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**Effective Pre-school, Primary and Secondary Education
(EPPSE 3 – 16+) Project**

Report on students who are not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET)

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Executive summary

This research on young people who are not in employment, education or training (NEET) is a sub-study of the Effective Pre-school, Primary and Secondary Education (EPPSE 1997-2014) programme of research. EPPSE is a longitudinal, mixed methods research study, funded by the Department for Education (DfE) that has followed the progress of 3000+ children from the age of 3 to 16 years. Details of the earlier phases of the study can be found at <http://eppe.ioe.ac.uk>.

A focus for EPPSE has been the influence of different phases of education (pre-school through to secondary school) on children's cognitive/academic and social-behavioural outcomes, as well as other important background influences such as gender, family characteristics and the home learning environment etc. The final phase of the study followed the participants to their post age 16 destinations (six months after they completed their Key Stage 4 GCSE or equivalent exams).

This research was commissioned to explore why some young people from the EPPSE sample became NEET 6 months after finishing compulsory education by examining some of the factors that might have contributed to this as well as the barriers and facilitators to these young people getting into education, employment or training.

Methodology

Qualitative, semi-structured telephone interviews were carried out with a sample of the 86 young people who indicated in their EPPSE 'Life After Year 11' questionnaire they were NEET six months after finishing compulsory schooling. In total 20 NEETs aged between 18 and 20 were interviewed about their experiences of taking their GCSEs, what they had been doing since leaving school and their hopes and plans for the future.

Prior to the interviews a range of background data were collated on each young person including information from the EPPSE quantitative data files, the 'Life After Year 11' questionnaire, GCSE results, relevant information concerning health, family or behaviour issues and anticipated plans post 16. This information was collated to produce a 'profile' for each participant and this helped to inform the development, structure and customisation of the interview schedule.

The NEET status of 13 of the 20 young people had changed over the period of time between their 'Life After Year 11' questionnaire and the interview taking place; this change in status provided an excellent opportunity to explore some of the issues related to entering EET.

The interviewed sample consists of 12 females and 8 males which closely represents the gender split of the wider NEET population but constituted an over-representation of females in comparison to the gender profile of the whole EPPSE cohort. The vast majority of the NEETs interviewed (85%) came from families with a White UK background, a similar percentage to that found in the wider EPPSE NEET population of 86 (79%) but slightly higher than in the whole EPPSE cohort (72.4%)

Researchers transcribed the interviews which lasted around 25 minutes and anonymised the data with pseudonyms mostly chosen by the young people themselves. The transcripts were imported to NVIVO for coding and analysis. Analysis combined a bottom up and top down approach, bottom up to code and analyse the perceptions of young people as to why they had been NEET, their views of school and undertaking their GCSEs and their plans for the future, and top down using the established literature on NEETs and the related risk and protective factors (Siraj and Mayo 2014).

Findings

1 Background characteristics of NEETs

The study highlights a number of background characteristics associated with a risk of becoming NEET. Previous research has identified social class as a major factor in those who become NEET with the participation of young people over the age of 16 in education and training declining markedly with social class position (Thompson, 2009). 65% of the NEETs interviewed for this research had an SES at pre-school in the lower half of the SES scale (4-7). Only 5% of interviewed NEETs were in the professional or non-manual SES groups compared with 33.4% of the whole EPPSE cohort. There was a general trend of low qualifications amongst the parents of NEET young people, only 10% of the mothers and fathers of these young people had educational qualifications of 18 Academic or higher compared with approximately a quarter of the EPPSE cohort. A higher percentage of interviewed NEETs were in the lowest early years Home Learning Environment (HLE) group (40%) than was the case amongst the full EPPSE cohort (30.7%).

Multiple risk factors were often at play in the lives of NEET young people many of which were present from their early years or emerged during the course of compulsory schooling. In many cases these had a hugely detrimental impact upon educational achievement and the pathways and opportunities available to young people post 16.

2 Educational risk factors

There were a number of educational risk factors contributing to young people's NEET status but the most significant was that of low educational attainment at GCSE. Only three of the 20 interviewees (15%) achieved 5 or more GCSEs grades A*-C, with number of young people that had managed to gain 5 GCSEs A*-C including the key subjects of maths and English even lower with only 2 young people (10%) getting these grades. Poor attainment significantly restricted the options available to these young people post 16 and was a major barrier to trying to get into further education, training or employment. Reasons cited by young people for low attainment included their own lack of motivation, poor health (physical and mental) and having Special Educational Needs. This highlights the importance of early identification of these risk factors is and the important role of schools in fomenting and supporting the educational achievement of those at risk. This might take the form of targeted support for pupils who may struggle to get GCSE passes in Maths and English or the use of more innovative teaching methods for young people who are struggling to engage with education or who have special educational needs.

3 Personal risk factors

A range of personal risk factors were associated with young people's NEET status including a lack of direction or aspirations after finishing school, health problems, caring responsibilities, difficult family circumstances such as being in Local Authority care or experiencing a breakdown in relationship with parents. The influence of physical and particularly mental health problems on NEET status cannot be overstated; the need for quicker access to professional support services was evident in the case of several young people. Greater flexibility in post 16 educational options particularly for those with physical or mental health difficulties or significant special educational needs would be hugely beneficial for some e.g. having the option to take just one or two 'A levels' at a time or being allowed to complete courses over a longer period of time

4 Structural risk factors

The young people who were interviewed were all keen to engage in some form of education, training or employment but aside from educational and personal difficulties there were a range of external, structural barriers that made resolving their NEET status very difficult and constrained the level of agency that they had been able to exert. This tension between structure and agency as described in the work of Bourdieu was very evident in the experiences of the NEET young people. Structural risk factors included the difficult labour market conditions, a lack of training and

apprenticeship opportunities, being caught in the benefits trap where young people were better off on welfare support than they would be in EET, access and transport especially for those living in more rural areas and the imposition of course fees for those aged 18 and over.

5 Characteristics of those who were still NEET at time of interview

Seven young people were still NEET at the point at which they were interviewed. Two of these had been NEET throughout the whole period of time since leaving school, a further two had spent a very short period of time in education on leaving school but due to health problems had left education and had been NEET since that time. The remaining three had mixed pathways of short periods of time in education, training or employment interspersed with periods of inactivity. Several of the above risk factors had contributed to these young people's continuing NEET status, including poor GCSE grades with only one of the seven gaining 5 A-C grades at GCSE, being in Local Authority care, long term physical health problems, long term mental health problems and a lack of any plans or aspirations about what they wanted to do after finishing school.

6 'Dropping out' and delay in post 16 pathways

There was a high incidence amongst NEETs of not knowing what they wanted to do after leaving compulsory schooling that often persisted for some considerable time. This resulted in non-linear, 'yo-yo' transitions, where young people started and stopping in either education or various forms of work. Particularly in relation to education, there often resulted in young people trying out courses with little overall direction or idea of what they might do afterwards. Linked to this, many NEET young people found making the transition from compulsory schooling to further education extremely difficult leading to a high rate drop-out rate from courses. Nine of the 20 young people had started a post 16 course but had dropped out because they didn't enjoy it, it wasn't what they expected or because they struggled to make the transition to further education

Some young people reported that they had not been ready at age 16 to make key decisions in relation to post compulsory education or their future careers. Trying to re-engage with education later on was sometimes problematic for these young people because once they were over 18 they had to pay fees for their education which most could not afford to do. It could be suggested that more needs to be done in the way of preparing young people in the final years at school for making the transition to college and in providing greater financial support for young people over the age of 18 who want to return to education.

7 Importance of information and advice on options and pathways post 16

Many of the NEET young people felt that there was a need for much better information and advice on the range of options available, not just in education but in relation to quality vocational qualifications, apprenticeships and training opportunities and the types of employment that this would qualify them for. It was felt that this advice should be available to young people much earlier on in their compulsory education, before they have to make their Key Stage 4 subject choices so that young people have the information they need to make clearer and more informed choices about their future pathways through education, training and employment.

8 The variable quality of post 16 courses

A key issue emerging from the interviews was that of the variable and often poor quality of further education courses and qualifications such as entry level vocational skills courses and short 'multi-skills' courses. The generally poor GCSE grades of this group of young people restricted the types of courses and institutions that they could get into with many finding they could only access relatively low level courses at what some considered to be less favourable educational establishments. In most cases these courses did very little to improve their employability and resulted in a return to NEET status or a cycle of taking up one short, low level course after another. It is apparent that there is a need for greater quality control of vocational courses and training to ensure that what is offered is of high quality and is recognised by employers.

9 Lack of long term employment and apprenticeship or training opportunities

Those young people for whom continuing on an academic pathway post 16 was not their preferred choice often reported enormous problems in trying to access training or apprenticeships or securing long term employment. Some of these young people were critical of services such as Jobcentres however such organisations face huge difficulties in identifying employment or training routes for young people, whose lack of qualifications and other personal issues such as health problems make it very hard to place them at a time of high youth unemployment. These difficulties are compounded by a context of significant cuts to Connexions services, Jobcentre budgets and the removal of the EMA. More routes into employment or training for those young people who are motivated to work but whose low educational

qualifications prevent access to the job market is needed as well as a greater range and availability of non-academic post 16 options for young people.

10 Personal motivation and determination in resolving NEET status

A very important protective factor that helped some back into education, employment or training was that of young people being proactive and determined despite the difficult circumstances they faced. Examples of this include young people walking the streets handing out CVs, signing up with a number of job agencies, carrying out voluntary work to boost their chances of employment and spending large amounts of time searching for courses or jobs online. Several NEET young people had found employment or training opportunities through their own perseverance and ingenuity rather than via the JobCentre or agencies.

11 Social capital facilitating entry to EET

Young people's social capital in the form of family, friends and other networks was exceptionally important in helping them out of their inactivity and into EET. Support and encouragement from family and teachers was important in helping to foster a more positive disposition towards education and to the possibility of returning to it in the future. Parents paying for course fees enabled some young people to return to education and there were examples of families supporting young people financially during extended periods of unemployment while they were studying or training. A number of young people received useful advice on educational options from those known to them which helped to galvanise their thinking and direct them into action whilst many others were able to find employment or access training opportunities through their friends, family members or teachers. In several cases, young people who had been NEET for more extended periods of time were those who had the least social capital.

Introduction

This study of young people who are not in employment, education or training (NEET) is a sub-study of the Effective Pre-school, Primary and Secondary Education (EPPSE 1997-2014) programme of research. EPPSE is a longitudinal study, funded by the Department for Education (DfE) that explores the influence of different phases of education (pre-school through to secondary school) on children's cognitive/academic and social-behavioural outcomes, as well as other important background influences (e.g. gender, family characteristics, the home learning environment etc.). Approximately 3,000 children have been part of the EPPSE research between the ages of 3/5 (when they joined pre-school/reception class) till they completed their compulsory schooling (age 16). The final phase of the study followed the participants to their post age 16 destinations (six months after they completed their Key Stage 4 GCSE or equivalent exams). EPPSE has, for almost 20 years, contributed to the debate about the policies and practices that make a difference to the lives of young children and help them become successful life-long learners. For more details on the EPPSE study see

Aims of the NEET study

The aim of the NEET study is to extend our understanding of why some young people from the EPPSE sample became NEET 6 months after compulsory education by examining some of the factors that might have contributed to this. By studying the personal and educational experiences of the NEET young people (hereafter called NEETs) the key risk factors associated with becoming NEET are explored, as well as the barriers and facilitators to young people getting into education, employment or training (hereafter called EETs).

