
Towards Zero NEETs – a model for effective flexible college provision pre level 2

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Abbreviations

AAP	Activity Agreement Pilot	FLT	Foundation Learning Tier
APIR	Assess, Plan, Implement, Review (framework)	IAG	Information, Advice and Guidance
CEIAG	Careers education, information, advice and guidance	ILP	Individual Learning Plan
CLC	Central London Connexions	LA	Local Authority
CPD	Continuous professional development	LSC	Learning and Skills Council
CWC	City of Westminster College	NEET	Not in Education, Employment or Training
DCSF	Department of Children, Schools and Families	PA	Personal Advisor
E2E	Entry to Employment	QCF	Qualifications & Credit Framework
EBP	Education Business Partnership	YOT	Youth Offending Team
EET	Education, employment and/or training	YOS	Youth Offending Service
EMA	Education Maintenance Allowance	yp	young people
ESF	European Social Fund	YPLA	Young People's Learning Agency
FE	Further Education		

1. About this report

This report has been commissioned by the seven central London Local Authorities (through Central London Connexions) and the London 7 Group of central London college principals. It has been funded by the London Council 14 -19 Regional Planning Group CEIAG (careers education, information, advice and guidance) initiative Achieving Excellence, aiming to identify and promote excellent CEIAG across London to increase 14 -19 participation, progression and achievement.

The seven local authorities in central London have all been successful at reducing their levels of young people not in education, employment or training (NEETs). However, although the reduction in NEET levels has been strong, the levels have reached a plateau at approximately 7% - with between 250 and 450 young people NEET in each local authority area at any one time.

In line with the national NEET strategy, it is recognised that if further progress towards zero NEET levels is to be made, then significant increases will be needed in the number of young people entering and remaining in education and training provision.

Flexible entry to Further Education provision, underpinned by personalised CEIAG and support, is a key strand of a NEET reduction strategy. There is a growing number of examples of how providers have introduced flexible provision both nationally and within Central London. The importance of partnership between agencies - particularly colleges and Connexions - is key to the strategy.

Significant numbers of students drop out of courses during or at the end of the year. This 'churn' is the major contributor to sustained high NEET levels. While over 2000 young people in central London per year are supported to re-enter learning, a further 2000 plus join the NEET cohort from post-16 learning. The reasons for this are complex, but it is clear that there is a need for more effective support for students at risk, a personalised approach to learning, more flexible points of entry and re-entry to courses and clear progression routes.

This report seeks to identify good practice examples of flexible pre level 2 provision in London colleges working with Connexions. It also draws up a model comprising effective practice factors that could be utilised when designing provision for young people NEET. All of the London 7 Group of central London colleges were approached although not all were able to take part. Other London colleges also participated in the study, as did a range of Local Authority contacts and Connexions personnel¹. While every good practice example in central London could not fit into this report, the effective practice factors and their constituent elements are comprehensive. We have included practice examples for each key factor though the scope of the report has not allowed us to provide evidence in relation to each identified element. The report is, in part, based upon a series of interviews conducted with key personnel in Central London Connexions and London colleges by an independent researcher. It also draws upon national guidance and project evaluations from around the UK which have been drawn together by the authors.

Exclusion from learning has major implications for young people and for their local authorities. The aim of this report is to stimulate further initiative and a strategy to ensure the inclusion of all young people in post 16 learning.

¹ A full list of acknowledgements appears at the end of the report in section 7.

2. Policy Context

Being NEET is an enormous waste of a young person's potential. Spending time NEET is also a major predictor of later unemployment, poverty, criminal behaviour, and poor physical and mental health. It is costly to the individual and to wider society - in 2002 DFES (now DCSF) calculated the lifetime cost to society for each young person NEET to be approximately £100,000, not including the incidental costs to health, housing and social services that stem from exclusion. For these reasons, the vast majority of local areas have the NEET indicator within their Local Area Agreement and, despite the current economic downturn, the national target remains, to reduce the proportion of young people NEET by 2% by 2010. NEET reduction remains a government priority.

The DCSF asserts that the changing economic climate makes it even more important that young people have the opportunity to stay in learning in order to gain the skills they will need to enter the labour market. While there has been a significant fall in job opportunities for young people between March 08 and March 09, this has been matched by a significant increase in the proportion of young people wanting to participate in education and training. This has meant that NEET levels nationally have remained stable.

The *National NEET Strategy*² outlines 5 key themes:

- Preventing young people from becoming NEET.
- Careful tracking.
- Personalised guidance and support.
- Provision of a full range of courses to meet demand.
- A new emphasis on rights and responsibilities.

The fourth theme of the strategy sets out the need for more flexible programmes to be introduced with different entry points throughout the year. This is key to enabling swift re-engagement of young people who do not start a course in September or who drop-out of provision. Flexible programmes are seen as crucial for driving down the NEET numbers and raising participation and attainment. The DCSF has published further guidance - the NEET Toolkit³ stresses the need for **flexible learning** opportunities to meet demand and subsequent guidance has been published clarifying what was meant by flexible provision and identifying some possible approaches⁴.

While the achievement levels of young people who are NEET cover a wide spectrum, it is still the case that approximately 60% of young people NEET have not yet achieved levels 1 or 2. It is increasingly being recognised that within the 14 -19 reforms, the development of the Foundation Learning Tier (FLT) will play an important role in NEET reduction. FLT will be fully implemented by 2010 and the Entry to Employment (E2E) programme will sit within it. The aim of FLT is to improve the skills of learners working below level 2, aged 14 and over, through developing high-quality credit-based qualifications at Entry level and level 1. Personalised learning programmes based on supported progression pathways will increase learner participation, achievement and progression.

