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Why can’t they be bothered? Managing and improving attendance and outcomes within a Neet Basic Skills class: A Case Study

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Abstract
The government has been insisting for some years that reducing the proportion of 16- to 19-year-olds not in education, employment or training (Neet) is a priority. Statistics available underline this concern, suggesting that during the first quarter of 2010, 17.6% of young people were Neet (Insidegovernment, 2010). Research also reminds us that being Neet between the ages of 16–19 is a major predictor of later unemployment, low income, teenage motherhood, depression and poor physical health (DCSF, 2010). Based on observations and interviews conducted with learners of a third sector training provider attending a basic skills class, this research assignment focuses on what could be done to engage and motivate young people to stay in education and training and how their transition from education to work might be managed more effectively.
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Introduction

Compared to other European countries, the UK has a history of underachievement in schools and of underinvestment in training (Cofield et al, 2008). Vocational pathways for the 50% of school leavers who cannot or do not wish to continue in full-time
education are confusing and inconsistent. Add to this a legacy of low levels of basic skills, and an incoherent and insufficiently valued skills and training system (Hutton, 2005) and it is no wonder so many of our 16-19 year olds are not in education, employment or training.

This case study is of a roll-on roll-off Basic Skills class of 10 learners, ranging in age from 16-19, who have displayed a tendency to drift in and out of education, employment and training. The class consists of learners who are participating on various schemes: Some are on an ‘education to employment’ (e2e) programme while others are on a ‘success’ programme or ‘mind the gap’ – Neet projects with different funding sources but similar in content and outcome requirement. The programmes include classes in Literacy, Numeracy, ICT and either a vocational course or vocational tasters. Which project a learner is accepted on depends on eligibility criteria such as postcode, vocational area of interest and prior attainment levels. The aim of the class is for the learners to achieve an Entry 3 or Level 1 qualification in either literacy or numeracy after which, combined with successful outcomes in the other specified areas, they are progressed to either further education, training, an apprenticeship, or even onto a different programme at the same training organisation. Most of this research was conducted in the six months before the national introduction of ‘Foundation Learning’ in September 2010, which effectively brought to an end any previous post-16 pathways. It was also conducted before the swathe of spending cuts questioned the future of many Neet projects.

My theory is that many Neet learners have multiple barriers to further education and training, often because of previous negative experiences at school. Most would like to get a job as soon as possible, often in any unskilled sector. They do not see the point in improving basic skills as they think they are not necessary in most vocational jobs they might pursue. A further reason that motivation amongst the learners is low relates to problems obtaining EMA for which some learners are not eligible mainly due to bad attendance.

To establish whether this hypothesis is correct, I decided to use mainly qualitative research methods, in this case discussion, questionnaires, and semi-structured
interviews. I was hoping to also use quantitative research traditions, where appropriate, in some kind of combination with qualitative methods, as suggested by Haggis (2008). There was a possibility that there are other factors such as the previously mentioned social and health factors, affecting the group which I researched using a more qualitative research approach, as ‘there is no point in simply having hypothesis for their own sake’ (Punch, 2009:67). As theory will be built from data, I initially analysed existing learner data in the form of archive material and conducted a discussion which I was hoping would generate themes to be used in open-ended interviews. I also created a questionnaire from this data.

The justification for this research project is that a significant number of the learners on Neet projects fail to successfully gain any qualifications either because they prematurely leave the course, have difficulties attending regularly or have other barriers preventing successful engagement. Learners are accepted on these courses with no formal qualifications. Most either left secondary school or were excluded prior to taking GCSEs. Some of the learners are youth offenders and participating in either education or training is part of a court order and not a personal choice. Other learners have an array of special learning needs that have not been formally diagnosed or statemented, such as problems concentrating, as well as weak reading and writing skills. Some display social, emotional and behavioural difficulties (SEBD). Other issues affecting motivation include personal drug use, parents who use drugs, pregnancy and teenage parenthood and well as chronic health issues. Living arrangements are often erratic, with some learners living in hostels, living with and looking after sick relatives, or being homeless, sleeping at friends’ places. Many have social workers and have spent periods of their childhood in and out of the care system.