The research questions

The overall question addressed by the NEET study is why some young people became NEET after leaving compulsory education, focussing on the following specific research questions:

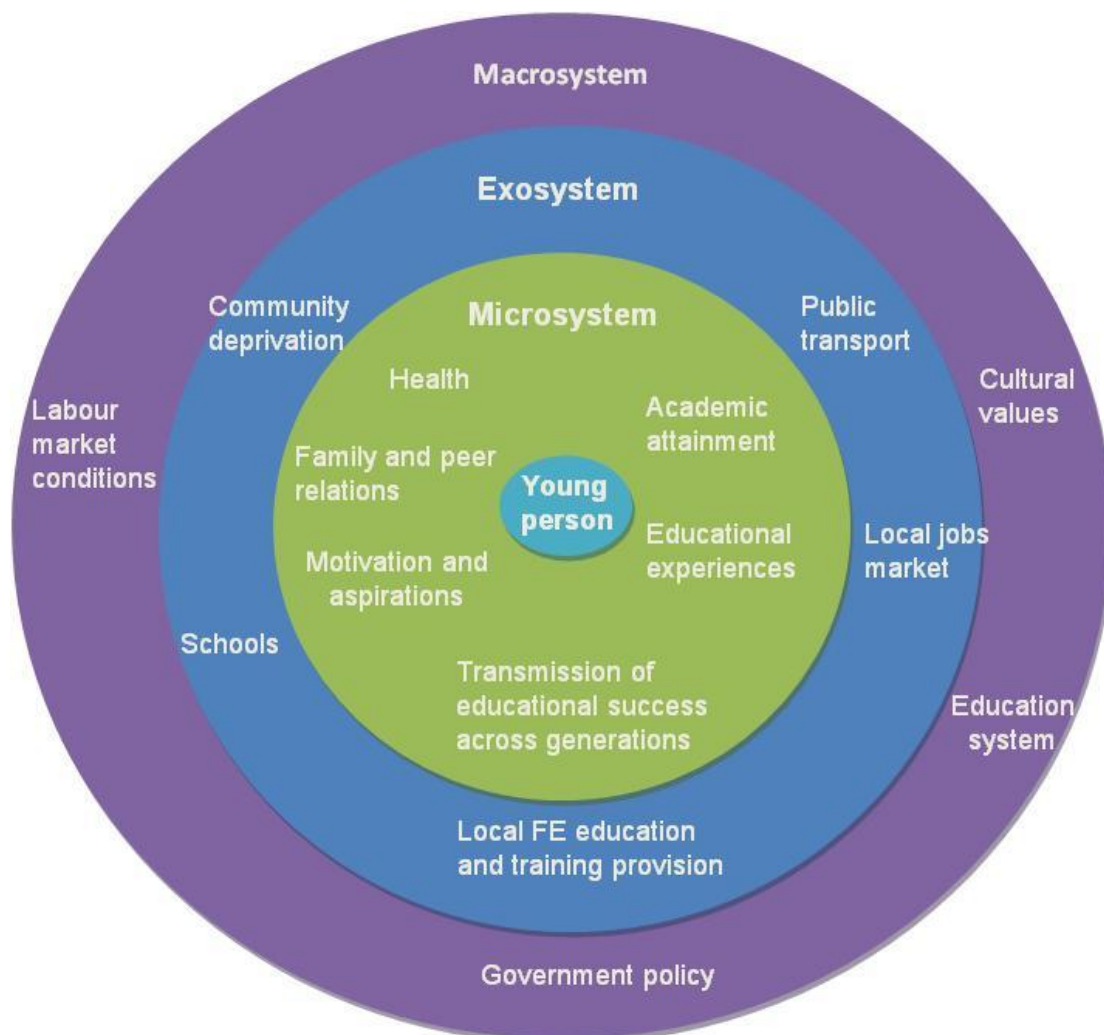
- What are the risk factors for these young people becoming NEET?
- In what ways might compulsory education, including the NEETs educational attainment have contributed to their NEET status?
- What are the post 16 pathways of the NEET young people? What forms of education, employment or training (if any) have they undertaken since leaving compulsory education?
- Who or what has influenced their pathways, choices and aspirations post 16?

- What are the barriers to these young people getting into education, training or employment?
- What are the facilitators for getting NEET young people into education, training or employment?

Theoretical background

This study draws on three theoretical models to provide a framework for understanding the processes at work in the lives and experiences of NEETs. Firstly, Bronfenbrenner’s ecological model of human development (Bronfenbrenner 1979, Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998) and its exploration of microsystems and how progressively more complex interaction processes impact upon developmental and life outcomes is a particularly helpful theoretical model for understanding the complexity of factors associated with NEETs. Figure 1 below shows the proximal to distal processes in the systems that are relevant to an understanding of why young people become NEET, adapted from Bronfenbrenner’s spheres of influence.

Figure 1: Processes influencing NEETs (Based on Bronfenbrenner 1979; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998)



The second theoretical model considered is Bourdieu's (1986) work on economic, cultural and social forms of capital. Bourdieu argues that the possession of these forms of capital, and their combination, defines a young person's place in the social topography and can contribute to their NEET status. Economic capital refers to wealth and financial assets such as that of a young person's parents, while cultural capital consists of educational qualifications and experiences and a young person's physical and mental dispositions. Social capital includes the network of people known to the young person and the ability they have to tap into opportunities and resources outside the immediate family.

Raffo and Reeves (2000) theorize about the role of social capital in the social exclusion of young people in the transition from school to work. Through qualitative research on marginalized British youth, they provided evidence of how limited or culturally inappropriate social resources limit the later-life chances of at-risk young people. They suggest a theoretical approach of 'individualised systems of social capital' that both support and constrain an individual's actions and outcomes and assert that young people's access to certain subject choices, careers advice, labour market opportunities and outcomes are constrained by gender, family background, income and ethnicity; young people's actions and choices are not completely open and free.

Thirdly the interplay of structure and agency is considered as this links Bronfenbrenner's model with the notion of social and other forms of capital. This is important because the level of agency that young people are able to exercise is also shaped by the political economy e.g. availability of work, opportunities to engage in education or training, employers requirements, economy and labour market patterns. In the case of many NEETs, access to social, cultural, educational and economic resources is often limited which reduces their ability to negotiate structures in ways that are advantageous to them.

The sample

A total of 86 young people who returned a 'Life After Year 11' questionnaire indicated they were NEET six months after compulsory schooling. This represents 4.9% of all those who responded to the 'Life After Year 11' questionnaire and 2.7% of the original EPPSE sample.

Difficulties were experienced in trying to engage this 'hard to reach' group. Taggart et al, (2014 forthcoming) identifies some of these difficulties in relation to the collection of data for the full EPPSE sample. Collecting research data, during this phase, was made difficult because of behaviours specifically associated with teenagers: their general disengagement in anything 'official' or outside of their immediate day-to-day culture, their lack of availability and erratic timekeeping. Similar difficulties were encountered when contacting the NEET group and gaining their consent to participate in additional data collection.

A total of 20 young people aged between 18 and 20 gave their consent to additional data collection and agreed to be interviewed between September and November 2013. These 20 respondents (the achieved/interviewed sample) had remained resident in the 5 target regions of England in which the original EPPSE sample was recruited. Semi structured in-depth telephone interviews were carried out covering the young people's experiences of taking their GCSEs, what they had been doing since leaving school and their hopes and plans for the future (see Appendix 2).

Methodology

Before the interviews a range of background data were collated on each young person including information from the EPPSE quantitative data files, the 'Life After Year 11' questionnaire, GCSE results, relevant information concerning health, family or behaviour issues and anticipated plans post 16. This information was collated to produce a 'profile' for each participant and this helped to inform the development, structure and customisation of the interview schedule. It should be noted that the NEET status of many of the NEET young people had changed over the period of time between their 'Life After Year 11' questionnaire and the interview taking place; in all 13 of the 20 were no longer NEET. This change in status provided an excellent opportunity to explore some of the issues related to entering EET.

Researchers transcribed the interviews (lasting around 25 mins.) and anonymised the data with pseudonyms mostly chosen by the young people themselves. Table 1 below provides an overview of the NEET participants using pseudonyms:

Table 1: NEET young people status at time of interview

Gender	Name	Age	Ethnic heritage	Activity at time of interview
Females	Laila	19	White UK	FT employment
	Natasha	18	White UK	NEET
	Annie	18	White UK	FT employment
	Shannon	18	White UK	NEET
	Sahla	20	Pakistani	FT employment
	Jackie	19	White UK	FT employment
	Jasmine	19	Mixed heritage	FT education & PT employment
	Marie	19	White UK	NEET
	Becky	19	White UK	FT education & PT employment
	Cathy	18	White UK	NEET
	Katie	18	White UK	FT employment & PT education
Bane*	18	White UK	FT education & PT employment	
Males	Crixus	20	White UK	FT education
	Michael	19	White UK	FT employment
	David	20	White UK	NEET
	Archie	19	White UK	FT employment

	Malik	19	Mixed heritage	NEET
	Harry	19	White UK	NEET
	Tim	19	White UK	FT apprenticeship
	Will	18	White UK	FT education

*Bane is female

The transcripts were imported to NVIVO for coding and analysis. Analysis combined a bottom up and top down approach, bottom up to code and analyse the perceptions of young people as to why they had been NEET, their views of school and undertaking their GCSEs and their plans for the future, and top down using the established literature on NEETs and the related risk and protective factors (Siraj and Mayo 2014).

Characteristics of the interviewed sample

Before undertaking any analyses of the achieved sample their background demographics (n=20) were compared to the full sample of NEETs (n = 86) to look at the representativeness of the smaller sample and to the wider EPPSE cohort.

Gender

The gender split of the young people who were interviewed was representative of that of the whole NEET group of 86 that responded to the 'Life After Year 11' questionnaire, 40% of those interviewed were male and 60% female (Appendix 1). There was a slight over representation of females amongst the interviewed sample in comparison to the gender profile of the whole EPPSE cohort. Whilst it should be noted that overall, there is a tendency for more young people who respond to the EPPSE surveys to be female, Labour Force Survey statistics for the 4th quarter of 2012 show a slightly higher percentage of NEET females than males in England; 16.1% of females aged 16-24 years were NEET compared with 13.8% of males aged 16-24 years.

Ethnicity

In both the whole NEET group and the interviewed sample there was an overwhelming predominance of White UK young people, 79% of all NEETs and 85% of the interviewed sample (Appendix 1). This is slightly higher than the percentage of the whole EPPSE cohort whose ethnicity was White UK (72.4%). Black ethnic minority groups are not represented in the interview sample despite being approached for interview, however, the overall number in the total NEET population was relatively small (n=3).

Socio-economic status (SES)

At pre-school age the majority of the 20 interviewed NEETs (n17 or 85%) came from the middle of the SES scale (SES 3 to 5) with 13 (65%) having an SES at pre-school in the lower half of the SES scale (SES 4-7). At pre-school the interviewed NEET group is very similar to the whole NEET group.

A comparison of the interviewed NEET sample and all NEETs with the whole EPPSE cohort shows that there is a significantly lower percentage of NEET young people whose SES at pre-school was in the highest two SES categories than is the case for whole EPPSE cohort. Only 5% of interviewed NEETs and 12.8% of the whole NEET group were in the professional or non-manual SES groups compared with 33.4% of the whole EPPSE cohort. The percentage in the lowest two SES categories of 'unskilled' and 'unemployed not working' categories is very similar between both NEET groups and the whole EPPSE cohort but it is in relation to the categories of 'skilled manual' and 'semi-skilled' where there is the most significant difference with much higher proportions in the NEET groups than is the case in the whole EPPSE cohort (Appendix 1).

The family SES of some of the 20 interviewed NEETs fluctuated significantly between pre-school and Key Stage 3 (KS3), both increases and decreases in SES are evident. However at KS3 there appears to be a slight polarisation with a greater proportion of interviewed NEETs in the lowest two SES categories as well as an increase in the number in the highest two SES categories. Previous research on NEETs has identified social class as a major factor in those who become NEET with the participation of young people over the age of 16 in education and training declining markedly with social class position (Thompson, 2009).

Comparing the SES at KS3 of the 20 interviewed NEETs with that of the whole NEET group shows that the picture is broadly consistent between the two although there is a greater percentage of the interviewed NEETs in the category of 'other professional non-manual' than in the whole NEET group. The most significant difference between the NEET groups and the whole EPPSE cohort in relation to SES at KS3 is in the proportion of young people in the 'unemployed not working' category; 6.7% of the whole EPPSE cohort compared with 15% of the interviewed NEET group and 18.6% of all NEETs.

Amongst all three groups of young people (interviewed NEETs, whole NEET group and EPPSE cohort) there was an increase between pre-school age and KS3 in the percentage whose parents were unemployed but the most significant increase can be seen amongst the whole NEET group (5.8% to 18.6%).

Marital status of parents (at child age 3 years)

Amongst the interviewed NEETs there was a higher percentage of young people whose parents were married (65%) than in either the whole NEET group (50%) or the wider EPPSE cohort (58.3%) (Appendix 1). The proportion that were in single parent families at age 3 was greatest amongst the whole NEET group (20.9%) with 13.1% of young people from the EPPSE cohort and only 5% of interviewed NEETs from single parent families at age 3. The figures across the other marital status categories were broadly consistent across the different groups with the exception of 'separated/divorced'. None of the interviewed NEETs were in this category at age 3 compared with 8.1% of the whole NEET group and 10.3% of the EPPSE cohort.

Parental qualifications

Mothers and fathers qualifications

Comparing the highest qualification of mothers and fathers separately for both the interviewed sample and the whole NEET group and showed a similar pattern of generally low qualifications for both groups (Appendix 1). 50% of the interviewed sample and 51.1% of the whole NEET group had mothers with either vocational or 16 Academic qualifications; this is only a marginally higher percentage than for the whole EPPSE sample (49.1%). Only 10% of the interviewed sample and 8.2% of the whole NEET population had mothers with educational qualifications of 18 Academic or higher compared with 24.2% of the EPPSE cohort. In relation to father's highest educational qualification, the characteristics of the interviewed sample and the whole NEET group are again quite comparable; 35% of the interviewed young people and 30.2% of the whole NEET group had fathers with vocational or 16 academic qualifications which is again very similar to the EPPSE cohort (32.2%). Only 10% of interviewed sample and 8.2% of the whole NEET group had fathers with qualifications of 18 Academic or higher compared with 25.1% of the EPPSE cohort.

Approximately a third of both the interviewed NEETs and the wider NEET group of 86 had mothers with no qualifications compared with only 1.5% of the EPPSE cohort. The percentage of the interviewed NEETs whose fathers had no qualifications is again approximately a third with a slightly lower figure for the whole NEET group (27.9%); this is again considerably higher than amongst the EPPSE cohort (15.3%).

Combined - highest qualification

Parental qualifications were fairly low for both the interviewed sample and the whole NEET group. Table 2 shows highest combined qualification of the parents of the 20 interviewed young people, it shows that, five young people had parents with no qualifications at all, for half of the 20 young people the highest qualification achieved

by one or both parent was that of 'academic qualifications at age 16'. Two of the 20 young people had a parent with a vocational qualification as their highest level of qualification. Only three young people had parents with qualifications higher than those acquired through compulsory schooling at age 16; 1 young person had a parent with academic qualifications at age 18 and two had a parent with a Degree.