² *Reducing the number of young people not in education, employment or training (NEET) – The strategy*, DCSF, 2008, available at <http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/14-19/neet>

³ *NEET Toolkit - Reducing the proportion of young people not in education, employment or training (NEET)*, DCSF, May 2008 available at <http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/14-19/neet>

⁴ *Using flexible provision to meet the needs of young people not in education, employment or training*, DCSF, 2008, available at <http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/14-19/neet>

More widely, it needs to be recognised that the landscape regarding post-16 provision is set to undergo some of the most radical reforms in a generation. 'The £7bn transfer of funding from the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) to local authorities in 2010 is the biggest single set of challenges that Local Authorities have faced for 30 years' (John Freeman, Director of the React Programme). The ***Machinery of Government*** changes set out in June 2007 will see Local Authorities take responsibility for commissioning learning for 16 to 19 year olds and sets the scene for ***raising the participation age*** in education or training to 18 by 2015. The ***new role of the LA*** from April 2010 will be to 'discharge their responsibilities to provide a place for learning for every young person through strategic commissioning'. Local Authorities will have to analyse demand and commission the right provision. Contestability in the education and children's services markets is a key objective. With the dissolution of the LSC, the key function of budgetary control will be transferred to the newly created ***Young People's Learning Agency*** (YPLA). The YPLA will also manage the devolution of power to Local Authorities that have formed sub regional partnerships. Locally, 14 to 19 partnerships are already grappling with this change agenda.

For each Local Authority, one primary objective of all these reforms is that smarter more strategic and coherent commissioning of provision will lead to a reduction in NEET levels, increased participation from 14 to 19, increased numbers of young people with level 2 and level 3 at 19, and the consequent impact on adult skills levels and economic vibrancy. The aim now is to ensure that by 2013 when participation is raised to 17 years old, there will be a system in place which engages **all** young people in learning and work.

3. Findings

3.1 The flexible provision model:

By drawing together national guidance⁵ and local examples of what works in engaging young people who have been NEET, it has been possible to identify the key effective practice factors for designing and developing flexible provision. This can be expressed most simply in the diagram below:



It is important to emphasise that this study found all of the key factors to be essential for the development of effective learning provision for young people who have been or are considered at risk of becoming NEET. The factors are deliberately modelled non-hierarchically.

3.2 Key factors grid:

Drawing on lessons from practice, research and the established guidance, this study has clarified and specified the elements of the key factors for effective practice. The study has drawn on specific examples from ‘real life’ against each key factor.

To display this information in as much detail and as clearly as possible it is captured in the grid that follows.

This effective practice grid can be adapted for use in planning provision to assess its potential to engage, sustain and progress young people who have been NEET or are at risk of becoming NEET.

⁵ Cited in section 6 of this report.

Key factors for effective college provision pre level 2 for young people (yp) who are not in education, employment or training (NEET)

Key factors	Effective practice examples
<p>1. Partnership</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engagement in a coherent local strategy to reduce NEET levels. • A strategic multi-agency approach, to add value to funding models. • Clear customer focus and involvement in design and delivery – especially by employers and service users (crucially those previously NEET & priority learners). • Strong cross-sector operational partnerships providing effective recruitment, learner support, enriched curriculum and progression routes. • A mutually supportive relationship with other agencies – leading to secondments, joint staff training, coordinated working, co-funding of the workforce. 	<p>1.1 Connexions and City of Westminster College's jointly devised Aspire Project delivers a borough-wide, multi-agency programme of skills development and support for hard to reach young people. Partner organisations include Positive Activities for Young People, YOT and Westminster's Accommodation Leaving Care Team, and 40 of their representatives have attended a training programme to increase their understanding of CWC's E2E provision. For yp NEET the college provides vocational taster programmes leading to E2E, and helps to train staff from partner organisations in motivational dialogue. Connexions and college staff work together on recruitment, materials production and development of a student mentoring model.</p> <p>1.2 Close strategic and operational partnership between Connexions and Southwark College is a defining characteristic of the college's "Foundation to Success" programme of accredited vocational options for yp NEET. In addition to providing referrals and contributing to the marketing, recruitment and induction process, Connexions has attached 2 full time PAs to the programme, who attend course team meetings and monthly strategic reviews and develop community links. There is also a CLC funded enrichment coordinator attached to the programme to organise a range of enrichment experiences available to participants via Connexions' Activity Agreement Programme for yp NEET: - on Wednesdays learners can opt into accredited activities or work-experience placements taking place as part of the AAP. This aims to boost learning hours to a full-time level to trigger funding and EMA, and means that learners' individual interests are catered for more widely. Prospects provide a PA to organise exit strategies to assist learners in choosing the most appropriate outcomes.</p> <p>1.3 Central London Connexions Activity Agreement Pilot for young people NEET is vital in bridging the gap between being NEET and becoming ready to succeed on E2E or a college course at the appropriate level. Its effectiveness relies heavily on the establishment of a wide range of partners. The CLC team of 17 PAs, each working within the PA team in their borough, manages a personalised programme of engagement and skill development for a caseload of yp NEET recruited through various organisations working with vulnerable young people (e.g. youth services, YOS, social services, Job Centre Plus, schools and colleges). Active links are essential for marketing the programme, referrals, the development of tailored activities, and for placing young people into education, training or work. Protocols for the conduct of partnerships are in place, an off-site programme of accredited learning provides a rich menu of centrally-managed courses, and local events/workshops are held to improve partner communication and mutual understanding.</p>