The context is multi-fold. We have the government promoting education as both a product and a financial asset in line with the transition of our economy to a ‘knowledge economy’ (Drucker, 1969, Brown and Hesketh, 2004). At the same time, the social and economic costs of being disengaged are far reaching, with research undertaken by the Princes Trust showing that Neets costs the taxpayer £4.7 billion a year (The Princes Trust, 2007). Despite this cash injection, missing out on education,
employment or training will most likely result in a lifetime of poverty. This is also research, indicating that within the UK, long term unemployment is seen as acceptable within certain family units, even though children growing up without an employment role model are more likely to become unemployed themselves in later life (Doyle, 2010), thus continuing the cycle of poverty and disengagement.

When this research took place in the first part of 2010, there were still many funded projects providing financial incentives for 16-19 year olds to continue with some form of training. However, despite government support, the amount of Neet learners has not significantly changed; the number remained high over the whole of the previous decade at between 10% and 18% - depending on criteria used - and youth unemployment began to grow even during the so-called boom years (Gracey and Kelly, 2010).

This case study starts by examining the controversy surrounding the term 'Neet' as well as the sociological background of many young people who fall into this category. It looks at the recent history of youth disengagement and transition to adulthood, establishing that it is not in itself a new phenomenon for young people to want to leave formal education early and gain independence and preferably employment. It will also summarise recent initiatives to encourage young people to gain qualifications and training. After this review of literature, the results of the six-month long research project are presented and discussed. The views of the young people attending Neet engagement programmes are listened to as well as what the young people like and dislike about their courses, what other issues affect their attendance and engagement and what could be done to motivate them enough to improve their basic skills and attend classes more regularly. Specifically, areas such as Initial Advice and Guidance (IAG), relevance of course content and a possible mismatch between expectations, personality, and realities will be examined as well as any institutional short comings resulting in suggestions of possible strategies to manage learner engagement and addressing root causes of disengagement.
Review of Literature

In the following section, current literature surrounding the topic of educational disengagement is reviewed and the sociological and psychological implications for the young person not being in education, employment or training as well as implications for society is discussed. By reviewing and constructively analysing academic research surrounding the issues of being Neet, it attempts to provide the theoretical underpinning for this study and thus justify later suggestions on what measures can be taken to build on current government guidelines as well as improve both retention and outcomes of existing Neet programmes. Reviewing past literature and discussing previous data collected also helps fine-tune the research questions and guide the observations.

What's in a name: Should the term ‘Neet’ be used to identify young people not in employment, education or training?

What is a Neet? The House of Commons Committee (2010) reported, ‘We accept that the term “Neet” is imperfect. In particular, its use as a noun to refer to a young person can be pejorative and stigmatising. It is, however, a commonly used statistical category, and - in the absence of an appropriate alternative - we have accepted it as a first step in understanding the issues’.

The use of the acronym ‘Neet’ for young people ‘not in education, employment or training’ is controversial. For many, it is both glib and inaccurate to emphasise the heterogeneous nature of a category when discussing a group as diverse as what would be more traditionally be termed ‘unemployed young people’. Using a generic acronym tries, unsuccessfully, to avoid negative connotations, managing to sound far more condescending in the process. Furlong (2006:553) agrees that the definition of Neet is insufficient, explaining that ‘to represent vulnerable youth effectively we must either use a set of definitions that are narrower than that represented by Neet, or adopt a much broader definition that provides a basis for more far-reaching interventions’. The term Neet remains a problematic concept that defines young people by what they are not, and hides under a negatively-perceived label a heterogeneous mix of young people whose varied situations and difficulties
have not been thought through adequately (Yates and Payne, 2006). In fact, early discussions about the problem of this disengagement recognised the diversity of different groups making up the Neet population; with the focus on the different obstacles and difficulties that young people face that may be associated with exclusion and disengagement (ibid). For researchers the main disadvantage of the use of the term Neet is this lack of an agreed definition, making it difficult to make international comparisons or compare trends (Furlong, 2006). Some government definitions of the Neet group try to be more inclusive but backfire and include young people who are long-term unemployed, briefly unemployed, looking after their children or relatives, sick or disabled or with severe learning disabilities, taking time out developing artistic or musical talents, on a gap year or simply taking a short break from work or education. As Furlong (2006) puts it, ‘combines those [young people] with little control over their situation with those exercising choice’.