Early Years Home Learning Environment

A higher percentage of interviewed NEETs were in the lowest early years Home Learning Environment (HLE) group (40%) than was the case amongst the whole NEET group (33.7%) and the full EPPSE cohort (30.7%). The percentage of young people in the medium HLE group was broadly consistent across all three groups. The percentage in the highest HLE group was significantly greater amongst the whole EPPSE cohort (41.8%) than for whole NEETs group, and particularly so relative to the interviewed NEET (30%) group (see Appendix 1).

Table 2 below outlines some additional background variables for the 20 young people interviewed that prior research has associated with young people becoming NEET (Robson (2008); Spielhofer et al (2009)).

Table 2: Additional background variables

Gender	Name	SEN KS4	SES 1	SES KS3²	EY HLE Category³	Highest parental qual.
Female	Laila	No	5	-	1	None
	Natasha*	No	7	-	1	None
	Annie	Missing	4	5	5	16 Academic (B)
	Shannon*	Yes	5	4	3	16 Academic (F)
	Sahla	No	4	4	2	None
	Jackie	Yes	3	4	4	16 Academic (M)
	Jasmine	No	4	1	2	Vocational (F)
	Marie*	No	2	2	3	Higher Degree (F)
	Becky	No	4	3	4	16 Academic (M)
	Cathy*	Yes	5	-	3	None
	Katie	Yes	4	2	2	16 Academic (M)
	Bane	No	5	2	5	16 Academic (B)

¹ SES categories at pre-school: 1 = Professional non manual 2= Other professional non manual 3 = Skilled non manual 4 = Skilled manual 5 = Semi skilled 6 = Unskilled 7 = Unemployed

² SES categories as footnote 1

³ The HLE has scores ranging from 0-45 in 5 categories: Group 1= 0-13 very low, Group 2 = 14-19 low, Group 3= 20-24, Group 4= 25-32 high, Group 5=33-45 very high. Three groups were then created: Low (0-19 points), Medium (20-24) & High (25-45 points).

Males	Crixus	Yes	4	7	4	18 Academic (M)
	Michael	Yes	4	4	2	None
	David*	No	3	2	2	Vocational (M)
	Archie	No	3	2	3	16 Academic (B)
	Malik*	Yes	3	7	4	Degree level (F)
	Harry*	Yes	-	-*7 at KS2	-	-
	Tim	No	3	3	2	16 Academic (M)
	Will	No	3	7	-	16Academic (M)

*NEET at time of interview F = Father M = Mother B = Both mother and father
 - Information missing

Research findings

Russell et al., (2011) state that the term NEET is, in itself, problematic because of the way it conflates young people with different experiences and conditions into a single category. The young people who were interviewed in this research had very diverse trajectories and pathways but some commonalities were apparent in their experiences and in relation to risk factors and barriers that had contributed to their NEET status.

Commonalities have been reported in previous research on NEETs, (Macdonald and Marsh, 2005; York Consulting Ltd, 2005; Russell et al, 2011; Spielhofer et al, 2009; Gartshore et al, 2009) and there was considerable heterogeneity amongst the NEETs interviewed for this study.

The findings from this research accord with previous studies of NEETs that have identified a range of risk factors for becoming NEET (York Consulting Ltd, 2005; Gartshore et al 2009, Spielhofer et al 2009). This section of the report describes, under thematic headings, the educational, personal and structural factors that act as barriers to resolving NEET status.

Risk factors

Educational factors

Attainment

Low educational attainment was one of the most significant NEET risk factors cited in the interviews. Only three of the 20 interviewees (15%) achieved 5 or more GCSEs grades A*-C, a similar percentage to that of the whole NEET group (Table 3). The number of interviewed young people that had managed to gain 5 GCSEs A*-C including the key subjects of maths and English was slightly lower with only 2

young people getting these grades. It is in comparison of the NEET groups with the whole EPPSE cohort where the contrast in educational attainment can be seen.

Table 3: Academic achievement of NEETs

	Interviewed NEETs		All NEETs that responded to questionnaire		Whole EPPSE cohort	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Achieved 5 or more GCSEs A*-C						
Yes	3	15.0	11	12.8	1570	49.5
No	17	85.0	69	80.2	1193	37.6
Missing	0	0	6	7	409	12.9
Achieved 5 or more GCSEs A*-C including GCSE and equivalents in English and Maths						
Yes	2	10.0	13	15.1	1555	49.0
No	18	90.0	67	77.9	1208	38.1
Missing	0	0	6	7	409	12.9

Many of the interviewees believed that their poor educational qualifications, and in particular not having a passing grade in English and maths, was a key reason for the difficulties they experienced in trying to get into further education, training or employment. Several spoke about how poor grades had significantly affected their employability:

“No one wants to employ me because I don't have maths.” (Annie)

“How do you feel about what has happened to you since you left school? Useless cos I ain't got no qualifications and no shot at work.”
(Shannon)

The 2011 Wolf Report for the Department for Education (DfE) on vocational education states that English and Maths GCSEs (at grades A*-C) are fundamental to young people's employment and education prospects. Yet national figures showed that fewer than 50% of students have both at the end of Key Stage 4 (age 15/16) and at age 18. The lack of educational qualifications achieved by the NEETs who were interviewed for this research had in their view significantly restricted the options available to them post 16 and in several cases were attributed as one of the main reasons for becoming NEET.

Young people were asked to identify the reasons why they thought they had not achieved the grades they had wanted or needed at GCSE. The responses were very wide ranging. Many attributed their poor grades to their own immaturity during secondary schooling, not working hard enough and having a general lack of motivation, a finding of previous research in this area (Furlong & Cartmel, 1997). A number of young people stated that they had not fully appreciated the importance of

achieving good grades and the consequences of poor educational attainment on their future pathways and prospects until it was too late:

“How did you feel about what you got in your GCSEs? *Oh I could have done better yeah, I didn’t really bother... And how was the last year of school for you? It was a bit crap to be honest, I turned into a little bugger at school to be honest, I wasn’t very good at school at the end. Can you think of any reasons why you felt like that? I don’t know really, when I think back to it I don’t really know why I was like that, I just didn’t want to go to school, didn’t want to do anything really like that”* (Archie)

There was a common theme of regret amongst these young people around not having worked harder at school and getting better grades; with hindsight they could see the impact of their poor qualifications on their pathway since leaving school and on their future. Some respondents felt very strongly that had the ability to achieve better grades if only they had applied themselves at the time:

“basically at school I’d say for about Year 7 and 8 I was fine and Year 9 and 10 I was ok but Year 11 I never went to school at the end, I regret it now but at the time that’s how I was, I didn’t enjoy it at the end.” (Archie)

“What did you think about the grade you got at GCSE? *I thought I could have done a bit better if I’d have stuck in a bit more...And when you say that you think you could have done better, what makes you feel that way? I think if I’d have just stuck in a bit more, did a bit more revising I could have come out with better grades.”* (Becky)

“What were your GCSE results like? *They were terrible. And how did you feel about that? Not very happy to be honest, I mean without trying to sound big headed or anything, I know I’m capable of so much more and its, I regret it to be honest but oh well, can’t go back now.”* (Harry)

“Were you happy with your grades? No. Why not? *Because if I’d applied myself more, I only started really caring like February, March of Year 11 and we took GCSEs in June....I think if I’d have applied myself more I would have got better.”* (Bane)

For many NEETs, there were a range of other factors that they felt had contributed to their poor academic achievement and for which the majority reported that they had received little or no support, for example, poor health. Many of these factors were not only influential in terms of impacting upon their academic attainment but are also NEET risk factors in their own right.

Special Educational Needs (SEN)

Table 4: Special Educational Needs (SEN) status at KS4

	Interviewed NEETs		All NEETs that responded to questionnaire		Whole EPPSE cohort	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
SEN Action Plus or Fully Statemented						
Yes	3	15.0	17	19.8	284	9.0
No	15	75.0	60	69.8	2360	74.4
Missing	2	10.0	9	10.4	528	16.6
SEN School Action						
Yes	5	25.0	21	24.4	322	10.2
No	13	65.0	56	65.1	2322	73.2
Missing	2	10.0	9	10.5	528	16.6

Having Special Educational Needs was another educational risk factor cited for both poor educational attainment and later NEET status (Table 4).

Eight out of the 20 NEET young people who were interviewed had SEN at KS4. Of these three were on Action Plus or had full statements of special needs according the SEN Code of Practice (DfE, 2001) whilst they were in compulsory schooling and 5 were on School Action equating to between 15 and 25% of the interview sample⁴. This compares very similarly to the whole NEET group, 17 (19.8%) were on Action Plus/Statements and 21 (24.4%) or SEN School Action. The proportion of NEET young people with SEN (both Action Plus/Statemented and School Action) is significantly higher than the proportion in the whole EPPSE cohort.

Educational disaffection

Another key educational risk factor for later NEET status and which also impacted upon these young people's educational attainment at GCSE was that of educational disaffection often as a result of negative experiences at school. There was a strong theme amongst a large proportion of the young people who were interviewed of not engaging with schooling. Many reported that they found school hard or boring, that they had difficulties in keeping up with the work and did not receive the support from

⁴ SEN School Action: "When a class or subject teacher identify that a pupil has special educational needs they provide interventions that are additional to or different from those provided as part of the school's usual differentiated curriculum offer and strategies. An Individual Education Plan (IEP) will usually be devised." (DFES, 2001)

SEN Action Plus: "When the class or subject teacher and the SEN coordinator (SENCO) are provided with advice or support from outside specialists, so that alternative interventions additional or different strategies to those provided for the pupil through *School Action* can be put in place. The SENCO usually takes the lead although day-to-day provision continues to be the responsibility of class or subject teacher. A new IEP will usually be devised." (DFES, 2001)

school and teachers that they felt they needed. Some had problems engaging with the style of teaching and learning used at school and there were reports of negative relationships with teachers. This had put many young people off staying on in education after the age of 16 and coupled with poor GCSE results and a lack of availability of employment or training had resulted in their NEET status.

*“I’ll be honest, I won’t lie to you I wasn’t the most, I wasn’t the best kid in the class, I wasn’t the best behaved one for the last few years... They could have been a lot worse [GCSE results], basically I did, I always had trouble with school so, it was quite difficult for me but I got through it. **Would you have liked to have done any better?** Much better yeah, I could have done if I had worked harder and not got into as much trouble through school but...” (David)*

“I just find it really difficult to learn, cos if I like, if I like start a subject and then I’ll be really good at it cos I’ll put loads of effort into it and then as soon as I, something catches me out and I don’t understand it, like all over, I just can’t learn after that”. (Annie)

In his interview Archie spoke about how he struggled to engage with school and learning and reported that his teachers “didn’t like him” so he didn’t approach them for support with his studies or really engage with lessons. At GCSE he only managed to achieve one A*-C grade and was currently working as a casual labourer after a long period of time out of education, employment or training.

Personal factors

Physical and mental health

Physical ill health and mental health problems, such as depression and panic attacks, were a key personal risk factor that impacted on educational attainment and led to young people becoming NEET. Two young people had long term physical health problems and three had long term mental health problems. These physical and mental health conditions started during the final years of compulsory education and had resulted in them missing periods of schooling and struggling to keep up with their studies. They reported receiving little or no additional support from schools, teachers or other professional sources.

These young people were still struggling to manage their physical and mental health problems at the time of their interviews and felt these were the main reason they had become NEET. Only one of these young people had managed to change their NEET status; Crixus was diagnosed with depression and Asperger’s and these conditions had seriously affected his schooling and had led to what he described as disappointing GCSE grades of 3Cs and 2Ds. He had attempted to enrol on Further Education (FE) courses after leaving compulsory education but had dropped out because of his mental health problems which deteriorated after he was put on medication which did not suit him. Crixus had spent over a year NEET before finally

receiving some professional psychiatric support for his conditions. In his interview he reported that he had recently started studying full time for a Level 2 BTEC which he was enjoying very much.

The effects of mental health problems on both educational attainment and later NEET status was an experience shared by Shannon:

“I dropped out of school at 15 because of my panic attacks and depression and, but I still done my GCSEs and got results for them but since then I haven’t done anything because of my panic attacks and depression.”
(Shannon)

Marie had been a motivated high achiever at school and achieved relatively good grades at GCSE despite becoming ill with a limiting long term physical condition which had affected her attendance. She reported that she had received no additional support from her school during this time and had been rather disappointed with her final grades as they were lower than she had been predicted. Marie had aspirations to do ‘A’ levels and go on to University but became NEET due to her health problems:

“I wasn’t happy because I didn’t get what I knew I could have because for the first year of my GCSEs. I was off a lot and in the second year I had to catch up by myself and I just had to do it all by myself...then I went back to do my A levels and I couldn’t do them at all, I was extremely extremely ill so I had to stop then... its still bad, I’m pretty much housebound for the majority of the time.” (Marie)

Malik also struggled with his physical ill health whilst at school and it left him unable to engage with education, training or employment. He had not received any support outside of his family and was still waiting for some professional help:

*“I’ve got a condition that stops me from doing anything...I have a condition which causes me to repeat movements over and over, it’s a physical condition...I’ve had it for the last two years. **Are you getting any help for it or support?** Well we’re still waiting for an appointment with a specialist”* (Malik).

Caring responsibilities

Caring responsibilities, such as becoming a young parent or looking after a family member, was another personal risk factor. Four of those interviewed (20%) reported that they looked after or were a carer for someone compared with lower percentage of 5.8% of all NEETs in the wider EPPSE study. Three of the four young people helped to care for a family member whilst the fourth young person, Laila, was a young mother.