Key factors	Effective practice examples
<p>2. Management & organisation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Commitment from all partners at a senior level to flexible provision and NEET engagement. • High standards in leadership and management to manage complex courses, students and partnerships. • Planning for NEET provision is made in advance in the college programme plan and receives mainstream funding. • Good provision of resources & sharing of resources across partnerships. • A robust quality improvement and quality assurance programme. • Reliable management information used effectively. • Workforce development enabling staff to demonstrate appropriate knowledge, skills and experience – especially with priority learners – and engage in continuous professional development (CPD). • Commitment by staff to working effectively and flexibly with learners who have been NEET or are at risk of disengagement. 	<p>2.1 Lambeth College's engagement provision was introduced in 2006 as an important strand of the college's strategic objectives. The college runs Skills Challenge (for 108 yp in 2008/09) - a full-time rolling programme with flexible start dates in September, January and April - affording progression to a wide range of flexible entry vocational courses at Entry and Level 1. In addition there is a Drop-in Centre open all week and all year, which provides initial assessment, guidance and basic skills support for young people not enrolled at the college. The Centre serves as a first port of call into the college in an informal, welcoming environment. Young people can attend for any 4 days per week. The college also runs each term 4 x13-week Prince's Trust programmes for 16-24 year olds. Fed by the Drop-In Centre, there are flexible entry arrangements onto mainstream fully-funded courses requiring a high level of commitment and compliance amongst staff across the college. NEET provision comes under the Head of Student Access, and is subject to the college's systemic quality assurance processes and performance monitoring. Performance data for the 2009 Spring Term intake of 110 students on the Skills Challenge and Prince's Trust programmes show a 75% success rate (achievements over starters).</p> <p>2.2 Lewisham College takes in 2200 16-18 year olds mainly at levels Entry, 1 & 2, most of whom are considered to be at risk of dropping out. Provision for yp NEET is key to the college's overall strategic commitment to the successful progression of disengaged young people. The college has invested in a college-wide, 4-year rolling programme of staff development focused on personalised learning. There is a strong emphasis on pedagogy and support designed to help students to develop a 'sense of consequence' and 'of contribution' enabling them to achieve 'learning-readiness and progression-readiness'. The college is regarded by the LA as a key contributor to its NEET reduction strategy, both through preventive intervention at key stage 4 (700 'at risk' 14-16 pupils attend courses at the college) and through the engagement of yp NEET for whom there is a roll on/roll off E2E programme with an intake of 160. An additional ESF funded course for the hardest to reach yp NEET is devised and delivered in collaboration with Connexions. Progression from E2E onto the college's wide range of vocational courses is facilitated around the year, but there is an institution-wide 'structured transition' process scheduled in February. A progression rate of 78% was achieved in 2007/08, and this remains the target for the current year. The college has adapted its organisational and management structures to deliver high quality engagement provision and support more effectively. There is a 'Junior Academy' managed and staffed to meet the needs of the 14 -16 cohort; whilst the 16 -19 yp NEET are attached to a 'Skills Academy'. Both units collaborate closely, and jointly constitute a critical mass of teaching and support expertise in the field of engagement. All programmes are subject to the college's robust course review and self-assessment system.</p>

Key factors	Effective practice examples
<p>2. Management & organisation (continued)</p>	<p>2.3 South Thames College has January starts scheduled into the college's annual funding plan, which allows for identification of staff time, advance preparation and up-front room bookings. Appropriate programmes are planned in advance, most at level 1 but with entry and level 2 provision available. The college recognizes that working with disengaged young people can be pedagogically challenging and has ensured that a range of CPD activities is open to staff to develop appropriate skills. Young people NEET are expected to have high levels of individual need so their support is planned at the beginning of the year and therefore is in place for when they arrive.</p>
<p>3. Outreach, marketing and recruitment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Established effective relationships with the widest range of referral agencies. • Timely & up to date information provided to referral agencies. • High quality marketing material developed in consultation with service users. • Direct marketing to young people NEET (and their parents/carers) both formally and informally. • Promotion activity at a range of community venues. • Innovative methods based upon good market intelligence – especially in relation to hard to reach groups. • Clear and straightforward recruitment processes leading swiftly into induction. • Gaps between recruitment and induction filled with engagement programmes. 	<p>3.1 As part of the Aspire Project, City of Westminster College and Connexions jointly produced printed materials giving information about CWC's pre level 2 provision. The design and name of the programme were developed with E2E learners to ensure that all materials were yp friendly and attractive to potential learners from different cultures, and the contents were intended to be useful to key staff in contact with targets groups in local communities. The college has also worked with Connexions and other partners in the development of a mentoring model which enables current student mentors to talk with potential learners about the college's provision and provide peer motivation. Connexions has developed and delivered training programmes for PAs to increase their understanding of CWC's re-engagement provision. An IT-rich learning centre specifically for teenage parents at the Cosway Centre has been set up by Connexions in conjunction with the college - thus offering a one stop shop for advice and guidance and learning provided with childcare facilities as a way of encouraging participation. CWC has produced an essential skills and work skills development programme to be delivered at the Centre.</p> <p>3.2 Lambeth College has to date recruited 269 young people to its full range of personalised programmes for yp NEET (a 50% increase over the 2007/08 level.) Referrals come via Connexions, but also in response to the college's own marketing and publicity campaign which emphasises the personalised nature of student programmes. The college has appointed dedicated Skills Coaches who, in addition to their support role, leaflet housing estates, and visit local burger bars, internet cafes, parks and shopping centres. The college's Drop-in Centre also brings in large numbers of disengaged 16-19 year olds, (approx 25-30 attend each day). The college has developed a system for contacting young people who apply for courses in November, but don't turn up, in order to recruit them for January starts. It also ensures that engagement provision is available at each of its 3 sites across the Borough, in order to make it locally accessible to young people wary of travelling outside their familiar environment.</p>

