year olds including access to appropriate accommodation and provision of benefits should be addressed within the context of the Pathways to Success Strategy. Outstanding proposals to amend legislation in order to give 'priority need' status to 16 and 17 year olds who are homeless but do not fall within the remit of social services, similar to legislative provisions which exist in Scotland and England, should be advanced without delay.
24. Greater consideration needs to be given within the Pathways to Success Strategy's plans for further work as to how the additional financial, childcare and other supports required by parents, carers and families will be put in place to ensure that they can play an effective supportive role in their children's individual pathways to success.
25. Include Youth supports the recommendation by the Employment and Learning Committee's NEET Inquiry report which recommended that the NEET Strategy must take into account that interventions should be community based, holistic and, involve the young person's family where possible.
26. The merits and feasibility of providing the type of 'one stop shop' within local communities, providing the collocation of services as suggested by young people and

also as recommended by the House of Commons Children, Schools and Families report on Young People Not in Education, Employment or Training deserves serious examination.

27. Include Youth recommends much greater prioritisation of engagement with business and employers within the Strategy. Specifically Include Youth recommends the formation of a regional Employers Forum or Task Force made up of dedicated employers that have a regional presence and can help to offer placements, training and jobs to young people not in education, training or employment. Equality Commission representation on such a body would also be required in order to provide advice and guidance on equality related matters within any targeted employment initiatives to be developed.
28. Parity of representation from the voluntary and community sector with civil servants on the joint steering and implementation body must be ensured.
29. Implementation of the Pathways to Success Strategy must come within the purview of the Ministerial Sub-Committee on Children and Young People.
30. Include Youth recommends that the Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership acts as the main implementation vehicle for the Pathways to Success Strategy from regional agency level down to local level.

APPENDIX 1



Give and Take Scheme

Evaluation Report

**Executive Summary
2008-2010**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This evaluation of Include Youth's Give and Take Scheme was carried out by Locus Management in 2010. The evaluation reviewed the work of the Give and Take Scheme over the period April 2008 to August 2010. Include Youth is a not for profit organisation that actively promotes the rights, best interest of and best practice with young people in need or at risk. The Give and Take Scheme works predominantly (but not exclusively) with young people from a care background aged 16 to 21 who have been assessed as not ready to participate in mainstream training and employment opportunities. The aim of the scheme is to improve the long term employability of young people and to enhance their self esteem and self confidence. The Give and Take Scheme has developed since its origins in 1988; the programme was greatly enhanced through a successful ESF application in 2008 which provided additional funding to enhance the employer interface element of the programme and training provision. Finally, National Lottery funding was secured in 2009 to develop the mentoring component of Give and Take.

Young people are referred to the Give and Take Scheme by social workers from each of the five Northern Ireland Health and Social Care Trusts. Social workers have a statutory obligation under the Children (Leaving Care) Act (NI) 2002 to provide greater support to young people living in and leaving care. The Give and Take Scheme is recognised as an exemplar programme by all five Trusts who refer young people to the programme. The Trusts currently contribute to the costs of 74 places annually as illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1: Give and Take Participant Allocation by Health and Social Care Trust Area

Health and Social Care Trust	No of Places
Belfast	12
South Eastern	12
Southern	12
Northern	18
Western	20
TOTAL	74

Give and Take works with a particularly marginalised group with many complex needs and issues. 100% of young people engaging are classified as 'NEET', i.e. not in education, employment or training and approximately three quarters are either in care or from a care background. Young people presenting to the Give and Take Scheme have had extremely negative experiences of schooling, home and family life which impacts upon their ability to engage with many of the mainstream programmes.

231 young people were recruited to the programme which is 143 short of the ESF target. There are, however, mitigating factors including that many young people stay on the programme for longer than the anticipated one year and 100% of places are occupied by Health and Social Care Trust referrals (which limits the numbers entering the programme).