Laila did well at GCSE achieving 5 A*-C grades, she had plans to go on to college and then to University to study to become a midwife but she became pregnant in her final year at secondary school and this disrupted her educational and career plans.

Laila was NEET for approximately 3 years before finding full time work a few weeks before taking part in the research interview:

“Were you pregnant when you left school? Yes I was, so I knew when I left school. I did plan on going to college after I had my little girl but once I had her I didn’t really want to leave her. I was going to do Health and Social Care, I did enrol and everything but the college course started in September and I had my little girl in August so she was only 4 or 5 weeks old and it just felt too soon.” (Laila)

The other three young people with caring responsibilities did not report it as the main reason for being NEET, citing other educational and labour market reasons for the difficulties they had experienced but it was apparent that their caring responsibilities had played a part in terms of restricting the kinds of employment and hours they felt they could take up.

Family circumstances

One young person, Cathy, had been in care of the Local Authority and had experienced many emotional difficulties and disruptions that had affected her educational attainment and had contributed to her NEET status.

Cathy went into foster care at 13 but her placement broke down and at age 16 she had to move into supported accommodation. Her pre-care experiences combined with difficulties that began to emerge with her foster placement during her final year at school had a significant impact upon her schooling and her GCSE results. Cathy also described the negative impact it had on her when it became public knowledge at school that she was in care, of how she had been badly bullied by her peers and that little had been done to try and resolve this:

“When I done the GCSEs I was in care and I was moving left right and centre, me head was all over the place at the time so when it came up to my GCSEs I didn’t do well, I got 1 C out of the whole of my GCSEs, that was it and the rest was Ds and under that, some of them I didn’t even pass at all you know cos I didn’t even go to the exams so its, it was quite hard to put in so much effort when I was at school and when that all came out [about the fact she was in care]it was as if everything changed and I couldn’t concentrate anymore and so I had to try and, I know I can’t do nothing about that now, I can’t go back and do my GCSEs again...”(Cathy)

Despite all this she was determined to continue in education and decided to stay on at her school 6th form to do a BTEC. However, the bullying she experienced continued into 6th form and this combined with the difficulties she had in making the transition from care to independent living resulted in her falling behind on her college course. Rather than receiving support in these circumstances she said that she was asked by the college to leave the course that she had very much enjoyed:

“I had a lot of people criticise me and with what happened with me and my family background...when I was living in supported accommodation I was still going back to 6th form in [town] but things were happening left right and centre and I was falling really badly behind in my work.... so they asked if I would leave so I left... when I left 6th form I was almost happy to leave cos I was sick of having to stand up for meself every day and it was just it wasn't nice for me, I thought its probably best if I do leave as well.” (Cathy)

Cathy then found herself some voluntary employment at a charity shop where she worked for over a year but had to leave this when she was forced to move away from the area because of her housing and has remained NEET since then:

“it was to the point when I was losing my house coming out of supported accommodation and I had to leave the [name of charity shop] so I could move away to a different house so I had no choice but I really did like it.” (Cathy)

Another young person whose difficult family life had played a major part in her education and NEET status was Sahla. Sahla had been an above average student with plans to do 'A' levels on leaving school and to go on to university but she experienced major problems at home with her parents during her final year at school which resulted in her having to leave home and move into a refuge. This difficult life event was compounded by what she viewed as a complete lack of support from her school during this time and resulted in her leaving with very poor grades. She stated that this had had a hugely detrimental effect on her post 16 plans and her pathway after school which had been characterised by several periods of being NEET interspersed with short term, low skilled work:

“all this started from the end of Year 9 to the start of Year 10, like there was a lot of things going on like at home but then I hardly ever went to school cos there was so much going on. When I was in school I wasn't doing my lessons, I would be separated like in a different office...I left school and then I left home as well and then like I was in refuges, going through a lot of stuff.” (Sahla)

Sahla spoke very emotively that had it not been for her family problems she believed that her educational outcomes and life post 16 would have been vastly different:

“but what really annoyed me is that if I was normal and had had a normal life I would have done really really well.” (Sahla)

Transitions from school to college

Another risk factor was that of young people struggling to make the transition to post 16 education with many saying that it wasn't what they were expecting. There was a very high drop-out rate from post compulsory education amongst the NEETs. Nine of the 20 young people had started a post 16 course but had dropped out because they didn't enjoy it, it wasn't what they expected or because they struggled to make the transition to further education

David initially went to college after he finished school but dropped out after 6 months and had been NEET ever since apart from a brief period of temporary employment. He said that he struggled with the different style of learning and expectations at college:

"I didn't like the style of learning, cos it was more, I'm more the type of person who needs to learn by being shown and by repeating the process and people haven't the patience for me cos I find it difficult to process information. I've obviously got a lot better with age but no, I didn't like the style of learning and the tutors weren't very helpful, it was more like, 'here's what you need to do, get on with it.'" (David)

Other young people who had dropped out of post compulsory education to become NEET reported that they felt forced to remain in education after finishing school. There were several reasons given for this; because they weren't sure what they wanted to do, feeling that their employment prospects were poor, there was a strong expectation from family or teachers that they would or should carry on in education or because they had received very little or poor quality advice on the options available to them after leaving school:

"I was in two minds about whether, cos I wasn't really told much about the progression that I could have took, I felt really forced into doing A levels, I didn't really know about the other side, vocational courses, they didn't really explain everything fully. Teachers at school mainly pushed you down the A level route." (Becky)

There were a few cases where young people had dropped out of their post 16 studies and wanted to do a different course instead but they had to wait for the start of the next academic year and in the interim period were NEET.

Lack of advice and direction

Another strong theme that played a major part in young people becoming NEET was that of a lack of direction or aspirations and not knowing what they wanted to do after finishing school. This meant that young people either drifted, did very little, took up low skilled temporary work or embarked on unsuitable courses or training that they all too soon realised they didn't like or couldn't manage:

“What did you really want to do when you left school? I don’t know, I still don’t know really what I want to do.” (Jasmine)

“I think cos when I was younger I didn’t really, like three or four years ago when I left school, I didn’t really know exactly what I wanted to do whereas if I’d known exactly what I wanted to do I would probably have been a bit more wiser in my actions...I think it was just down to me really, it was all me.” (David)

“I’ve honestly thought about this for quite a while and I have no idea at all, I mean the amount of different jobs I’ve applied for you’d think I was just, I’m signing up for anything I can get really,” (Harry)

Whilst 16 of the 20 interviewed NEETs indicated a job that they would most like to do in their ‘Life After Year 11’ questionnaire, nine felt that it was either very unlikely, or fairly unlikely that they would be able to do that job. This is suggestive of quite unrealistic future aspirations. In many cases, these young people did not know what else they might like to do or only had a vague idea e.g. “office work” or “something with computers”.

In the interviews many of these young people reported a lack of timely, quality careers advice and information on the educational and vocational courses available to them. A few young people stated that it would have been useful to have had this kind of information and advice earlier on in their school career before they chose their options for GCSE. Very few young people mentioned family members in their interviews as a source of support or advice on what they could do after finishing school.

This theme of not knowing what they wanted to do after leaving school as a risk factor for becoming NEET follows findings from Yates et al., (2011) and their study of the 1970 British Cohort Study. They found that young people with uncertain or misaligned aspirations (aspirations that exceed likely educational attainment) at age 16 were much more likely to be NEET at age 18. They also found that this uncertainty and misalignment is more widespread and more detrimental for those from poorer backgrounds.

Structural barriers

Contrary to assumptions in UK society and the policy arena that young people who are NEET have poor motivation and low aspirations, the young people who were interviewed for this NEET study were all keen to engage in some form of education, training or employment but aside from the educational and personal difficulties cited above there were a range of external, structural barriers that made resolving their NEET status very difficult. This tension between structure and agency as described in the work of Bourdieu was evident in the experiences of the NEET young people.

Cost of education post age 18

Some young people had started post compulsory education but had dropped out or had been NEET or in low skilled work for a long period of time before deciding they wanted to go back to education having realised what they wanted to do.

There were some young people who said that they were not ready at age 16 to make key decisions in relation to post compulsory education or their future careers. Some while on, when they felt more mature, they felt better prepared and sufficiently motivated to engage with education. However, trying to re-engage with education later on was sometimes problematic for these young people because once they were over 18 they had to pay fees for their education which most could not afford to do and this further restricted their options and opportunities for moving out of NEET status:

“I would have liked to have done computer software work or I would have liked to have studied psychology and become like a, well have gone down that route anyway. I’ve thought about it over the past year but when I was at the end of my schooling I wasn’t really thinking about this back then, I mean I would have done it now, I would have gone to do that at college now but it’s just the cost of it now I’m over 18, you have to pay for like your fees and it’s really hard to find the money, it’s the finances that are the problem.” (David)

“I must have been like 18 maybe and I was signing on. Then afterwards I couldn’t find a job, I was unemployed for about a year, I couldn’t find a job and so I thought you know what I’m gonna go back and study but then I think it was along the lines of I’d have to pay for a course or something but then obviously I couldn’t afford to pay and I thought I don’t want to get into that.” (Sahla)

The 2013 IPPR report ‘No more NEETs’ (Cook, 2013) highlighted this as a major structural issue facing NEET young people reporting that ‘there is currently no provision of financial support for young people aged 18-24 to participate in education or vocational training unlike for those in higher education. This means that opportunities are restricted to those who can access support from parents or independent sources of income’ (Cook, 2013, pp2). These financial difficulties have further intensified since the removal of the Educational Maintenance Allowance (EMA).

Lack of professional support with personal difficulties

Another key barrier to some young people getting into education, training or employment was a lack of support with their physical or mental health difficulties. All of the young people who were experiencing some form of ill health at the time of their interview had been living with their conditions since they were at school yet they all reported a lack of support both whilst at school and subsequent to that. Where young people missed schooling because of their health and had fallen behind, none

reported receiving any additional support from educational professionals or any help to prepare for what would happen after they left school. These young people all had loving and supportive families but they did not have the professional support and guidance they felt they needed with their education and their life after leaving school.

Shannon began suffering with panic attacks and depression from year 10 which meant she found it very difficult to go outside and resulted in her leaving school at age 15 though she went back to take her GCSE exams. Her health problems continued after that and she stated that it had been very difficult to access mental health services to try and get the professional help and support she needed that would enable her to feel ready to engage with education, training or employment:

“So for the past two years have you tried to get help with your depression and your panic attacks? Yeah. Ok, and has it not been very successful? No, they just push me aside and let me get on with it. Can you tell me a bit more about what help you’ve tried to get? I got sent to a psychiatrist when I was 15 and that was at [name of hospital] but in [name of town] and I had a couple of sessions there and they were the ones that put me on my tablets and I’m still taking them now. And that just like, they can’t take you when you get to like 17, 18 and I got put over to this place in (town) called (name of service) and then I didn’t get in for the therapy so they’ve then put me over to somewhere else and I’m not sure what that is and that’s, but an adult service. So why could you not get into the therapy? I’m not sure, they didn’t even end up getting back to me..... How do you feel about the fact that you haven’t been able to access support or get the help you needed to enable you to get qualifications? I’ve been asking, I was really frustrated and just down about it like all the time and I am still down.”
(Shannon)

Shannon spoke about how she had wanted to do some form of study but didn’t feel able to attend conventional post 16 studies due to her conditions and that courses in what she aspired to do weren’t available to do online from home:

“I wanted to do online courses at home but I didn’t have a clue how to set it all up. What about information on the post 16 choices that were available to you after you left school, did you get any information or help from anyone on what might be out there for you? No I didn’t get anything like that...there’s Open University and I went on there to look for care work stuff and there were no online courses for it, you’ve actually got to be in University so.” (Shannon).

Marie who suffered from a long term physical illness was NEET after being forced to drop out of her A level studies but she wanted to engage with education that would be suitable and manageable for her:

“Have you had any support from elsewhere in terms of trying to find something suitable for you like a course, to get you back into education? Er, no. When I got ill there wasn’t really anybody, because at the time I thought I could do an ‘A’ level and there was like nobody to ask, there was nobody trying to help really so we found it very, very tough because in the end that made, because there wasn’t much flexibility and there wasn’t anybody I could ask questions meant that it ended up that I just had to quit completely cos by the time we got the answers cos I’d been trying to do 4 ‘A’ levels at that time, my condition had just got so much worse.

So have you pretty much been on your own apart from your mother since you left school in terms of trying to find out what the options are for you? Yep, yep, completely.” (Marie)

Marie’s situation highlights another structural barrier that some NEET young people face and that is the lack of flexibility of post 16 educational options for those with special circumstances, for example being allowed to study for one ‘A’ level and the need for a wider range of options for distance learning, studying online and greater flexibility in the timescales allowed for completing FE courses:

“I’ve heard of people having home tutors and things like that or erm, even if I could go into, when I was at college if I could have gone in to do one part, one subject so at least I got at least one A level or an A level over two years. So there needs to be more flexibility for people like yourself in terms of how you study and what you study? Definitely.” (Marie)

Lack of information and advice around post 16 options

Linked to a theme previously mentioned in this report regarding young people not knowing what they wanted to do after finishing school, two major structural barriers to young people resolving their NEET status were that of a dearth of information about the options available to them and a lack of support from education and employment services in helping them to access education, training or employment.