Key factors	Effective practice examples
<p>3. Outreach, marketing and recruitment (continued)</p>	<p>3.3 Lewisham College's NEET provision is marketed through a combination of open evenings, taster events, the college website, links with schools, and college representation at careers events and events for yp NEET organized by Connexions and youth services. Publicity materials are distributed to youth clubs, social centres, doctor's surgeries and libraries etc. Recruitment is through initial assessment (1 to 1) leading to an immediate decision, with learners able to begin straight away. An ongoing programme of induction follows. Similarly, South Thames College's NEET provision is marketed through the college website, open evenings, taster events, links with schools and Connexions as well as an advertising campaign in the local press.</p>
<p>4. Assessment and review</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assessments built upon those previously undertaken – sharing of information across agencies avoiding duplication. • Assessment <u>prior</u> to the design and delivery of individual learning programmes. • Assessment identifying strengths and weaknesses, aspirations, learner's starting point and any barriers to learning & achievement. • Assessment leading to an appropriate mix of personal social development, functional and subject/vocational content using a range of diagnostic tools. • Ongoing review following initial assessment at regular intervals. • More specialised diagnostic testing used as appropriate – e.g. dyslexia, hearing or visual. • Feedback from assessments & reviews to learners. 	<p>4.1 City and Islington College's roll on/roll off, "Step Forward" programme (2006-2008), is targeted at the borough's hardest to reach yp NEET, some with manifold and complex problems. Its primary objective is to provide disengaged young people with a "structured space" in which - through individualised learning and enrichment programmes, and teamwork focused on creative projects – the learners undergo self-development and re-introduction to the disciplines of the classroom. The students attend for 3 days each week – 2 days on group activity, one day working on individual programmes. Initial assessment draws on information received from Connexions and consists of tests which look at reading, writing and numeracy skills. Applicants with physical or mental health needs are assessed with the support of specialist staff at the college. Ongoing review and setting targets takes place through weekly 1 to 1 tutorials and regular individual sessions with an adviser working with learners on their career progression portfolios. All the course assessment processes are geared to the re-engagement of young people. In practice this means that the specially devised skills assessments are individually facilitated by the literacy/numeracy tutor. The assessment materials are designed to be relevant and interesting and there is individual feedback focusing on positive achievements with clear indications of how the individual students might move forward. Similarly, risk assessments are conducted with emphasis on helping the project to identify individual support needs.</p> <p>4.2 At Lewisham College, the initial assessment starts with the recruitment interview, picking up previous successes and building on details provided by other agencies. Connexions makes referrals on a weekly basis and PAs and college staff jointly complete the Connexions assessment framework (APIR). Individual support needs are identified at initial assessment and referrals made immediately. Programmes are personalised to learner needs, including individualised timetables. Individual Learning Plans start at square one, and are developed and monitored at regular 1 to 1 tutorials. Progress reviews are held to which parents/guardians are invited. Students are involved in all reviews and receive written and agreed copies of outcomes.</p>

Key factors	Effective practice examples
<p>5. Personalised learning</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Flexible start provision – based on learner availability and motivation to engage rather than the needs of the institution. • Learning programmes designed in partnership with learners & according to abilities, interests, aspirations. • A wide range of choice available at the right level for the learners. • Learners feel ownership of their learning and are in control of their learning (through e-ipl). • Targets set in the learning plan both challenging and SMART. • Use of non-formal learning to engage yp NEET. 	<p>5.1 South Thames College has flexible entry into programmes throughout term 1 and the first half of term two that lead to full qualifications. There is an offer for yp NEET in each curriculum area and learners are offered a place on these programmes depending on their abilities and interests. Individual learning plans are owned by learners, and targets are set in conjunction with staff.</p> <p>5.2 At Lambeth College there are entry opportunities onto the “Skills Challenge” course in September, January and April. Fast tracking arrangements enable students to progress to a variety of mainstream vocational courses when they are ready. There are scheduled transition dates every four weeks between October-April for young people attending the Drop-In Centre to progress onto a mainstream course. The content of “Skills Challenge” is modelled on the Prince’s Trust programme, reflecting individual choices, interests and learning goals.</p> <p>5.3 Other colleges too recognise the efficacy of non-formal, personalised learning programmes, for engaging young people who are totally resistant to participation within an institutional framework. Lewisham and South Thames colleges also provide Princes Trust Programmes as feeders into E2E or appropriate accredited courses, and reference has already been made (1.2 above) to the innovative link between Southwark College’s Foundation to Success programme and CLC’s Activity Agreement Pilot (AAP). Structured around three elements – engagement activities, development activities and exit activities – the AAP is a 20 week roll on/roll off re-engagement programme which provides, within a framework of intensive PA support and expectations learner self-discipline, an attractive range of enrichment and accredited learning options tailored to individual needs and interests. The programme gives disaffected young people the opportunities to develop skills, attitudes, self-belief and motivation, and a growing sense of career direction, in order for them to be ready in themselves to successfully progress into EET. (Of the 512 who left the AAP in 2008/09, 50% progressed within 13 weeks into EET and a further 7% into structured personal development opportunities such as volunteering). Another effective model of largely non-formal provision which has the distinction of being almost entirely community-based, is the ESF funded “Keep it Moving” project driven and coordinated by Inspire (Hackney EBP) and delivered primarily through the borough’s four neighbourhood youth support teams, supported by a consortium of community, grass roots organisations including resident and tenants associations, youth clubs, education providers, local government and voluntary sector agencies. The emphasis throughout is on choice, flexibility, experiential learning, self-development, and individual pathways – operating outside an institutional framework but resulting in most of the participants opting to move into work or education. To facilitate the latter, a progression link has been established with Hackney Community College, feeding into their Back on Track vocational taster programme. There are many other such</p>