The term ‘Neet’ was first formally identified by the Department for Education and Schools (DfES) in the central government report ‘Transforming Youth Work’ (2002) and was created to replace the more controversial term ‘Status Zer0’. This paper was a direct result of the benefit system being changed in 1988 resulting in most under 18s left without access to unemployment benefits and with limited benefits for people under the age of 25. What should be done with these 16-24 year olds who did not want to stay on in education but could not get a job? In fact, the economical situation had been changing since the 1960s when it was still not only possible, but the norm, for many young people to leave school as soon as they could and seek a job in the unskilled (youth) sector of the labour market. But by 1988 these unskilled jobs were already starting to be outsourced to other parts of the world. The jobs market, for example, used to be able to absorb a larger number of unskilled young people. The situation now is even more difficult with both the outsourcing and with many companies in the UK shunning young people and instead increasingly encouraging older workers to either stay on or return to work – for example more than 25% of B&Q shop staff are over 50 and the company actively recruits pensioners (Matheson, 2006). This replenishment of the work force has resulted in young people having increasing difficulty in getting any kind of secure job,
especially young people without qualifications, all of which increases the risk of unemployment and disengagement, especially in young people not wanting to continue in education.

**A new class emerges**

The term Neet might be a new one but the idea of disengaged young people has been around for a long time with the Underwood Report insisting in 1955 that ‘maladjusted children are insecure and unhappy’ (The Underwood report, 1955:22).

In Victorian times there were workhouses providing a form of welfare for young people who could not rely on their families for support as well as reformatory schools or even juvenile ‘hulks’ keeping disaffected young people on the straight and narrow (Cole et al, 1998). In the middle of the previous century the burgeoning welfare state realised that not all young people would succeed in mainstream education. The Underwood report (1955:32) also states that ‘some children who are bright but not bookish find that as the work becomes more abstract and formal it does not suit them’.

Around the same time, in 1953, the Ministry of Education defined ‘maladjusted’ pupils to be those who show ‘evidence of emotional instability and psychological disturbance and require special educational treatment. Cole et al (1998:5), explain that many young people thus labelled could have equally well been described as ‘socially deprived, disruptive, disaffected, delinquent or mentally ill’.

These days, Neets might not all be ‘maladjusted’ in the traditional sense and there are numerous sub groupings within this group of young people. According to research presented at a recent Institute of Education conference, young people are more likely to disengage from education and not immediately progress onto training or employment when they are affected by a range of outside factors ranging from gang membership, care needs, drug use and dependency, teenage pregnancy and low level crime (IOE, 2010). Others agree with this, stating that the increased risk of factors such as unemployment, poor health and criminal activity is linked to young people who are Neet (Pearce & Hillman, 1998; Coles et al, 2002). Neet
disengagement is also not something that just happens at 14-16 but often sets in far earlier (Gracey and Kelly, 2010). Yates and Payne (2006) point out that the emphasis on young people who are Neet not only disguises the heterogeneity of this group, but also diverts attention away from others who, while not Neet, may also be living in fragile circumstances or tracing non-linear pathways between education and work (Cieslik and Simpson, 2006).

The classic reasons given for educational disengagement are that it is due to a combination of socio-economic deprivation as well as low educational attainment and unsuccessful previous educational experiences—which could be partly due to the young person suffering from social, emotional and behavioural difficulties (SEBD). SEBD is a broad term, open to many interpretations, not always easy to diagnose and is used mainly to refer to young people's difficulties in behaviour, emotions and relationships that are of such severity and persistence that they interfere with individuals' learning and development (Macnab et al, 2008). Within the Neet group, there is also a prevalence of Special Educational Needs (SEN). Young people with SEN are 3-4 times for likely to be excluded from school than those without SEN and those with SEN who have been excluded are less likely to stay on in full time education (Polat et al, 2001). Furthermore, young people with SEN but no statement of SEN were twice as likely to be unemployed (Cullen et al, 2009) as those without statement.

Conversely, Cole et al (1996:36) find that young people with emotional and behavioural difficulties who come from more privileged backgrounds usually have their difficulties described in terms of biological and genetic conditions, and are sometimes referred to as the ‘syndromic children’, displaying aspects of Aspergers, dyspraxia, Tourettes and ADHD. Even though this shows that SEBD can be present in young people of all backgrounds, family support can make a difference and vulnerable young people who require distinct forms of policy intervention in terms of welfare or training provision should not be grouped with the more privileged, who may not require any assistance to move back into education. The latter are what Viswanathan (2010) calls the core Neet, ‘those with social and behavioural problems including those who come from families where worklessness and unemployment is an accepted norm’.
A DCSF report (2000) states 10 key factors that can be identified amongst Neets:

i. No/unknown/not stated qualifications

ii. Excluded from school in Years 10 or 11 (not available for 18 year olds)