All participants joining the Give and Take Scheme are provided with an induction programme tailored to meet individual needs. The vast majority of young people complete the induction phase, with programme monitoring records showing that to date there is a retention rate of 78.4%. Following induction participants are provided with access to a suite of six accredited training programmes. The successful ESF application provided Include Youth with the resources to employ their own Essential Skills tutors and expand the range and quality of training programmes on offer. Training provided is accredited which is important and young people on Give and Take place great value on attaining recognised qualifications. Qualifications awarded include:

- Essential Skills in Literacy and Numeracy (CCEA Entry 1 to Level2)
- ICT (NIOCN Entry 3 to Level 2)
- Preparation for Placement (NIOCN Level1)
- Employment Skills (CCEA Levels 1 and 2)
- Getting Ahead (NIOCN Level1)
- Duke of Edinburgh
- First Aid
- Driving Theory
- Driving Test
- Retail and Hospitality Skills
- CSR Card

Programme records highlight that the time young people on Give and Take engage in training has significantly increased from a total of 3,000 hours in Year 1 to 8,000 hours in Year 2. Records also indicate that 78% of all participants complete induction and successfully achieve at least one qualification and critically that 70% of all participants achieved their essential skills in numeracy and 67% achieved their essential skills in literacy (from approximately 30% achievement rates prior to directly employing essential skills tutors).

Personal Development support is provided through specific programmes (e.g. Getting Ahead /Health Matters) and one to one support delivered by the Personal Development/Mentoring Workers. This assists young people to manage their lives, make better decisions and to consider the impact of their actions. Programme monitoring records show that engagement by young people in personal development activities has increased from approximately 4,000 hours in Year 1 to 7,000 hours in Year 2. This equates to an average of 33 hours per person in Year 1 and 52 hours per person in Year 2. The evaluation identifies many positive outcomes in respect to personal development provision.

Funding secured through the National Lottery in 2009 provided Give and Take with the resources to introduce mentoring provision which is offered to all young people entering the scheme. All mentors are volunteers and receive extensive training upon being accepted as a mentor. To date 39 mentors have been recruited from across Northern Ireland. Currently only 21 of the recruited mentors are matched with a young person.

Finally, providing young people with the tools and necessary skills to gain employment is integral to the scheme's success. ESF funding helped secure the appointment of an Employability Coordinator with responsibility for enhancing and broadening the employer interface to help bridge the gap between those offering and seeking employment. Research carried out with the young people entering the scheme identified that young people had little knowledge of the types of jobs potentially they might like and therefore there was a need to introduce young people to job opportunities across a range of sectors. The Employability Coordinator therefore has worked with the Project Workers, introducing options that are focused upon the capability and readiness of each young person for work. These options include Work Prep, Work Ready and Work Well.

The employment of an Employability Coordinator has helped the Deputy Manager in his review of work experiences. The move away from extended work placement to a gradual Work Prep, Work Ready and then Work Placement has been much more suited to the needs of the young people. This process has benefited the young people in that;

- They are now more aware of career options
- They have developed their employability skills
- They have received a personality test through MAPS which has helped to identify what types of jobs they may be suited to
- They have visited different employers and engaged in a variety of work tasks
- They have employability related qualifications
- They have engaged in an extended work placement.

The evaluation identified Give and Take as an exemplar programme, providing a much needed and valued intervention for many young people in need. The aim of the programme is to enhance the employability and self confidence of young people at risk of social exclusion across Northern Ireland and there is much evidence to support that this has been achieved. Young people are more employable because of:

- The qualifications they have attained
- Their greater awareness of employability related skills which are needed in the workplace and the development of such skills
- Their improved behaviour and self awareness
- Their work experience
- Their feeling of self worth
- Their positive focus on the future.