Key factors	Effective practice examples
<p>5. Personalised learning (continued)</p>	<p>personalised, experiential learning programmes available in London boroughs, offering scope for the scope for collaboration and cross fertilisation with FE colleges.</p> <p>5.4 Lewisham College’s E2E provision accommodates weekly starts throughout the year. Personalised timetables comprising learning and enrichment activities which reflect individual progression goals and skills development needs, are worked out between students and their tutors. It is an important part of the process of developing a “sense of consequence”, that students are encouraged to accept ownership of their programmes.</p>
<p>6. Support</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support requirements identified through the initial assessment. • Support improving access to provision and facilitating progression. • Support coordinated by a lead worker/agency for the whole programme, and by a named lead professional for each student. • Support provided by a whole range of agencies – including teachers, peers, mentors, Connexions advisors, parents/carers, youth offending teams, children’s services, health services. • Positive relationships built with mentors and tutors. • Strong cross sector partnerships developed in order to deliver coherent and effective support. • Information about Learner Support Funds provided. • Financial and housing advice services easily accessible. 	<p>6.1 City and Islington College’s “Step Forward” programme is characterised by a strong, cohesive team approach, led by a highly skilled practitioner who acts as course tutor. Learning and learner support is provided on a group and individual basis, and tracked through the ILP. Students work in groups of no more than 10 with two teachers. Each student has regular individual support and supervision according to his or her needs including performance review and target-setting. A numeracy and literacy specialist provides individual support and also is present during many group sessions. A dedicated “Young People’s Adviser” provides IAG and undertakes career portfolio-building work with individuals. A youth worker attached to the team generates and co-ordinates weekly enrichment activities, and carries out the associated risk assessments. The team calls on external agencies when specific support is required.</p> <p>6.2 A distinctive characteristic of Southwark College’s “Foundation to Success” programme is the involvement of Connexions PAs in the provision of on-course learner support. 2 PAs are attached full time to the programme, each responsible for a caseload of learners, providing learner support and IAG and helping with career development planning. The PAs work closely with tutors and link with the college’s central student support services. They also act as a useful conduit to external support agencies, as appropriate. They contribute to learner and course reviews, and play an important part in the induction process.</p> <p>6.3 Learner support is an intrinsic aspect of Lewisham College’s personalised engagement curriculum. An “entitlement support team” (ESTREAM) (10 posts) together with an additional 4 youth workers, work closely with tutors in the Skills Academy to provide guidance and counselling, and also enrichment programmes for the 14-18 year olds, including those on discrete provision for NEETs. There are 3 further posts whose remit is primarily disciplinary. They “stride the corridors” sorting out any behaviour problems, and defuse social or cultural tensions – helping to maintain a calm and purposeful atmosphere. The college has developed a comprehensive student mentoring scheme to support and motivate at risk learners.</p>

Key factors	Effective practice examples
<p>6. Support (continued)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Innovative strategies in place to identify and support priority learners & those at risk of becoming NEET. • A continuum of ongoing support along the learner journey – during re-engagement, through integration into mainstream and across future transitions. 	<p>6.4 At Lambeth College learning and learner support is provided by course tutors and by the college central student support service including mentors and careers advisors and Connexions PAs. There is also a dedicated team of 3 ‘skills coaches’ who link in with the tutors and course managers. They provide on-course support, but also have an important marketing and outreach role liaising with youth workers, youth clubs, borough and voluntary sector services, and Connexions. Sometimes a young person has to take a step back before moving forward. Where students on mainstream courses outside the personalised programme are at risk of being withdrawn, they can be referred to the personalised programme, spend some time there, and then are re-integrated onto mainstream courses course where possible.</p> <p>6.5 At South Thames College’s, through links with Connexions learners receive very good advice and guidance and initial assessment to ensure that the programme is right for them. The courses are full time over two terms with high levels of support from personal tutors within the tutorial system. Learners are closely monitored for attendance. Support is holistic across the college with the curriculum teams, learning support, enrichment and student services being involved. Learners have advice and help on all areas, from their studies to personal matters, including financial and health issues.</p>
<p>7. Progression & IAG</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Programmes support learners to progress to level 2 and beyond. • The curriculum offer includes vocational/subject based learning, functional skills and personal & social development skills. • Learning contextualised whenever possible – embedded into the vocational area. • Progression routes clear & meaningful destinations for learners. • Timely follow up to re-engage/re-route learners who drop out. 	<p>7.1 At South Thames College, yp NEET attend one to one interviews with their curriculum area and with a cross college specialist if needed. Learners are advised of the whole range of programmes open to them as they complete their first course. Progression routes are clearly signposted for learners and extra support is available for those making a jump between levels. For those who drop out there is follow-up from within the college and if that does not re-engage the learner, the follow-up process is passed to Connexions PAs.</p> <p>7.2 Progression to mainstream courses at the college is a central objective of the Step Forward Project at City and Islington College. Much of the activity of the project focuses on helping the young learners make good choices about their immediate and longer term plans. This aspect of the work is made explicit in individual work with the project’s Young People’s Advisor and associated Career Portfolio building work, but it is implicit and embedded in all aspects of the programme as a whole. Each progression route is negotiated with the young person over time and with specially organised individual referral interviews with curriculum managers across the college. Students are always accompanied to interviews by one of the project staff. ‘Step Forward’ ensures that each application is accompanied by detailed information including risk factors related to the student’s becoming NEET in the first place. This is in order to ensure future providers or tutors are aware of</p>