iii. Persistent truant in Year 11

iv. Parents' occupation being unskilled manual

v. Neither parent in full-time employment

vi. Living with neither parent or father only

vii. Living with their own children

viii. Living with a partner

ix. Parents living in rented accommodation

x. Having a disability or health problem

Racial background plays a less important role: Young Asian people were more likely to be in education at 16 with young people of Indian background the least likely to become unemployed at 18. By 18, white and black young people were least likely to be in education, with white people more likely to be in work than black people, with or without training (Middleton et al, 2005). These figures can be compared with the DCSF (2000) which states white people are less likely to be in full-time education than people from other ethnic groups at 16, 17 and 18 with Indian young people having the highest participation rates of over 90% in education or training. Young males are more likely to be Neet than young females, reflecting the gap in GCSE grades, estimated to be 15-20% in socially deprived communities, although this has narrowed in recent years (Burgess et al, 2004). Bradley and Lenton (2006) looked at how housing played a role in further education and found that people, who live in social housing where household incomes are relatively low, tend not to proceed to post-compulsory education.

Regardless of background and living arrangements however, their future could look gloomy: Being Neet between the ages of 16–19 is a major predictor of later unemployment, low income, teenage motherhood, depression and poor physical health. Vaughn (2009) cites a study in the North East, which found that 15% of long-term Neet's die within 10 years. And Neets do not come cheap. The social cost of
Neet’s are far-reaching, with research undertaken by the Princes Trust showing that Neets costs the taxpayer £4.7 billion a year (The Princes Trust, 2007).

**Sinking or Swimming: Surviving Secondary School**

While investigating secondary schools in the UK in the 1980s, organisational and management expert Charles Handy (1984) concluded that the nearest model he could compare a secondary school with was a prison, with inmates being disturbed every 40 minutes, constantly changing place of work and supervisor, no place of their own and forbidden to communicate with each other. Harber (2004) claims that schools are often violent towards children and directly involved in the active perpetration of violence in the wider society as well as ‘reproducing inequalities in race, class and gender’ (Harber, 2004:71). Bullying remains an issue, both amongst students and from teaching staff with some students reporting fear, humiliation, embarrassment and exclusion as a result of punishment from teachers (Harber, 2004). One reaction to this disaffection is that truancy rates are on the increase with 67,000 children taking unauthorised time off school on any given day (Garner, 2010).

Is this secular authoritarianism the reason why our secondary schools are such an unsuccessful experience for so many young people? Statistics seem to suggest that in almost half of state schools, fewer than 50% of students achieve the expected benchmark of 5 A*-C (Williams and Shepard, 2010; Côté and Bynner, 2008). Thirty percent of 17 year olds have no qualifications at all (Côté and Bynner, 2008). And these statistics relate to the ongoing issue of social deprivation and poverty: In 2007, 42% of school pupils on free school meals did not manage a single GCSE with grade C or above, and only 6% went on to do A-levels (Harris, 2010). This is despite the fact that research conducted on 14-16 year olds in London states that ‘the vast majority of 14–16 year old respondents viewed post-compulsory education as important, and maintained an intention to continue with it’ (Francis, 1999:315).

With this in mind, government advice for disaffected or excluded Key Stage 4 (the last two years of compulsory schooling in the UK when pupils are aged between 14 and 16 years old) students requires further investigation: It reminds us that in some
circumstances it may be more appropriate for these young people to attend Further Education (FE) colleges instead of seeking re-admission to a mainstream school, as ‘the different atmosphere and older peer group [of further education] can motivate some young people disaffected with school’ (DfEE, 1999a, Macnab et al, 2008). With secondary schools being offered this acceptable system of ‘dumping’ any students deemed as disruptive or disengaged who would quite likely negatively affect all-important KS4 GCSE outcomes, it is not surprising that the system is controversial. Students may not have a choice in the decision and might feel that a transfer to a different school worsens their difficulties (Mcnab et al, 2008). As well as within FE colleges, about 70,000 pupils are currently also taught in Pupil Referral Units (PRUs) after being excluded from mainstream schools. Most are boys aged 11 to 15 and just 1% of all pupils achieve the benchmark five C grade GCSEs (Lipsett, 2008). According to Curtis (2008) it costs around £15,000 a year to educate a child in a PRU, yet the vast majority leaves with no qualifications at all. The question is why this policy fails to take into account the educational as well as the social, emotional and behavioural needs of these young people. The advantage of the FE sector is that it at least already has a traditional role of offering learning support to students failed by the school system. The funding formula which allocates funding according to ‘entry’ ‘on programme’ and ‘completion’ criteria also encourages FE colleges to give students all the support, guidance and counselling that they need to achieve recognised qualifications (Hyland, 1998).