As has already been mentioned, there was a high rate of dropping out of courses with many taking up courses either of questionable quality or without understanding what these courses would or would not enable them to go on to do afterwards. This will be discussed in a later section of this report on the characteristics of the pathways of those who were NEET but here it highlights the need for better quality information on the different options and pathways available to young people, the likely outcome and consequences of particular choices and better information on which courses and institutions are of high quality.

Becky dropped out of her ‘A’ levels after only a few months and spent almost a year NEET before re-enrolling in education on a different course. She stated that she felt forced into taking ‘A’ levels because there was little information at school about the

alternative options available and she found a lack of support in terms of helping her back into some form of activity during the time she was NEET:

“So when you decided that you didn’t want to continue with your A levels did you have any help in deciding what might be the right course for you? Not really no, I just did it all by myself yeah. Did anyone try to help you or give you any advice? My parents did but not really the college or anyone else no, they didn’t really do much.” (Becky)

This dearth of information and support around educational options was something that Sahla also experienced:

“sometimes I want to go back into education and people have told me about doing Foundation Degrees at university but I’ve always been very confused, like everyone tells me that like you have to go back to college and you have to have like a C in English and Maths or something and that’s what’s putting me off, I don’t know enough information about it or where to go.” (Sahla)

Structural barriers not only exist in relation to educational options, a number of young people spoke about the difficulties they had experienced in trying to find employment and how little support was available to them from professional services:

“I only got this job because of my mum, she told me about it. When I wasn’t doing anything like education or employment I didn’t really have any help or advice about that from anyone.” (Laila)

There was particular dissatisfaction with official services such as the Job Centre. Sahla who was NEET for over a year said when asked if she had received any support or help in finding a job or training:

“the Jobcentre but to be honest with you they weren’t that great, they would just leave you to it.” (Sahla)

There were other negative experiences of trying to find work through the Job Centre:

“I’ve looked [for employment]. It would be nice to have some help to try and get a job.....Jobcentre aren’t helping very much.” (Natasha)

“I went on Jobseekers, I didn’t want to, my mum wanted me to, I didn’t feel comfortable doing it but I was like ok, I’ll just do it. My advisor she tried to help me but she was always sending me to job interviews and stuff like that like totally outside the area where I live but because I don’t drive I would have had to rely on public transport and there was no way where the jobs were based that I could have been able to get to them so she didn’t really help as much as I wanted her to.” (Jackie)

Tim had encountered little help in trying to find apprenticeships and reported that he had received no real careers advice either:

“They put us on like a, it was like another place they sent me where I could like try and find a job but they didn’t really help us, they just wanted to get us into any sort of work, stuff that I didn’t need qualifications to do. I was trying to tell them that like I wanted to do an apprenticeship but they didn’t have like an apprenticeship sector, programme. So they just made us apply for like working in shops, cleaning, stuff like that.” (Tim)

Tim spoke more generally about what he saw as the lack of specific services and support for young people aged 18-25 around finding employment, training and apprenticeships. He thought the Connexions office in his area had closed and was unaware of anything else in its place for young people:

*“there isn’t anything like that for us no more [Connexions] cos the one in the centre of town closed down and the one at the school, I couldn’t like go back into school and use that one cos I’d left. **So are you saying that there’s not much of that support these days for people who have left school? Yeah, not that like everyone knows of. So was there nowhere else that you knew of that you could go to to find the type of help that Connexions gave you? No, there’s like nowhere else.” (Tim)***

This gap in services for NEET young people was also raised by David. He managed to get a temporary job through an agency after dropping out of his FE course but when this employment ended he hadn’t been able to find other work via this agency because he was over 18. At the time of his interview David had been NEET for over a year:

“The agency I first used was for under 18s so now I’m 20 I can’t use them again.” (David)

The Benefits trap

A structural barrier that was raised by Cathy who had been in Local Authority care was that she was better off on benefits than if she was in education or on an apprenticeship. She hadn’t been able to find full time employment that paid more than the minimum wage and although she had looked into doing apprenticeship she said that it wouldn’t pay her enough to support her family and she would lose her benefits if she was to take one up:

“I tried to do an apprenticeship but with it being a joint tenancy with my boyfriend it would have affected our benefits, the money we would get through an apprenticeship it wouldn’t be enough for what we need, my boyfriend’s got two kids as well so we got to, me and me boyfriend are supposed to be looking for full time jobs cos if one of us gets a part time job we’re gonna be financially really badly off so its worked out that I’ve got to work at least 40

hours a week minimum pay which is quite a lot so an apprenticeship wouldn't be beneficial to me.” (Cathy)

This was another issue raised in the 2013 IPPR report (Cook, 2013) which highlighted how training of 16 hours or more a week is not permitted for those on Job Seekers Allowance (JSA).

Labour market conditions

A key structural barrier highlighted in many interviews was that of the lack of employment and training opportunities for young people. This was often compounded by the fact that many of the NEET young people had achieved relatively poor GCSE grades which automatically put them at a disadvantage:

“at the minute its quite tough cos obviously the job front is not so great at the minute...., they (Job Centre) try and help all they can but the job front isn't great at all, they can't do their job that well in finding people work because the jobs aren't there.” (David)

“as soon as I left college I applied for apprenticeships but I didn't really get anywhere with them. Like not many got back to us, I didn't get any interviews until this recent one....I just think it was economic times really, it's getting harder and harder to find an apprenticeship.” (Tim)

“What do you think have been the main obstacles to doing what you want to do? Just there's not enough out there, opportunities, to do what I want.” (Will)

Several young people had spent a long time looking for employment and had been quite demoralised by the experience:

“I looked for work for quite a long time, I applied for quite a lot of jobs and I never heard anything back. My partner works as well so I had to find a job that obviously fitted in around my children and around him working so that made things a bit tricky... wasn't really picky, I think it was just bad luck really that no-one replied. It's not easy out there at the moment with finding a job, it's difficult.” (Laila).

“Have you had interviews or anything? No, I've had nothing at all. I hand out CVs too but I just don't hear anything, like to shops, anywhere...I hand out CVs and all like that but I just don't hear nothing.” (Natasha)

“I haven't heard nothing back on a job yet and I've been on jobseekers for nearly 8 months now and I still haven't heard one thing back from any people from work whatsoever but I'm still trying and I know these things take time but it doesn't really help that I don't have much qualifications from school either and all I've got is the volunteering work on my CV. I know a lot of people are

chasing places and not many people get them so it's just a waiting game at the minute really, it's not easy out there.” (Cathy)

Some young people recognised that their lack of work experience was a key barrier to finding employment or an apprenticeship but they were caught in a vicious circle as they needed experience to find work but couldn't get any work in order to build a portfolio of work experience:

“I did apply for like an apprenticeship but like you need experience to get a job so that didn't work out.” (Bane)

A lack of work experience was also a concern for a few who were hoping to get onto vocational based degree courses in the future; when talking about the barriers that might prevent her getting on to the Degree course she wanted to do Becky said:

*“Just getting enough experience really because you need a lot to get onto the Degree. **When you say experience do you mean work experience?** Yeah, in the health care setting...I've got a bit more than some people but probably not as much as some people, other people have got. It's quite hard to get experience but there aren't many places that take students on cos you need health and safety and stuff like that.” (Becky)*

Access and transport

Living in a rural location was something that was highlighted as a key structural barrier for several NEET young people and was made more difficult by the fact that most either did not drive or did not have access to their own car. This limited their educational options in terms of the colleges and other educational institutions that they could get to and they were much more constrained in terms of the courses that were on offer at these locations. Living in a rural area also limited the employment and training opportunities not only in terms of the jobs that were available within travelling distance on public transport but the employment hours that they could work e.g. getting to and from a job that starts early or finishes late or involves night shifts. Maguire & Thompson (2009) identified this as a key barrier and risk factor for becoming NEET.

Natasha who had been NEET ever since leaving school said that living in a rural location was a key reason why she hadn't tried to get into FE or been able to find employment:

*“**Have you tried contacting a college to find out what they do and talking to somebody there?** I could do, I haven't tried. It just they're so far out though so.” (Natasha)*

Other young people also spoke about how the rural locality of where they lived restricted the opportunities available to them:

“What do you see as the main difficulties to finding a job? I’d say experience and distance.” (Harry)

“Where I live the college I was going to was an hour away and the bus was like at half seven so I had to get up quite early and I just couldn’t be bothered. So do you live in quite a rural area? Yeah, in [name of town], it’s very rural here. Plus the college I was at it was like awful.” (Bane)

It was clear from the interviews with young people that their lives were characterised by a range of risk factors and external barriers that had contributed to their NEET status and which made it difficult to get into education, employment or training. They often faced multiple risk factors in combination which were emerging or present whilst in compulsory schooling but which hadn’t been addressed, this concurs with previous research on NEETs (Gartshore et al 2009, Spielhofer et al 2009).

These risk factors were often compounded by structural barriers making many young people feeling that, apart from the emotional support of family members, they had been left on their own to change their NEET status.

The Post 16 pathways of the young people interviewed

Young people who were NEET at the time of interview

Of the 20 young people who participated in the NEET study, seven reported that they were still NEET at the time of their telephone interview. Two of these seven had been NEET throughout the whole period of time since leaving school, a further two had spent a very short period of time in education on leaving school but due to health problems had left education and had been NEET since that time. The remaining three had mixed pathways of short periods of time in education, training or employment interspersed with periods of inactivity.

An analysis of some of the background characteristics of those 7 young people who were still NEET revealed that 4 of them had SEN, 2 had long term physical health problems and 1 had long term mental health problems.

The seven young people came from across a broad range of early years Home Learning Environments (HLE) and SES backgrounds however 3 of the seven came from the lowest SES group. There was a mixed picture in terms of highest parental qualification level.

Table 5: Characteristics of the young people who are still NEET

Name	Physical ill health	Mental ill health	SEN	Most recent SES information available	HLE	Highest parental qualification
Natasha	No	No	No	5	1	None
David	No	No	No	2	2	Vocational (M)
Shannon	No	Yes	Yes	4	3	16 Academic (F)
Marie	Yes	No	No	2	3	Higher Degree (F)
Malik	Yes	No	Yes	7	4	Degree level (M)
Cathy	No	No	Yes	7	3	None
Harry	No	No	Yes	7	-	-

Several of the risk factors mentioned in the previous section had potentially contributed to some of these young people’s continuing NEET status, these include poor GCSE grades with only one of the seven gaining 5 A-C grades at GCSE (Marie), being in Local Authority care (Cathy) and not having any plans or aspirations about what they wanted to do after finishing school (Natasha, David, Harry, Malik).

A study by NFER (Spielhofer et al 2009) identified three sub-groups of NEETs based on attitudes to education and future employment and the likelihood of their re-engaging.

- *Open to learning NEETs*: Most likely to re-engage with education or training and tended to have higher levels of attainment and more positive educational experiences
- *Sustained NEETs*: Have had negative experiences of school, higher levels of truancy and exclusion and a lack of educational attainment
- *Undecided NEETs*: Similar levels of attainment to those who were open to learning but were dissatisfied with the opportunities available to them and had difficulties accessing what they wanted to do

The pathways and experiences of the seven young people who were still NEET at the time of their interview map onto this NFER categorisation quite well and provides a useful analytic framework.

Of the seven young people, Marie fits into the ‘Open to learning’ group. She attained 10 good grades at GCSE despite having a long term physical illness and she had a generally positive experience of and attitude towards education. Her physical illness was the main reason for her NEET status but she had been and continued to be actively looking to get back into education in a form that she could manage.

According to the NFER report, 'sustained NEETs' are characterised by their experience of a number of the risk factors discussed in the previous section of this report and of not having had any thoughts about what they wanted to do after leaving school. This relates very closely to the experience of Natasha, Shannon and Malik. All three of these young people had been NEET throughout the whole period of time between leaving school and being interviewed for this study. They all had very low grades at GCSE, only Malik achieved any A*-C grades with 2 Cs and they all reported that they had not known what they wanted to go on to do after leaving school. Shannon suffered from mental ill health and Malik had physical health problems. Natasha lived in a very rural area which restricted her educational and employment opportunities.

The final three young people, David, Cathy, Harry fall largely into the 'undecided NEETs' category although all three did poorly at GCSE so in terms of educational attainment they are more similar to those in the 'sustained NEETs' category than the 'open to learning' category. All three of these young people had been engaged in education, training or employment for varying periods of time but had dropped out or had been forced to leave and so were currently NEET.

David started an electrician's course at college when he left school but dropped out soon after starting because he struggled with the style of learning. He was then NEET for 16 months after which time he managed to find work as an apprentice manager in retail for 6 months before being "unfairly dismissed". He had been NEET for almost a year and faced ongoing problems in trying to find employment. Cathy, who had been in Local Authority care, had gone onto 6th form from school to study for a Health and Social Care BTEC but the difficulties she faced in making the transition to independence from care in addition to experiencing severe bullying from her peers meant that she felt she had to drop out of education. She had looked into a number of different options such as returning to education, taking up an apprenticeship and looking for work but due to a range of factors including her financial circumstances, lack of experience and the difficult jobs market she had not been able to access what she wanted to do.

Harry had a similar story to tell, he went to college on leaving school but didn't enjoy the courses he was doing so dropped out after a few months. He tried college again the following academic year but was again dissatisfied with the course so left. Despite attending courses and interviews arranged by the Job Centre, he had been unsuccessful at finding work.