The evaluation concluded with a number of recommendations including:

- The Give and Take model is one that works and should be sustained
- The Give and Take programme currently works with a small segment of the overall NEET group (130 per annum out of a total 10,140 NI total!!). Include Youth needs to consider if it is desirable as an organisation to support a greater number of young people through Give and Take and what impact this might have on the organisation
- The success of the model should be communicated widely to inform discussion and debate in respect to meeting the needs of NEET young people
- There is a need to enhance the sharing of information with those who currently refer and have the potential to refer young people to the scheme e.g. Trust staff (Gatekeepers, Social Workers, Employability Workers) and DEL Careers Advisers. Give and Take staff should have face to face meetings with such people once a year to discuss and review progress and share experiences
- In the current economic climate, where jobs are difficult to find and work placement opportunities are also becoming difficult, Give and Take may wish to consider the inclusion of a self employment, business skills training / practical input. This would introduce young people to more entrepreneurial focused skills development
- There needs to be a recognition that Give and Take is not an employment programme but an employability programme
- The evaluation identifies Give and Take as a model of best practice in respect to interventions with young people from a care background. There are a number of European transnational initiatives which potentially could provide a platform for

Include Youth to promote Give and Take, to develop new practices and to learn from other similar organisations across the EU.

Case Study 1

Paul is 18 years of age. When he was 12 he was removed from his mother's care due to concerns about her ability to provide adequate parenting for him. Since then he has resided in many different placements including foster care and a residential home. He has a Statement of Educational Need and struggles with literacy and numeracy. Paul has a history of anti social behaviour and criminal involvement and has exhibited self harming behaviour. At the time of his referral he was also known to be involved in consuming large quantities of alcohol and was known to be smoking cannabis regularly. He was referred by his Social Worker as she believed that this would help:

- To enhance his self-confidence and self-esteem
- Secure job opportunities for supported work placement as Paul was keen to get a job
- Reduce his risk of offending

Paul was referred to Give and Take in June 2009. Give and Take staff advise that his literacy and numeracy skills were the lowest they had ever encountered and initially they were unsure if he would be able to cope on the programme. Paul was unable to read and write and he could not switch on a computer when he first arrived. Despite his low level of skills staff report that Paul is one of the best attenders on the programme and has achieved all of the qualifications, as well as his First Aid and CSR card. He no longer has to ask for help as he has made significant progress on his essential skills, albeit that they are still at a very low level. Because of this his Social Worker requested that he be offered an extension on the programme for a further 6 months to help further his essential skills.

During his consultation Paul advised that *"before Give and Take I was being a wee shit"*. He was very open about the fact that he was regularly *"thieving"* and engaging in anti social behaviour because he was *"bored"* and he never considered the consequences of his actions. He has really enjoyed Give and Take which he describes as *"great"* and the staff as *"dead on"*. He really enjoys the routine that Give and Take has introduced to him and as a result of having something to do he is no longer engaging in anti social behaviour. He remarks that Give and Take has *"changed"* him and kept him out of trouble. He has confidence now in his ability to achieve and realises that anything is possible but that he will have to work for what he wants. The staff on Give and Take have pushed him to achieve and while initially he would have had the attitude *"I can't do that"*, now he reports that he knows that he can do it. He believes that as a result of Give and Take he now has a better chance of getting a job because he has;

- Qualifications
- Improved English and Maths
- A cv
- Work experience.

Paul has also really enjoyed the social activities with Give and Take and the opportunities he has had would not have been available to him if he was not on the programme. He has enjoyed meeting new people and new friends. Paul is now more positive about his future and he recognises that he needs and wants routine when he leaves Give and Take to ensure that he doesn't fall back into his old ways. He hopes to get a job and is currently working towards securing a work placement.

Case Study 2

Sarah is 17 and has a care history since she was 11 years of age, due to alcohol misuse and domestic violence at home. She dropped out of school despite being academically very able and is described as a 'rebellious' young girl who finds it difficult to comply with boundaries at home. Sarah is hard to engage and Give and Take staff report that they have found working with Sarah to be extremely challenging as she would not communicate with them for many months. Initially all contact was through Sarah's mother who accompanied her to all induction sessions. This proved to be very difficult for staff who were unsure initially of the benefit that Sarah would get from the programme if she would not communicate with staff. The induction process was "*difficult and almost impossible*" according to staff and Sarah indicated that she was only interested in training towards qualifications and was not interested in any of the personal development activities. Sarah started Give and Take in December 2009 and it took until April 2010 for her to complete her induction. Her time keeping was very poor and in May 2010 Give and Take staff met with Sarah to discuss her commitment and level of interest in the programme. Staff queried Sarah's motivation and following a frank and honest session Sarah advised that she was interested in participating.