Key factors	Effective practice examples
<p>7. Progression & IAG (continued)</p>	<p>support needs. The college’s evaluation report (July 2008) of the Step Forward Project concludes that, “Measures of success for re-engagement have as yet no agreed definitions, but will need to include delayed benefits which might be realised only in the future. Future development for the project should include resources to support students at least through their first year of mainstream education. “</p> <p>7.3 At Lewisham College, progression to the college’s wide range of vocational courses is facilitated on an individual basis mid-year, with a scheduled progression phase instituted across the college in February. Programmes are designed with the learners to include vocational inputs which reflect their individual progression aims. The college has adopted a ‘guidance until no longer needed’ policy. Students who were formerly NEET but who have progressed to mainstream courses, have an open invitation to call on guidance from the tutor in the Skills Academy who supported them through their original re-engagement programme (and with whom a special bond of trust has been developed), whenever the need arises.</p>
<p>8. Celebrating Success</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All achievement recognised and learning accredited to the QCF. • The widest possible range of qualifications available. • Learning achievements recorded from the outset so learners can access recognition of achievement at any point. • Prior learning and achievement accredited. • Celebrate success via award ceremonies or events. • Ensuring quick wins for learners. • Other incentives (formal and informal) used to motivate & reward learners – e.g. prizes, in-house certificates, peer awards. 	<p>8.1 Young people on the Skills Challenge Programme at Lambeth College have a final presentation ceremony to which they invite along family and friends and other learners on the programme. Here they have the opportunity to showcase what they have done over the past 12 weeks. They are then presented with their certificates and a completion gift.</p> <p>8.2 At South Thames College learners are rewarded at a variety of levels. At curriculum level there are rewards for attendance which culminate in a trip to a theme park at the end of the year. The college also celebrates success at an annual Young Learners Event when learners from all curriculum areas are rewarded for their efforts and achievements.</p> <p>8.3 At Lewisham College a ‘Cause for Celebration’ event is held 3 times a year in the Skills Academy. Learners receive college certificates and a prize for various achievements such as improving attendance rates, helping others, being successful as a volunteer or study-buddy, overcoming a difficulty, or achieving high standards. When learners achieve a qualification they receive a personal congratulatory postcard from the Head of School and teaching staff.</p> <p>8.4 On City and Islington College’s Step Forward programme, recognition of student achievement through creative and active project work is seen as the key to building confidence. The emphasis is on teamwork and public celebration of achievement at award ceremonies and displays of work, for example the screening of the student produced film “One Night.” The film launch was attended by 60 people including students’ friends and families, members of the college, LBI and Connexions.</p>

Key factors	Effective practice examples
<p>8. Celebrating Success (continued)</p>	<p>The young film makers gave a Q and A after the screening during which they conveyed their sense of pride and achievement. It was important that the film was well made with input by professionals who could teach specialist film making skills, and the collaboration between Roving Eye Films and the Step Forward Project was highly successful. The associated documentary “The Making of One Night” is an equally important piece of film. It traces the process from story idea to the shoot, showing how the students managed to work together effectively and to work under the direction of the production team.</p>
<p>9. Monitoring and evaluation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Independent academically robust evaluation informing future programme developments & helping to create a business case. • Longitudinal tracking of learner progress. • High quality internal monitoring providing management information & leading to improvements. • 360 degree review from the widest possible circle of key partner agencies, employers, learners etc. • Regular service user feedback ensuring a learner-centred approach at all levels of programme development & delivery. 	<p>9.1. Programmes at South Thames College are reviewed each term with action plans updated constantly to monitor and improve quality. Learners are encouraged to contribute to the review at course and college level through the involvement with the delivery team and wide involvement through the Learner Voice and Learner Forums.</p> <p>9.2. City and Islington College’s Step Forward Project collects learner feedback on a weekly basis through the student forum conducted by the course tutor and attended by both staff and students. These sessions are minuted with action points. The forum proves effective at resolving student/project issues and providing a sounding board for students’ opinions to inform and shape course delivery, whilst at the same time helping them to build confidence and develop a sense of responsibility and ownership. The project has been the subject of a LA commissioned external evaluation along with all the Borough’s re-engagement programmes in 2006/07. The college’s internal evaluation reports are detailed and comprehensive, including data relating to recruitment, retention, achievement and progression, and identifying areas for improvement. The programme received LA funding for the period Jan 2007 - July 2008, and although the Project Team has since been redeployed, it is clear that the college is building on the models of successful practice developed in the Project in its current preparations for the introduction of FLT and a new E2E programme in September 2009.</p> <p>9.3. As part of its learner involvement strategy, Lewisham College is working with the Edge Learner Forum on the conduct of a college-wide, student-led review of provision, including programmes for students at risk. This initiative – called “Edge Instead” (i.e. instead of OFSTED!), provides a snapshot of how the institution is doing in the eyes of students and staff. 65 young people from across the college, including learners at risk of disengagement, have been trained by the Edge Learner Forum to undertake interviews, workshops and observations. 700 staff and students were reached through the review process and 15 lessons were observed. The four core topic areas for research were <i>Learning, Aspiration, Persistence and the Environment</i>.</p>