Young people who were in EET at the time of interview

Thirteen of the 20 young people were no longer NEET at the time of interview. Six were in full time employment, 2 in full time education, 1 in a full time apprenticeship and the remaining 4 were in a combination of full time education and part time employment.

Table 6: Activity of young people no longer NEET at interview

Name	Age	Activity at time of interview
Laila	19	Full time employment
Annie	18	Full time employment
Sahla	20	Full time employment
Jackie	19	Full time employment
Jasmine	19	Full time education & part time employment
Becky	19	Full time education & part time employment
Katie	18	Full time employment & part time education
Bane	18	Full time education & part time employment
Crixus	20	Full time education
Michael	19	Full time employment
Archie	19	Full time employment
Tim	19	Full time apprenticeship
Will	18	Full time education

There was considerable variation in terms of the different pathways and activities of these thirteen since leaving school and also in the amount of time that they had spent NEET. A few young people were only temporarily NEET at the point at which they completed their Life After Year 11 questionnaire whereas others had a more sustained NEET experience.

Analysis of the pathways of all 20 young people interviewed highlights three different categories of NEET experience:

- 1) A relatively brief period of time NEET while waiting for an educational course to start or before finding work (6 months or less): This was the experience of eight of the 20 young people (Michael, Annie, Archie, Jasmine, Becky, Tim, Will and Bane).
- 2) More than one episode when they were NEET: Five of the eight had been NEET more than once since leaving school; David and Harry (two extended episodes NEET of more than 6 months), Sahla and Katie (several brief periods of less than six months when they were NEET between courses and/or employment) and Jackie (two brief NEET episodes).

- 3) One extended NEET episode: Seven young people had experienced this; Natasha and Shannon had been NEET since leaving school and had not been in any form of activity during that time. Marie and Malik had spent a very brief period of time in education after leaving school but dropped out and had been NEET since then. Laila and Crixus had been NEET since finishing school but had recently embarked on employment and education respectively at the time of their interview. Cathy had started in FE after leaving school but left part way through her course and apart from some voluntary work had been out of education, employment and training since that time

Difficulties experienced in post 16 pathways

A major theme identified from the analysis of young people's pathways and experiences was that of the variable and often poor quality of further education courses and qualifications such as entry level vocational skills courses and short 'multi-skills' courses. The generally poor GCSE grades of this group of young people automatically restricted the types of courses and institutions that they would be accepted into with many finding they could only access relatively low level courses at what some of the interviewed NEETs considered to be less favourable educational establishments. In most cases these courses had done very little to improve their employability and resulted in a return to NEET status or a cycle of taking up one short, low level course after another:

"I did like a multi skills course which was only three months long. I did that and then completed it, got a certificate from that and that's it, I then started looking for a job after that". (Sahla)

Harry had been sent on a series of short courses by the Jobcentre which he seemed happy to do but this had not resulted in him finding employment and did not appear to be providing him with any proper direction in terms of his career path and employability:

"I've been sent on a food and hygiene course and I'm thinking about going on a gaming course, when I say gaming I think it's, they didn't really specify what it was they just mentioned gaming and obviously me being a boy I liked the sound of that! So I think I might be going on a gaming course....either way it's a course that I can go on." (Harry)

This was an issue highlighted by Cooke (2013) in the IPPR report which found that all too often the qualifications gained through courses such as these are not valued by employers. The 2011 Wolf review also raised this issue reporting that 'the staple offer for between a quarter and a third of the post-16 cohort is a diet of low-level vocational qualifications, most of which have little to no labour market value'. Among 16 to 19 year olds, it estimated that at least 350,000 get little or no benefit from the post-16 education system (pg.7).

These two reports also found that there were too few firms offering apprenticeships, this was affirmed by several of the NEET sample. They had struggled to get onto an apprenticeship reporting few opportunities and intense competition for places. These are both major structural factors that inhibit the agency of young people who are already at a disadvantage because of the multitude of risk factors they carry with them such as a lack of qualifications which is usually a pre-requisite for being accepted onto an apprenticeship.

Dropping out of education was reported by 15 of the 20 young people taking part in this study:

“Well I went when I was in school like one day a week for two years to get like a diploma in a construction course and like then I just didn’t really fancy it I just wanted to go out and earn money.” (Michael)

“...starting and stopping courses because I didn’t like them.” (Jasmine)

“I went to college for a couple of months and I didn’t enjoy that so I left and then did nothing but I went, again, I tried college again and again it wasn’t for me so I just dropped out again and then I signed onto Job Seekers Allowance and ever since then it’s been looking for work.” (Harry)

Walther et al (2002) refers to this pattern of behaviour as ‘Yo-yo transitions’, reflecting how in contemporary modern societies young people’s transitions to adulthood and particularly in to work are no longer linear. It was evident amongst the NEET group and is something that has been reported in other studies with NEET young people that there is no longer a clear transition between school and work, it is now prolonged and highly person specific.

The post 16 pathways of most of the NEET young people who were interviewed were quite messy and complex characterised by this ‘yo-yoing’; starting and stopping in either education or various forms of work. Particularly in relation to education, there was a real sense of trying out courses with little overall direction or idea of what they might do afterwards.

The Wolf review (2011) also reported on this theme stating that ‘many of our 16 and 17 year olds move in and out of education and short-term employment. They are churning between the two in an attempt to find either a course which offers a real chance for progress, or a permanent job, and are finding neither’ (pg.7). Cote & Bynner (2008) wrote that young people may require additional time in making the transition to adulthood, often on a trial-and error basis.

Young people cited various reasons for dropping out of educational courses such as struggling to make the transition to the different style of teaching in FE and the expectation that students should be more independent in their learning. In many cases these young people had already experienced difficulties in coping with and

engaging in compulsory schooling so it was unsurprising that they found it difficult to adjust to the less structured and supportive demands of post compulsory education.

Unmet expectations was another reason why some FE student's dropped out as they realised that the course they were on was not right for them or not what they wanted to do:

"When I first left school I started doing A levels and I found out it wasn't for me so I only ended up being there for a couple of months and then I left...I just didn't enjoy them meself, I found that they weren't for me no." (Becky)

There was a sense amongst a number of those interviewed that they had initially decided to continue in education post 16 either because there was an expectation that they would from family, friends or teachers or because they didn't feel they had an alternative option at that time. Some of those interviewed acknowledged that they had been very uncertain about what they wanted to study and had picked a course that they thought they might like without fully understanding what it entailed or what it would mean for their future employability. As has been mentioned before, this highlights the lack of information and advice received by this group of young people and a potential gap in services and support for those who are at risk of becoming NEET.

It was not just in relation to education where there was a theme of stopping and starting and complex, 'messy' pathways. Whilst Sahla had not dropped out of education like many of the other NEET young people had, her post 16 pathway had been equally one of trial and error with little overall sense of direction. On leaving school with poor qualifications and having been forced to leave the family home, Sahla ended up in several temporary, low skilled jobs including seasonal work over the Christmas holiday period, she took a three month 'multi-skills' course at college on the advice of friends who were in post compulsory education which did not result in any recognised qualifications and she carried out voluntary work set up by the Jobcentre. She stated that it was through slowly building up her experience in different forms of employment and volunteering that had enabled her to get into her current permanent post working full time in retail.

Sahla's pathway highlights another key theme that was clear from the interviews; that of the lack of suitable, long term employment and training opportunities for young people. The types of employment that these NEET young people had finally been able to secure was generally low skilled, often temporary and relatively poorly paid with little or no opportunity for career progression. Several of those in employment of this kind were lacking in motivation or a clear plan of how to up-skill or improve their future prospects which links with the lack of career awareness and ambition previously mentioned:

*"When I left school I couldn't find a job for about 6 months and then I worked at a pub doing washing up for about a year and a half...**And then you found***

this job? *Yeah, it's temporary at the moment but I've been there 8 months so. And what do you do? Have you ever heard of like tanks and silos, big metal sheets, we do them. So is it heavy duty manual work? Yeah, loud, hot...What did you really want to do when you left school? I don't know, I still don't know really what I want to do. And how might you find out what you really want to do? I don't know, see what pops up.*" (Michael)

Young people's agency and choice

Of the 20 young people who were interviewed only a few were doing what they had hoped and planned on leaving school. In some cases, as has been highlighted in previous sections, the young people did not have any post 16 plans, but for many of those who did, these changed quite considerably over time. For some young people this was largely the result of their own choice and agency but for others it was in response to structural and other constraints that influenced their post 16 pathways.

Young people whose plans changed quite dramatically largely as a result of structural and other constraints (rather than their own agency) included Sahla. At school she had been a relatively high achieving student before she experienced severe family problems which eventually forced her to leave home at age 16. Sahla had always planned on going to college and then university but these plans were impeded by her family circumstances that impacted on her educational attainment at GCSE resulting in much lower grades than she had been predicted (2Cs, 3Ds, 2Es, and 1F) and failing to pass English and maths. On leaving school she took a series of short term low skilled jobs interspersed with periods of time NEET, whilst she had considered trying to go to college her confidence in her ability to study had been severely shaken by her poor GCSE grades, she also believed that her grades would make it very unlikely that she would get accepted onto a good quality course at college:

"because of everything that was going on at the time but you know in my mind I did have the plan where I would go to college, I would go to uni, I would do all those things but, yeah. Do you see the fact that you don't have GCSEs A-C in certain subjects the reason why you didn't just go back into college? Oh yeah for sure and the fact I was 18 by the time things had settled down. Because it just seemed like a very long process to go back and re-do my GSEs and do this and then get into what I want to so I just couldn't...I feel like now my brain's not all there cos I've been out of education for like a good few years now, I feel like my brain's not all there to sit there and like study. I've been trying to do my theory (driving) for so long and I haven't been able to do it and I don't know, you know it's like you know when you get into work and then it's just hard to go back into education." (Sahla)

Laila stated that she had always wanted to go to college and then to university to study to become a midwife but she became pregnant unexpectedly during her last year at school which resulted in her being NEET for almost four years. Whilst she still had aspirations to study midwifery at some point in the future, her personal circumstances were such that it was financially necessary for her to be in employment rather than education:

“Well with my current situation it makes more sense to work rather than to continue studying, I’ve accepted that, it doesn’t have to stop me from doing what I want to do in the future but just not now. Obviously it’s quite annoying but I chose to have my children and I’m happy with them.”(Laila)

Cathy had been in care since the age of 13 and had faced huge difficulties in her personal life (e.g. placement disruption and bullying). All of these factors had impacted upon her educational achievement but despite this she had always had aspirations to go to college and pursue a career in health and social care. She thought the bullying she had experienced at school and college left her with no option but to drop out of education:

“I don’t think I could [go back into education] erm, not after the experience that I’ve been through with, it’s just too much I mean I tried to go to [name of institution] to do me course and there was people from me old school that was there that used to take the mick out of us and basically not very nice people so I didn’t go and then I looked into going to [name of institution] and when I looked around there it was more people I knew and I thought I don’t think this is for me, I can’t cope with another 3, 4 years of people taking the mick out of us again, it’s just, I couldn’t physically do it.” (Cathy)

Will had wanted to get an apprenticeship as a tattoo artist but the lack of opportunities in this meant that after almost 6 months NEET he was forced to change his plans and aspirations. He took a basics course in plumbing and plastering before embarking upon the current full time course in plumbing and engineering that he was taking at the time of his interview. Whilst this was not what he had hoped or planned to do and though he still had aspirations to work in tattooing in the future he felt that he had no other option if he was to avoid remaining NEET:

“Just there’s not enough out there, opportunities, to do what I want. Limited number of apprenticeships and tattoo shops in the area!..It’s just like, people are always going to need plumbers and I just thought it’s like something to fall back on and there’s always going to be money in plumbing.” (Will)

David hadn’t any set plans about what he wanted to do after finishing school and although he had become NEET again by the time of his interview he had been in

employment for 6 months as a result of an opportunity that he was directed to by the Jobcentre rather than as a result of his own agency:

“I got a call saying there was a job going so I thought ok, it’s a job at the end of the day, it was something that was quite close to home as well, I know exactly where it is and I know the people there as well so I thought I’d apply for it and see if I got lucky. I got a call a couple of weeks after the interview saying I was successful and that’s how I got into it really. There was not really any desire on my part to do that particular job, it wasn’t like my ideal job or anything, someone needs to pay the bills.” (David.

Often those, like David, who didn’t have any particular aspirations or ideas about what they wanted to do in the future and who had found themselves NEET ended up doing something as a result of an opportunity or ‘tip off’ from a friend, family member or someone else they knew. In the case of these young people, whilst their level of personal agency in directing their own pathways was very limited, their social capital and the structures around them had been positive factors in getting them into some form of activity. This theme is discussed further in the next section on the factors that helped young people into EET.

There were several young people who reported the post 16 pathway they had envisaged for themselves had changed over time mainly as a result of their own choice or agency. Annie had planned on going to college after finishing school and initially she followed this path by studying for ‘A’ levels and a re-take of her GCSE maths. After a few months in FE she started to struggle with her studies and did not like the courses she had taken. She did not like the fact that she was not financially independent and had little money of her own so she left education and looked for employment. Her family were very supportive of her decision to change her plans; Annie said that her family were happy with whatever choice she made as long as she was in some form of activity.