Sarah was particularly keen to get a job and it was agreed that the Project Worker would organise childcare work experience for her over the summer. The Project Worker sourced a local childcare business and met with the employer at the end of July to discuss the possibility of Sarah going on work experience. A taster day was arranged initially when Sarah and the Project Worker visited the childcare business and since August Sarah has been attending for work experience two days a week. This placement has had an extremely positive impact on Sarah. Give and Take staff report that feedback from the employer is very positive and they have agreed to offer her additional work experience if she decides to

go to college to get her childcare qualifications. This is an exit strategy that staff are working towards with Sarah.

Sarah's time with the Give and Take programme will be coming to an end soon and staff, her Social Worker and her mother all report that she is a very different person compared to when she first came to the programme. For example, they report that Sarah;

- Is much more communicative. Her Social Worker remarks how she is more talkative and will now make eye contact when she is talking
- Has developed enhanced self esteem and confidence, which is particularly evident in the workplace where she is obviously at ease and enjoying herself
- Is a much happier young girl – her mother commented that before Give and Take Sarah was *“unhappy”* and *“didn't know what to do with her life”*
- Is physically more self confident in her stance and appearance
- Is more relaxed in a group setting
- Has a sense of purpose and is focused upon her future, a career and the qualifications that she will need to achieve her goal
- Is a better timekeeper and gets out of bed to be in work for 8.30am. Her mother reports that *“she wouldn't have bothered getting out of bed before”*
- Is much more relaxed at home where her mother advises there is a *“nicer atmosphere”*.

Both Sarah's Social Worker and her mother have praised staff at the Give and Take Scheme for *“not giving up on her”*. They are appreciative for the respect and patience that they have shown her despite the fact that for many months she would not communicate or properly engage with them. Her mother comments that *“where others would have given up Give and Take didn't”*. Both agree that if Sarah had not been involved with Give and Take she would now be sitting at home doing nothing. Instead she is now working two days a week, developing her essential skills qualifications and considering going to college to study for a childcare qualification. Her Social Worker also advises that the Give and Take Scheme has preserved Sarah's placement at home. If she had continued to do nothing and to stay at home, her Social Worker would have had no option but to consider placing her in residential care.

Case Study 3

Mark is 19 years of age and was referred to Social Services when he was 12 due to concerns about parental control at home. Prior to coming into care he was subjected to significant trauma, loss, rejection and multiple moves and his experiences include:

- The death of his father when he was 5 years old
- Witness to serious physical violence (domestic and other)
- Multiple house and school moves
- Multiple placements – he has been in 20 different placements between 2002 and 2009, including time spent in the Juvenile Justice Centre and Hydebank Young Offenders Centre
- Difficult and volatile relationship with his step father
- His mother and siblings leaving NI.

Mark has a significant criminal profile. His first conviction was when he was 12 years of age and he has a total of 92 convictions. His Social Worker referral to the Give and Take Scheme reports that Mark was not suitable for mainstream education due to his poor literacy and numeracy issues, resulting from his interrupted education. The referral makes reference to the unresolved feelings and emotions Mark was trying to cope with and the fact that he “deals with these issues through self harm, drug misuse, anger and other high risk behaviours”. Also “he can present as lazy and not very motivated but this is a confidence issue”. Mark is described as:

- Hurt
- Confused
- Angry
- Fearful
- Hopeless
- Rejected
- Abandoned.

Mark agreed to come onto Give and Take because he would be able to avail of one to one support. He did not want to join any training programme that required group settings because he was concerned that he would not be able to keep up. This was based upon his school experiences where he was left behind in class. Give and Take staff agreed to work with Mark on a one to one basis and they report that he flew through his induction in seven weeks. They report that Mark’s ability is high “but he had no confidence to engage” in group based training. Following induction and his attainment of some qualifications Mark

began to grow in confidence and started to ask about opportunities to engage in other Give and Take activities. Mark progressed to group based work and participated fully, developing a more positive attitude to engagement. Staff report that previously Mark would have said no to everything but now he “will give anything a go”.