Key factors	Effective practice examples
<p>9. Monitoring and evaluation (continued)</p>	<p>In addition, the review focused on the following key areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ What does Lewisham College do to motivate students to stay in education and succeed? ▪ What does Lewisham College do which adversely affects student motivation to stay in education and succeed? ▪ What kind of support do students receive in order to succeed and what else might they need? ▪ What is the educational journey of students prior to starting at Lewisham College and how might this affect them? ▪ How does the environment of the college feel to students? ▪ What is the experience of a student stepping through the doors of the college to when they leave at the end of the day? ▪ What causes the differences in the success rates of different students? <p>The actual review took place in May 2009 and the college is currently in the process of analysing the results and will share the data with all the student reviewers in June, in order for them to conclude the key themes arising from their findings. They will also be required to recommend solutions and actions to the Principal at a later date. Students involved in the process will receive an 'Edge Instead' certificate and a personal reference from the Principal. They will also be encouraged to take an active part in the national Edge Learner Forum. The college's Director of Quality and Improvement states that "for many (students), the most significant outcome has been the personal self worth, confidence and self esteem they have gained from being involved in a radically empowering process whereby their contribution and views are greatly valued."</p>

4. Conclusions – pointing the way

It has to be recognised that re-engaging and successfully progressing vulnerable young people who are disaffected with education, is not easy. While all factors in the model need to be addressed in planning and delivering provision, we have identified four as being found by some colleges to be particularly challenging and difficult to get right. These are:

1. Partnership.
2. Management and organisation (including funding models).
3. Personalised learning.
4. Progression and Information, Advice and Guidance.

4.1 Partnership

It is clear that the challenges set by the NEET Public Service Agreement (PSA) target and Reducing the Participation Age (RPA) require **solutions that are developed and delivered in partnerships**. The DCSF⁶ stresses the important roles to be played by a whole range of agencies including Local Authorities, Children's Trusts, 14 -19 Partnerships, Connexions providers, schools, post-16 learning providers and the LSC. Success against NEET targets will depend to a large extent upon establishing and nurturing effective partnerships and developing a **coherent local strategy for flexible entry** within which partnerships can operate effectively. A strategic multi-agency approach will best exploit funding opportunities. A strong cross-sector operational partnership allows for a seamless learner journey – recruitment, personalised formal and non-formal learning, holistic support for learners, enrichments to the curriculum and progression routes. A mutually supportive relationship between agencies can lead to opportunities for shared workforce development, secondments or even for co-funded posts. Partnerships also need to retain a clear **customer focus** – taking account the needs of the young people themselves and their future employers.

Establishing and maintaining effective partnerships with relevant organisations continues to be a real challenge for some colleges. The **quality of partnership working** impacts at both the operational level (e.g. creating effective referral routes, providing coherent support services, identifying and re-engaging potential drop-outs, feeding into progression routes) and the strategic. This study identified plenty of evidence of effective operational partnerships in London, but also some specific weaknesses:

- Even where partnerships are well established some lack dynamism, i.e. they are purely functional rather than also being creative drivers of new ideas and approaches to NEET reduction and raising attainment.
- Differences in organisational cultures tend to be blamed for things going wrong, but are not always addressed.
- Partners are not all fully engaged at all stages of planning, decision making and delivery.
- There is a lack of joint evaluation (or indeed any evaluation) of how effectively the partnership works.
- Insufficient priority and time is given to maintaining and developing the partnership often because the partnership is seen as being peripheral to an organisation's *raison d'être*.

⁶ NEET Toolkit - Reducing the proportion of young people not in education, employment or training (NEET), DCSF, May 2008 available at <http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/14-19/neet>

It is crucial that partnerships do not merely exist, but are seen to **operate effectively**. While the responsibility lies with individual members, there is also a key strategic role for Local Authorities forming coherent sub regional partnerships and ensuring the mechanisms are in place to commission learning for 16 -19 year olds. Local Authorities will need to ensure they can **know and demonstrate** that their partnership arrangements are working effectively in the interests of young learners.

4.2 Management and Organisation (including funding models)

This research found that **senior level strategic commitment** and “**getting the culture right**” within a college are felt by practitioners to be crucial to securing and maintaining the engagement and successful progression of vulnerable young people. Young people NEET need to feel that the college is there for them, and this requires **commitment, professional understanding and empathy** as well as a sense of structure, at all levels throughout the organisation. It calls for high levels of leadership and planning, not least because of the high level of commitment demanded of staff in order for them to work effectively and flexibly with at risk learners. We have found good examples of organisation development and effective management, but also some causes for concern:

- Is the culture of the whole organisation attuned to engagement of young people who are NEET?
- Is there rigorous quality monitoring and management and is the provision good enough?
- Have lecturers been given adequate opportunity to develop their skills in engaging young people at risk?
- Are arrangements in place to support staff to adjust flexibly to the students’ levels of neediness and fragile sense of purpose?
- Is engagement and progression of young people who are NEET seen as core business across the college?
- Have arrangements been put in place to offer flexible entry opportunities around the year?

One other challenging organisational factor is **funding**. This needs to be **secured for the whole learner journey**, and to be **long-term** and **mainstream** if provision is to be planned and delivered effectively. Too much support and provision for NEET young people is still subject to short-term funding streams, with the effect that many of the essentials are treated as add-ons rather than core elements of a coherent programme. With the implementation of the Foundation Learning Tier (FLT) and progression pathways there is a requirement for colleges to provide entry level and level 1 personalised learning programmes from within their current mainstream funding allocation. There are, however, concerns that the pre-existing funding allocations will not adequately support the FLT and this will have to be addressed if the resourcing proves not to be adequate to support the engagement of young people who have been NEET especially for those who because of their complex needs require intensive support. There may therefore be a continuing need to draw on current business models employed by colleges whereby supplementary income is applied either from within the college (e.g. ‘additional needs’ funding) or from partner organisations. From April 2010 the Local Authorities (working in sub regional or regional partnerships) will have the responsibility to provide a place for learning for every young person through strategic **commissioning of provision**. These partnerships will have budgetary responsibility and they will inevitably need to bring together different funding streams in order to commission provision fit for purpose for young people who are NEET.