Jackie spoke about how she had always planned to continue studying after the age of 16 and to complete a college course in hairdressing. Her family and friends had always expected that this was what she would go on to do but after enrolling at college she came to realise that this was not what she wanted to do after all. She dropped out of her course much to the chagrin of her family and set about being very proactive in finding full time employment which she secured after a short time being NEET. Despite the expectations upon her and the barriers she faced such as relatively poor GCSE grades (2Cs, 1D, 1E) Jackie demonstrated a high level of personal agency and assertiveness:

“When I was a school I did hairdressing and my family were like ‘oh, you’re going to be the hairdresser of the family’ and every time I’d kind of talk about it they were like ‘Oh, well done, carry it on, you’ve got to go to college’ so eventually that went on for about two years and I finished my NVQ 1 and they

were like 'ok you definitely need to do this cos you're like really good at it' but after a while I kind of felt obliged to do it for my family, I didn't want to do it for my own reasons as much as I enjoyed it I couldn't see myself doing it but they could and I was like 'Yeah I'll just do it cos it seems like the easiest way out'. So then as soon as I went to the induction day I really realised that I didn't want to do it so everyone was a bit, I think they were more like erm, upset that I couldn't see myself doing it cos apparently they could. I was like I'm happy that you've like supported me and stuff but if I don't want to do it then I'm not going to do it cos I won't be happy doing it and I felt as if I'd be wasting a college placement." (Jackie)

Jackie also came to realise that she wanted her independence which she felt she could only achieve through employment rather than continuing in education as originally planned:

"I'm quite an independent person and I think I just wanted to get out there and earn myself a living, I didn't want to kind of rely on my mum so much, I didn't want to rely on friends, I wanted to get out there, earn my money...so I think that's probably why, because I'm so independent." (Jackie)

Whilst Jasmine was still pursuing her plan to continue in education post 16 her choice of course changed several times. Her parents had been very supportive of her changing her mind and Jasmine reported that they just wanted her to be happy in whatever she went on to do. She spoke about how the music course she was currently undertaking was something she was very passionate about having realised over time that music was what she most enjoyed. On leaving school she had been uncertain about what she wanted to study which was the reason why she ended up dropping out of the courses she had started previously:

"Can you tell me a bit about how you came to decide to study the course that you're on now? Because I really like singing and I thought I'd do something that I knew I'd enjoy". Has anyone influenced you in what you're doing now in terms of choosing to do music? No, it's just something that I've always really enjoyed". (Jasmine)

There were some young people whose post 16 pathways had been directed by a combination of their own agency and the influence of others. Whilst Bane reported she had always wanted to go to college she spoke about how her friends had helped to sway her choice of 'A' levels:

*"I was doing Philosophy at first and I found it too hard to do cos its quite religious and I wanted to change and I didn't know what I could do and then my friend was like 'oh Business is exactly like the GCSE' and they advised me taking it cos I was good at it and really enjoyed it. **So your friends are quite an important source of information? Yeah definitely.**" (Bane)*

Tim had just started an 18 month apprenticeship at the time of his interview and felt his post 16 pathway had been influenced by his family, particularly his father:

*“I was always like hands on practical, I like doing practical stuff and I’ve been like that since I was little. I always knew what sort of route I wanted to go down, I don’t think I could see myself sitting at an office job I like to be out and about. **Did that influence come from anyone or was it just how you are?** Well, that’s how I am but like everyone in me family’s sort of been like hands on and in hands on jobs really but me dad’s he’s like an electrician as well he sort of like said I could go down that route so I’ve seen what he done and like I thought it looked good like what he was doing, and it’s like good money so...” (Tim).*

In her interview Becky spoke about how she had always planned on continuing in education after leaving school. She had dropped out of her ‘A’ levels which she said “were not for me” but she said that her choice to then study for a Health Science BTEC had been heavily influenced by her family and the type of work that her parents do:

“Me family’s always worked in the health side of things and I think that’s been an influence me whole life, going into caring and things like that”. (Becky)

Factors that helped young people back into EET

Whilst the majority of NEET young people interviewed did poorly in their GCSEs, several spoke about the support and encouragement they received from family and teachers in relation their education. Whilst this may not have always translated into good educational qualifications it fostered a more positive disposition towards education and to the possibility of returning to it in the future than might have been the case otherwise.

David spoke about the support he got from his parents and some of his teachers at school which helped him to do better than he had expected in some subjects:

*“some teachers like to adapt their style around me and I was really thankful for that and that actually got me where, it made lessons really good for me as well. I mean that’s half the reason why I got some of the results I did, I actually in the last year I got moved up a couple of sets because I was doing really well cos teachers started to realise what I learnt like. I think that some of the teachers did play a role in it yeah definitely, cos I got quite close to some teachers as well. **And what about the role of your parents?** Well my parents were obviously, they were very helpful as well, like any parents should be really. When I was younger they helped me with homework, they explained word definitions to me you know that kind of thing.” (David)*

The encouragement for education and practical help received from parents was also mentioned as important by several other young people. Becky had been NEET after dropping out of her 'A' levels having felt forced down that educational route by her school, she retained a positive disposition towards education though, enrolling back into college to undertake a BTEC and she intended to go on to university to study midwifery:

“Well my parents helped a lot with encouraging me to do everything.” (Becky)

Katie had struggled at school and only gained one GCSE A*-C grade but her mother, who was a teacher, had supported and encouraged her and had influenced her return to education to re-take her maths GCSE and her current employment as a teaching assistant at a secondary school. Katie had aspirations to undertake a Foundation Degree within the next few years:

“What role did your parents and your school teachers have if any in supporting or helping you in your GCSEs? I don't know, me school no, my school was rubbish to be honest but my mum did yeah cos she's a teacher so she supported me a lot.” (Katie)

Support for education after GCSEs was also important for many young people especially for those who had dropped out of or changed courses or who had been struggling to get back into education:

“Has anyone else played a role recently in encouraging and supporting you? My teachers at where I am now they're quite supportive, also like my friends and my boyfriend. In what ways are they supportive? They praise me and encourage me in what I'm doing and I think the teachers are a lot more, they're quite lenient with me because we started 2 weeks ago and I've like changed my subject four times, they know that I'm really indecisive but they've allowed me to do that.” (Bane)

This same young person also spoke at length about the support and encouragement she had received from a teacher on a previous course she had taken when she was on the brink of dropping out:

*“when I was at college when I was doing media, like my teacher was like, he was really annoying but supportive because towards the end I wanted to quit because we had so little time and so much work to do it was like, do you know what I can't be bothered and he kept like ringing like every day to make me come in and I just ignored his calls but then one time he actually like got through to me and I just felt bad, I felt really awkward and I couldn't say no to him, so I'm like 'fine'. **So he didn't give up on you. No.**” (Bane)*

Shannon had been suffering from panic attacks and depression for several years and this had led to her being NEET since leaving school. She had experienced a lack of professional support but with the help of her family she had very recently

been able to access some professional counselling and was hopeful that she would soon be able to take up some further education. She had also been allocated a social worker a month before she was interviewed for this study which had had a positive impact in terms of helping her to feel more ready to re-engage with education:

“Well I’ve been setting goals for, cos I’ve been going out more with my social worker and she’s been teaching me techniques on how to handle stuff...she rang me up, not yesterday, the day before, and she was talking about getting some things from the [name of college] to look at with me.” (Shannon)

A very important protective factor that helped some young people back into education, employment or training was that of personal motivation, determination or pro-activeness. Young people recounted stories of walking the streets handing out CVs, signing up with different job agencies, doing voluntary work to boost their chances of employment and spending hours at a time searching online for courses or jobs. Jackie initially looked for work through the Jobcentre but when this proved unsuccessful she took a much more proactive approach to finding a job:

“I was like ‘ok I’m going to have to do it myself’ and that’s when I started looking for other work rather than like just going to me advisor.” (Jackie)

It was very apparent that Jackie had been highly motivated and proactive in looking for work, in finding her first full time job she reported:

“I went in one afternoon just to quickly like grab a sandwich with my mum and as were paying at the till I asked if there were any jobs going and the lady who served me said ‘yeah there is, if you want to hand in your CV I’ll give it to my boss and he’ll get back to you as soon as possible’. And then the next day he actually called me cos I went back later that day and handed it in, he said ‘I really liked your CV, I’m phoning to see when you’re free for an interview’ so within about three days I had a job so.” (Jackie)

The same pro-activeness facilitated her finding her current full time job:

“so I kind of went out in my own way, I went on different job sites rather than er, jobseekers websites, and that’s where I found the bar job.” (Jackie)

Archie thought it was important to be motivated and determined in job searching using both personal contacts and professional services, he said that it was this that had eventually led to employment:

“My personal opinion is that I’ve got a lot of friends who are lazy and not bothering to get a job and that, I just personally think you’ve got to get out there and sort of, off your own back, hand out CVs and that sort of thing, you can’t just sit there and expect it to come to you.” (Archie)

Becky also demonstrated this motivation and determination but in her case in relation to getting back into education:

*“On the {name of city} college website, I just went on and looked at what you could do, I wasn’t sure what you could do there, I just went on and researched it all meself and found one that was suitable for me. **And you did all that by yourself, there wasn’t any careers advice or professional support? No not really no.**” (Becky)*

This was something that was also mentioned by Bane in her interview. She had been suspended at school and had done poorly in her GCSEs, on leaving school illegal drug taking had affected her physical health. She was NEET for around 9 months during which time she unsuccessfully applied for employment and apprenticeships before deciding to go back into education. She then started a BTEC before dropping out after two months and then taking up a different BTEC, only completing the first year. She was determined to embark upon ‘A’ levels but knew that her behaviour at school and ‘messy’ post 16 pathway meant that she was unlikely to be accepted back by her 6th form college so she made a concerted effort to prove her commitment to wanting to study to them:

*“I’ve only just got into A levels now by literally me writing a letter and saying I’m not who I used to be because where I am, I’m at 6th form now, which is the local 6th form which is where I went to school and so they were a bit lenient to take me back because I got suspended in like May, a month before I left school. So they knew me and they were a bit like hesitant to take me back but I proved to them that I was grown up. **So it sounds like you were quite determined to get back into education? Yeah I was, definitely.**” (Bane)*

Cathy spoke about how she went out of her way to find voluntary work when she couldn’t find paid employment. She worked for a charity shop for over a year to try and gain some experience:

“it was Christmas when I got kicked out of 6th form so after Christmas I started handing CVs out and I came across the Salvation Army around where I lived and they were taking on volunteer people to work in their shop and I was like right well can I sign up for it and I used to do that 5 days a week and I thoroughly enjoyed that as well.” (Cathy)

Gaining work experience through volunteering was mentioned by several other young people as a positive experience. David took up some voluntary work that the Jobcentre arranged for him and this led him to employment as an apprentice retail manager. Although this only lasted for 6 months it gave him work experience to put on his CV.

Sahla also talked about how volunteering had provided her with useful work experience which ultimately led to paid work:

*“what they did get me into was, erm, what was it called, erm, voluntary work at this receptionist place which then, obviously it was unpaid but you got experience, having experience from that got me a job into a call centre because of the reception experience I had. **Going back to the volunteering work, do you think that was valuable, did it help you and open doors in terms of getting future work?** It did yes because, erm, it definitely did because then on my CV, I’ve customer services experience, being a receptionist as well like it gave me that side of opportunities as well.” (Sahla)*

Social capital in the form of familial support and support from significant others proved to be instrumental for several NEET young people in getting into education or employment. Financial support from parents such young people living with parents and parents paying for courses when young people were over 18 was particularly important. Jasmine had attempted two different college courses after leaving school but had dropped out of both because she found she didn’t enjoy them. Despite this, her parents remained very supportive and encouraging. When Jasmine finally decided on a course she really wanted to do her parents paid the fees (liable as an over 18 year old). Her parents and friends had also encouraged and supported her when she was thinking about what course to do and in researching what was available:

*“They’ve been helpful, they helped me find out, work out what I wanted to do and stuff, my friends and my parents. They’ve helped me to find courses especially when I dropped out of the ones I started... **So you’re studying for a Diploma, is that full time?** Yes, it’s full time. I’m loving it. **And how is it funded, who pays for it?** Oh, my parents. **And are you still at home?** Yeah. **And do your parents support you quite a lot?** Yeah they do, they’re really supportive”....**How do your parents feel about what you are doing now?** Yeah they’re happy that I’ve finally found a course that I’m happy with and that I’m sticking with.” (Jasmine)*

Social capital in the form of family contacts provided Will with a source of casual employment whilst trying to get into an apprenticeship:

“I’ve never been in full time employment but friends of my mums and people I know who needed jobs doing I’ve been doing stuff for them cash in hand over the past year whilst I was trying to get an apprenticeship.” (Will)

Several young people had struggled for extended periods to find employment and had been unsuccessful in trying to do so through the Jobcentre and other ‘official’ routes but had eventually managed to get into work via the contacts they had e.g. family, friends and teachers.

Laila who was a young mum of two and who had been NEET since leaving school had managed to get into full time employment shortly before she was interviewed for this study. The issue of potentially expensive childcare was resolved by her partner

looking after the children so she could go out to work. Laila had been looking for a job for several months but had eventually found her current employment through her mother:

*“I looked for work for quite a long time, I applied for quite a lot of jobs and I never heard anything back.... **How did you go about looking for work?** I used to look online, ask friends who had jobs and things like that. **How did you get this job that you’re in now?** Through my mum, she told me about it and I applied for it.” (Laila)*

As mentioned in the previous section, often those young people with no particular plans about what they wanted to in terms of education, employment or training found their post 16 pathways steered by external factors including family, friends or opportunities that came about via their social capital.