When consulted Mark describes the group work as “brilliant” which he admits himself he didn’t want to get involved with at the start. He reports that he “loves” the Give and Take programme and the classes which are “not like the tech”. He reported that “I’ve done more here than any other techs. I didn’t go to class as I couldn’t concentrate in large groups”. Mark is very aware of the need to change his lifestyle. “This is my last chance to give it a go. I’m sick of committing crime and I want to change my life around. They will help me”. He admits that prior to Give and Take he was drinking and taking drugs every day. Now he has something to preoccupy him every day, keeping him busy and out of trouble.

Mark’s Social Worker believes that Give and Take has been “the making of him”. The ability of Give and Take staff to successfully work with a high risk individual such as Mark has been praised by the Social Worker and the package of support on offer has been of huge benefit to him. He has moved from one to one training to group training, he has gained qualifications and he has benefitted from a work placement in Homebase. They describe the very positive impact that the programme has had in that;

- Prior to Give and Take Mark had an overwhelming sense of hopelessness and didn’t care what happened to him. Now he realises that as he has worked so hard and put so much into the scheme that he can’t go back
- Mark now has hope and a belief both in himself and for himself
- He has a positive attitude to life and his future
- He has developed a sense of independence which has been enhanced through his work placement opportunity
- His communication skills have improved – he used to swear a lot and talk about crime whereas now he talks more about his future in a positive way
- His resilience has improved and he is now better able to deal with issues in his life.

Mark specifically makes reference during his consultation to his mentor who he describes as “brilliant” and someone he can really trust. He can talk to his mentor about anything that is happening in his life and the Social Worker also remarks about the importance of Mark’s

mentor who they have also interacted with in respect to addressing issues being experienced by Mark.

Mark wants to get a job and he values the qualifications that he has been able to get at Give and Take. His time on the programme is due to come to an end but he would like to stay longer and get more qualifications. Mark believes that if he was not on Give and Take he would be in jail or dead as a result of his misuse of alcohol and drugs. He remarks "I've changed so much". He has not engaged in criminal activity during his time with Give and Take and has reduced his alcohol intake significantly during the week. He knows that he has opportunities available to him if he applies himself.

Case Study 4

Peter is 18 and was referred to Social Services when he was 8 due to concerns about his mother's ability to care for her son due to mental health issues. He was placed in a children's home in 2009 as a temporary arrangement due to concerns about his personal safety and vulnerability. His Social Worker referral makes reference to the fact that Peter has threatened suicide on a number of occasions. Peter has a mild learning disability and finds formal learning difficult. He has literacy and numeracy problems and while he has started several training courses with training agencies in the past, he has been unable to sustain any of these courses. Peter was referred to Give and Take as it was considered that the Give and Take flexible approach to training and the small group and one to one training options would suit his needs. Consultation with Peter confirmed that while he has engaged in both group and one to one sessions he prefers the one to one because it's "quieter" and he can "get through the work quicker".

Give and Take staff report that when Peter first started he was quiet and hard to engage. Now he will talk openly to staff when things are bothering him and he is open to support from staff. During his consultation Peter confirmed that it has taken him a while to trust staff but that he now feels comfortable in talking to them.

Peter's attendance on the programme has been excellent and he has achieved all of the qualifications available. Despite his essential skills difficulties he has excelled at his literacy and numeracy and Peter's sense of achievement has increased his self confidence and given him a sense of hope for the future. A Social Work review report states; Peter "continues to present with improved self esteem and confidence" and "Give and Take has been central in providing him security and stability."