4.3 Personalised Learning

Development of personalised learning has implications at both at the organisational and pedagogical levels.

1. At the **organisational** level, there is the need for **flexible, responsive provision** whereby young people can access mainstream learning programmes at different entry points during the year – either via multiple start dates throughout the academic year or ‘roll on-roll off’ provision.
2. **Pedagogically**, learning programmes need to be designed and delivered according to **the individual interests, abilities and aspirations** of young people and their need for self-development space.

There is also a growing recognition of the role that **non-formal learning** can play in helping to re-engage young people who are NEET or who are at risk of dropping-out. While this is often deployed as an initial engagement tool and a stepping stone into the more formal FE setting, there are also examples of its being used through enrichment activities and work experience. Sometimes non-formal learning is accessed through partner organisations such as Connexions or voluntary and community sector groups and this can boost the learning hours provided by the college and provide input responsive to the learners’ individual interests or needs.

This study found strong examples of all of the key elements of personalised learning, however, the picture was not consistent – there were examples of good practice but funding restrictions, institutional constraints and (in some cases) pedagogic rigidity, militated against the development of provision with fully flexible starts or truly personalised learning programmes.

It is clear that the development of the **Foundation Learning Tier (FLT)** is intended to support the delivery of personalised learning programmes based on progression pathways – enabling learners to progress at their own pace. One of the aims of the FLT is to increase learner participation, achievement and progression and it is increasingly being recognised that the development of the FLT will play an important role in facilitating engagement and progression continuity across the 14 -19 spectrum thereby reducing the numbers of young people who become NEET.

4.4 Progression and Information, Advice and Guidance

The goal of enabling learners to be **ready to progress** and then to actually develop their individual career plans and progression routes, is pivotal to the successful delivery of learning programmes for young people, including those for young people who have been NEET. High quality **careers work and Information Advice and Guidance (IAG)** are essential elements of developing progression-readiness, but so too are the **acquisition of knowledge and skills** including functional skills, and the **broadening of experience and raising of confidence through enrichment**. For disengaged young learners whose experience of education hitherto has been one of underachievement or failure it is especially important to help them come to believe that they are being taken seriously as people who have a future. In essence, the development of their “**progressionability**” should lie at the heart of their engagement with the programme from the very offset and should inform both implicitly and explicitly every aspect of the relationships they have with their peers and with the adults working with them. This research has found examples of provision which has been consciously developed around the **concept of progression-readiness** in its fullest and formative sense, but elsewhere there are some cases where progression is viewed purely in terms of the mechanics of making career choices and route plans regardless of whether the young person is intrinsically ready to progress - which all too often can lead to failure and disengagement further up the line, causing the young person to become NEET again.

One major shortcoming in most of the colleges visited in the course of this study, is the absence of **longitudinal progression-tracking** and **continued support** for young people who were NEET but who had progressed from initial re-engagement programmes onto mainstream courses. This is the ultimate measure of how effectively they were prepared for progression in the first place, and also of whether or not the right kind of support has been provided to see them through their onward journey.

Progression also has a second inherent area of vulnerability – the **risks associated with transition** for young people. It is recognised that young people (particularly those with a history of being NEET) are at risk of dropping out of provision during the first few days and weeks. Colleges and their partner organisations need to **invest heavily in supporting transition into positive destinations**.

Progression-readiness in its fullest sense is all the more important given that progression into employment is vulnerable to the economic climate. There has been a significant reduction in job opportunities for young people over the last 12 months - the proportion of 16 -18 year olds in employment fell from 16.1% in March 2008 to 13.8% in March 2009. The economic downturn has also impacted upon the availability of apprenticeships, despite the government's drive to expand this route for young people. Despite these challenges, however, it is still important to retain a focus on ensuring the learning experience **improves the life chances** of the learner and that will include improving their chances of remaining engaged in education, employment or training. Progression opportunities therefore remain vulnerable to changes in the economy and providers will need to adapt provision to accommodate these, not least because the changes will have a knock on effect upon young people's individual aspirations and motivation.

5. Endnote...

While moving towards Zero NEET levels and Raising the Participation Age pose a real challenge, there is a growing body of evidence of 'what works' in engaging young people who are NEET and supporting them to participate in learning and progress successfully. The introduction of the Foundation Learning Tier (FLT) in particular provides a real opportunity for colleges to rethink how post-16 learning can be modelled and delivered in order to better engage young people and meet their individual interests, abilities and aspirations.

This study provides a model for effective flexible college provision pre level 2, which can be used to both enhance existing provision and to ensure that lessons learnt from current good practice inform planning for the implementation of the Foundation Learning Tier. It also highlights key factors for Local Authorities to consider when commissioning future 14 to 19 provision. This model is offered as a contribution towards the goal of achieving full participation and attainment.

6. Sources and useful publications

Reducing the number of young people not in education, employment or training (NEET) – The strategy, (2008) DCSF - available at <http://www.dcsf.go.uk/14-19/neet>

NEET Toolkit - Reducing the proportion of young people not in education, employment or training (NEET), (May 2008), DCSF.

Using Flexible provision to meet the needs of young people not in education, employment or training, (2008), DCSF.

Effective practice principles for designing and delivering the FLT 14-16 framework of learning, (2008), QCA.

Foundation Learning Tier: Interim Guidance, draft working version for 2009/10, (2009), LSC and QCA.

Providers Requirements for Progression Pathways, (August 2008), LSC.

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