Michael had been NEET for over 6 months after he left school and struggled to find any employment through the Jobcentre; he had managed to get into work as a direct result of his family:

“Some of my family members were working at [name of company], they knew a job vacancy was coming up so they told me.” (Michael)

Other young people also reported they found employment via their social contacts. Annie had been NEET for a few months after dropping out of her college course and had been struggling to find work:

*“**How did you find this job?** Erm, I went round [name of town] asking for applications and giving in my CV and erm a friend of a friend knew a supervisor who worked at (name of business) and so they already knew of me so we then met at like the interview and they were like ‘oh yeah I know you!’ and then we sort of got on and she gave me the job.” (Annie)*

Archie was able to make use of his ‘social capital’ to get some work experience which facilitated him getting into his current job:

*“**How did you go about finding work?** Well I signed on to the agency but I had a friend who got me some work in construction and that’s how I’ve found work more recently”. (Archie)*

Katie started as a volunteer at the school in which she eventually became a teaching assistant. As she is currently still working at the school and they are helping her to retake her maths GCSE and are encouraging her to start a Foundation Degree next year. Describing how she was helped out of being NEET she said:

“I was talking to one of my teachers at like my school and he knew that at the time I was going through a rough patch trying to find a job and stuff and he was like well I’ll give Katie an opportunity to do this so I could actually work for a few months voluntarily to prove myself and I’ve done that and then I applied

to get paid on top of that so basically it's just through that... this came along and I thought I'm not going to turn down this opportunity...as soon as I started I loved it because the kids are so nice, and when I walk out of the classroom I feel like I've helped that child learn something, you get a real buzz and I like giving the support that I never had in school, I love it." (Katie)

Conclusions

Young people who are NEET constitute a heterogeneous group with varied experiences and pathways but this research, as with previous studies before it, has identified a range of common risk factors associated with becoming NEET at both proximal and distal levels. Bronfenbrenner's ecological model has proven to be a helpful theoretical framework for understanding the complexity of factors at play in the lives of these young people.

Amongst both the 20 interviewed NEETs and the whole NEET group of 86, there was a significantly higher incidence of Special Educational Needs, parental unemployment, lower parental qualifications, low SES and a higher incidence of caring responsibilities than amongst the overall EPPSE cohort. Multiple risk factors were often at play in the lives of NEET young people many of which were present from their early years or emerged during the course of compulsory schooling. These can have a hugely detrimental impact upon educational achievement and the pathways and opportunities available to young people post 16. This is evidenced by the findings of this research and the results from the wider EPPSE research study which show the high prevalence of poor GCSE grades amongst NEET young people in comparison to the whole EPPSE cohort.

The experiences of the 20 young people interviewed for this study highlight how important early identification of these risk factors is and the particular role that schools can play in ameliorating their impact on future outcomes through fomenting and supporting these young people's educational achievement. This might take the form of targeted support for pupils who may struggle to get GCSE passes in Maths and English or the use of more innovative teaching methods for young people who are struggling to engage with education or who have special educational needs.

Many NEET young people found making the transition from compulsory schooling to further education extremely difficult leading to a high rate drop-out rate from courses. It could be suggested that more needs to be done in the way of preparing young people in the final years at school for making the transition to college. In addition, the influence of physical and particularly mental health problems on NEET status cannot be overstated; the need for quicker access to professional support services was evident in the case of several of the young people who took part in this research.

A key facilitator for many young people in getting into education, training or employment was that of personal social capital. There were numerous examples of

the vital role played by 'significant others' in the lives of NEET young people such as parents paying for course fees to enable young people to return to education or supporting young people financially during extended periods of unemployment while they were studying or training. A number of young people received useful advice on educational options from those known to them which helped to galvanise their thinking and direct them into action whilst many others were able to find employment or access training opportunities through their friends, family members or teachers. In several cases, young people who had been NEET for more extended periods of time were those who had the least social capital.

The influence of structure and agency on the NEET young people's pathways and experiences post 16 and the tension between the two is evident in this study. There was significant variation across the interviewed NEETs in the level of agency that they had been able to exert and the degree of constraint imposed by structural factors. For the NEET young people in this study, the constraints appeared to be less related to gender, ethnicity and class and more to do with distal factors such as the difficult jobs market, a lack of training and apprenticeship opportunities, a lack of flexibility in educational courses, the imposition of course fees for those aged 18 and over, living in a rural area, a lack of services and support for health problems and educational needs and a dearth of good quality careers advice.

Many of the young people in this research felt that there was a need for much better information and advice on the range of options available, not just in education but in relation to quality vocational qualifications, apprenticeships and training opportunities and the types of employment that this would qualify them for. It was felt that this advice should be available to young people much earlier on in their compulsory education, before they have to make their Key Stage 4 subject choices so that young people have the information they need to make clearer and more informed choices about their future pathways through education, training and employment.

Whilst some young people were critical of services such as Jobcentres it is important not to underestimate the difficulty such organisations face in identifying employment or training routes for young people, whose lack of qualifications and other personal difficulties such as health problems make it very hard to place them at a time of high youth unemployment. These difficulties are compounded by a context of significant cuts to Connexions services, Jobcentre budgets and the removal of the EMA.

In spite of this difficult economic context, the problems that NEETs experienced in trying to get into EET highlights a number areas that could be addressed to try and ameliorate some of the problems that they encountered:

- greater flexibility in post 16 educational options particularly for those with physical or mental health difficulties or significant special educational needs e.g. having the option to take just one or two 'A levels' at a time or being allowed to complete courses over a longer period of time

- greater financial support for young people over the age of 18 who want to return to education
- a route into employment or training for those young people who are motivated to work but whose low educational qualifications prevent access to the job market.
- greater range and availability of non-academic post 16 options for young people
- greater quality control of vocational courses and training currently available to ensure that what is offered is of high quality and is recognised by employers.

The EPPSE team are extremely grateful to all of the young people who participated in this sub-study of the project and wish them well in their future endeavours.

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Appendix 1

	Interviewed NEETs		All NEETs that responded to Life After Year 11 questionnaire		Whole EPPSE	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Gender						
Male	8	40.0	39	45.3	1646	51.9
Female	12	60.0	47	54.7	1526	48.1
Ethnicity						
White UK	17	85.0	68	79.1	2295	72.4
White European	0	0	5	5.8	122	3.9
Black African	0	0	1	1.2	66	2.1
Black Caribbean	0	0	0	0	116	3.7
Black other	0	0	2	2.3	22	0.7
Pakistani	1	5.0	4	4.7	177	5.6
Indian	0	0	0	0	67	2.1
Bangladeshi	0	0	0	0	40	1.3
Mixed race	2	10.0	1	1.2	192	6.1
Other ethnic minority	0	0	5	5.8	71	2.2
Family socio-economic status (SES) at pre-school – age 3						
1- Professional non manual	0	0	2	2.3	281	8.9
2- Other prof non manual	1	5.0	9	10.5	776	24.5
3- Skilled non manual	6	30.0	24	27.9	974	30.7
4- Skilled manual	7	35.0	21	24.4	452	14.2
5- Semi-skilled	4	20.0	21	24.4	406	12.8
6- Unskilled	0	0	1	1.2	79	2.5
7- Unemployed not working	1	5.0	5	5.8	88	2.8
Missing	1	5.0	3	3.5	116	3.7
Family socio-economic status (SES) at KS3 – age 14						
1- Professional non manual	1	5.0	1	1.2	200	6.3
2- Other prof non manual	5	25.0	12	14	638	20.1
3- Skilled non manual	2	10.0	10	11.6	258	8.1
4- Skilled manual	4	20.0	7	8.1	213	6.7
5- Semi-skilled	1	5.0	4	4.7	117	3.7
6- Unskilled	0	0	0	0	28	0.9
7- Unemployed not working	3	15.0	16	18.6	211	6.7
Missing	4	20.0	36	41.9	1507	47.5
Marital status (at child age 3 yrs)						
Never married, single parent	1	5.0	18	20.9	417	13.1
Never married, living with partner	4	20.0	14	16.3	444	14.0
Married, living with spouse	13	65.0	43	50.0	1849	58.3
Separated/divorced	0	0	7	8.1	327	10.3
Widow/widower	1	5.0	1	1.2	8	0.3
Other	0	0	0	0	21	0.7
Missing	1	5.0	3	3.5	106	3.3

	Interviewed NEETs		All NEETs that responded to Life After Year 11 questionnaire		Whole EPPSE cohort	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Mothers' highest qualification						
Vocational	1	5	10	11.6	442	13.9
16 Academic	9	45	34	39.5	1118	35.2
18 Academic	2	10	4	4.7	257	8.1
Degree or equiv	0	0	2	2.3	381	12.0
Higher Degree	0	0	1	1.2	131	4.1
None	7	35.0	29	33.7	46	1.5
Missing	1	5.0	6	7.0	647	20.4
Father's highest qualification						
Vocational	3	15.0	8	9.3	346	10.9
16 Academic	4	20.0	18	20.9	676	21.3
18 Academic	0	0	1	1.2	223	7.0
Degree or equiv	1	5.0	3	3.5	378	11.9
Higher Degree	1	5.0	2	2.3	165	5.2
Other professional/misc	0	0	1	1.2	32	1.0
None	7	35.0	24	27.9	484	15.3
Father absent	3	15.0	25	29.1	757	23.9
Missing	1	5.0	4	4.7	111	3.5
Early years home learning environment group						
Low HLE	8	40.0	29	33.7	973	30.7
Medium HLE	4	20.0	23	26.7	727	22.9
High HLE	6	30.0	29	33.7	1306	41.8
Missing	2	10.0	5	5.8	166	5.2

Appendix 2

NEET interview schedule

Thanks for taking part, will be discussing what has been happen in your life since you left school. Confidentiality, won't use name in report. Can stop at any time/not answer any Q's you don't want to. OK to record?

1) Can you tell me a bit about your life right now, what are the main things happening in your life at the moment?

Probe:

- Education, employment, training, NEET (has this been constant since filling in the post 16 Questionnaire or 'episodic?'), family life, leisure life, finances, health, caring responsibilities
- Get details of any ETE e.g. education/training (what course, where/institution, full/pt, length of course/training, qualification it will lead to, how funding this (course fees and living costs, getting any financial support? What? From who? Had they been getting EMA?). Employment: Job role, where, FT/PT, hours, permanent/temp, pay
- Has there been any particular event in your life since we last interviewed you five years ago that might have had a good or bad effect upon you or your education? E.g. illness, having a child, time off of school
- Check/discuss GCSE results and any other quals they got e.g. A levels/BTEC: What they think about the grades they got, how happy or not/did they get what they expected? If not, why do they think this was? Would they like to have done better? What makes them feel that way?
- What were the expectations of their parents, other family members, friends? What did their parents/family/friends think about their results?
- What role, if any, did your parents, school/teachers, friends, anyone else play in your recent learning?

If in Education, training or employment

2) When you completed the post 16 Questionnaire we sent you, you were not in education, training or employment, can you tell me a bit about how you came to be doing what you're doing now?

Probe:

- Is this what they planned to do when they left school or something different?
- Why they are doing what they are doing now (choice vs. drifting into it or feeling forced into it)
- How they feel about what they are doing now, how do significant others' feel about what they are doing now
- What/who might have influenced them in what they are doing now (others' expectations of them, particular careers advice or opportunity that came up, opportunities/facilitating factors vs. barriers/ constraints)

- Had any help or support from anyone while they were NEET/that helped them into ETE? (Financial, education or careers advice, Entry to Employment, taster courses, information, networking, encouragement, emotional support)

3) What are your hopes/aspirations for the future? Where do you see yourself going?

Probe:

- What/who might have influenced these plans?
- What do you think you'll have to do to achieve these aspirations?
- Do you feel that these aspirations are realistic? Why/not? What might help/hinder?
- If they don't feel their original goal is realistic: What is a realistic goal for you do you think?

If young person is still NEET:

2) What are the main reasons you are not in education, training or employment at the moment?

Probe:

- Difficulties/barriers to getting into education, employment, training e.g. health, family responsibilities, lack of jobs/training, travel/distance, cost of education, GCSE results/lack of qualifications, not knowing what they want to do or the options available, financial e.g. costs of courses, travelling

3) Have you been in any education, training or employment since leaving school?

Probe:

- Probe for more details e.g. what, when, why not doing that now (completed/dropped out – WHY?/employ came to an end?)
- Explore themes of 'dropping out', trial and error, starting and stopping
- How they feel about these experiences? What significant others' thought
- Have they been doing anything else e.g. looking for work, voluntary work, unpaid internship or work experience

4) What would you like to be doing, if anything?

Probe:

- Why that rather than anything else? Anything in particular that 'puts them off' other options e.g. bad experiences at school
- What/who might have influenced them in what they want to do
- Explore others' expectations of what they should be doing

5) Have you had any help or support from anyone?

Probe:

- Parents, other family, careers advisor, jobcentre, teachers/tutor, friends, community groups/clubs, others
- Financial (how managing?)

- Careers advice, information on courses/ training,/jobs, schemes such as Entry to Employment, taster courses
- Emotional support, encouragement

6) What are your hopes/aspirations for the future? Where do you see yourself going?

Probe:

- What/who might have influenced these plans?
- What do you think you'll have to do to achieve these aspirations?
- Do you feel that these aspirations are realistic? Why/not? What might help/hinder?
- If they don't feel their original goal is realistic: What is a realistic goal for you do you think?

Thanks and ask young person to select a pseudonym



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