Peter reports that he enjoys Give and Take. He has enjoyed the flexibility of the programme and now that he has achieved his qualifications he would like to do more training. He has

really enjoyed the social activities of Give and Take and feels much more confident in engaging with others. He has even felt comfortable participating in Give and Take activities outside his own area. When asked if the Give and Take programme has changed him in any way, Peter reports that as a result of meeting new people and making new friends he has become less sectarian and more tolerant. He reports that in advance of Give and Take he often engaged in anti social sectarian activity. He had never interacted with anyone from a different religion and through Give and Take he has been introduced to other young people from a different religious background. As a result of getting to know these young people he has made new friends and as a group sectarianism has been discussed. He now realises that his behaviour was wrong.

Peter was provided a work placement opportunity but unfortunately this did not work out for him. He is unsure what he would like to work at and staff report that he lacked self confidence to sustain his placement. Peter has been on the programme for over one year and it is time for him to move on. He has concerns about leaving but he has been reassured that he can call into the office at any time. He has applied to the further education college for training.

When Give and Take staff were asked how Peter has benefitted from the programme they comment that he has;

- Improved his essential skills
- Become more self confident
- Developed his social skills
- Improved his communication skills
- Reduced his self harming behaviour.

If he was not on the programme Peter reports that he would be “sitting at home watching TV”.

Case Study 5

John is 18 years of age and has been in care, living in a residential home for children, since he was 10. John was referred to Give and Take because he was unwilling to commit to a full time course at his local further education college. He has literacy and numeracy difficulties and has a problem with alcohol misuse which resulted in him engaging in aggressive and anti social behaviour. Before Give and Take his daily life lacked routine and structure and he tended to spend his days sleeping in bed.

John's Social Worker referred him to Give and Take because she felt that the approach adopted by the scheme would suit John's needs and his ability. Despite his literacy and numeracy difficulties she describes him as an intelligent young man. John is keen to get a job and therefore his Social Worker felt that Give and Take would help to improve his essential skills and motivate him to focus on his future. She reports in her referral form that John has low self esteem as a result of the stigma of being in care.

The Give and Take Project Worker reports that initially John appeared to be motivated and keen to engage in the programme. However he was drinking during the week and after a while, was missing classes or turning up while still under the influence of alcohol. This was unacceptable and the Project Worker spoke to John to discuss the issue. John reported that he still wanted to continue with the programme and the Project Worker agreed to let him stay and appointed a mentor to provide additional support to him. The Project Worker reports that the appointment of a mentor "was the turning point". John is very interested in football and supports his local soccer team. A mentor was appointed who had a similar interest and went with John to local football matches at the weekend. John's engagement with Give and Take improved. The Project Worker reports that his attendance "shot up" and he became much more open and communicative with staff. He now engages well and participates in group based activities and "puts great effort into everything".

Initially John didn't attend the essential skills classes because he felt that he wasn't capable. However with the support of staff he is now attending essential skills and working through at his own pace. He reports during his consultation that he finds the work "doable" and says that "it's easier to get work done here than anywhere else". "You get all the help when you need it". He also enjoys the social side of Give and Take and relates well to the young people on the programme as well as the staff who he describes as "brilliant, laid back and always a laugh". He says "I couldn't be anywhere if I wasn't happy with the staff".

John believes that he has matured as a result of coming onto Give and Take. He says that he is now "waking up to things" and "I have my wits about me". He has completed his qualifications and sustained a 6 week work placement in a local restaurant. As a result he feels that he is more employable. His Social Worker reports that she too can see great changes in John. For example;

- His communication skills have improved
- He is not as "cocky" as he was previously but has honed his self confidence skills
- He now contacts his Social Worker when he feels the need for help rather than letting things escalate to crisis point

- He can manage himself better and has become more independent
- He has an interest in further training and is motivated about his future
- He is much more reliable

The Social Worker reports that Give and Take has been John's "most permanent structure". His time on the programme is due to come to an end and John reports that initially when staff began to discuss possible exit strategies with him he was "raging" and said to staff "if you close me now you close me to nothing". A six month extension was approved to facilitate his transition into another training course and he was advised that he can always avail of the drop in facility at the Give and Take office. The Project Worker advises however that he still has fears about John's transition to mainstream education. His academic ability is low and without the support he has had through Give and Take he is concerned about his ability to cope.