Daniels et al (2003) argue that the real key to success in this area is relationship building between young people and skilled, committed adults. This positive approach is seen as the foundation for addressing young people’s social, emotional and behavioural difficulties and assists educational development and more general plans for social inclusion. For this cohort of young people, who are often very suspicious of and antipathetic towards many teachers, entering an environment where staff have no desire to teach them - as they may have experienced throughout secondary school - could prove disastrous. Staff members’ genuine support of the young people was seen as an important factor in the success of provision in further education colleges (Mcnab et al, 2008).
In a further attempt to find out more about what puts young people off education, The Nuffield Review established the ‘engaging youth’ inquiry with Rathbone in 2007 which undertook workshops with young people in the Neet groups and those working with them. The inquiry aimed to establish why it was so difficult to get young people to remain in education and training, why they experienced difficulties finding and keeping jobs as well as why policy decisions directed at these groups had such limited impact. Key results of the inquiry included that those in the Neet group had similar aspirations to other young people, they saw their position as being primarily related to the authority structure in schools and their relationships with adults and finally concluded that they would rather be in work than continue in education. (Hayward et al, 2008).

**Transitional changes: Delaying adulthood**

In recent years a consensus has grown amongst social scientists that the transition to adulthood is extending and that ‘emerging adulthood’ (Arnett, 2000) is taking longer, with young people gaining independence from their parents later than ever before (Côté and Bynner, 2008, Scabini et al, 2007). Scabini et al (2007:18) goes on to explain that ‘the extension of the stage of life spanning the transition from childhood to adulthood is an increasingly common phenomenon in industrialised countries’. This means that adolescence and young adulthood are becoming internally unbalanced and increasingly characterised by ‘inconsistencies, tension and a tendency towards disintegration’ (Scabini et al, 2007:71). Adulthood requires a whole range of changes in a person’s life, such as ‘reaching independence, mastering the ability to form relationships, to make decisions for and about themselves and to be responsible for the consequences’ (Polat et al, 2001:81). This prolonging of adolescence is very different to the transition to adulthood that took place in the past, which was clearly mapped by well-defined markers that occurred in a clear sequence: finishing school, entering the labour market and finally, getting married (Scabini et al, 2007). The transition was not only clearly mapped but also took place at an earlier age, especially in the traditional working classes (Jones, 2009). And there are consequences to this lengthening of puberty. One of the
consequences is the increasing importance on family support. Scabini et al (2007:6) explain that,

‘this slowing down of the transition has given more power to a young person’s family and depends on the person’s family for a successful outcome’.

The extended dependence many young people have on their parents has created an even greater polarisation within the 14-19 age groups (Wilson et al, 2008). On the one hand, there are those whose extended transitions to adulthood are supported by their parents, possibly with an attitude of ‘flexible protection’ (Scabini 1995 in Scabini et al, 2007) and on the other hand there are those unsupported young people who leave education early and have less support (Bynner, 2001). Though a return to dependency on the parents has become more common, it is still contrary to the work ethic and notions of self-sufficiency which form a part of working class culture, and, at least traditionally, a return to dependency is seen as a failure when associated with unemployment (Jones, 2009). This cultural work ethic has also evolved amongst families perceived of as ‘socially excluded’, within which the parents might not be in employment, their children might not be in education, employment or training but there is still an expectation for the children to gain independence from the parents – even if it involves moving into a dependence on the welfare system with long term unemployment often the only option. These days is not uncommon for there to be a third and fourth generation of unemployed within a family and it is well-documented that children growing up without an employment role model are more likely to become unemployed themselves in later life (Doyle, 2010).

This is not helped by government policies which have raised the age threshold for entry into independent adulthood but have not been matched with legislation explicitly extending parental responsibilities to this point (Jones, 2009). The result is that there are gaps in social protection. For example, though parents in England have a legal responsibility for children under the age of 18 they are not required by law to care for a child beyond the age of 16. Add to this the long-standing class differences in patterns of transition to independence and the long-standing patterns of parental support which make the confused messages being sent out to these young people become clearer.
Many young people also have feelings of ambivalence about adulthood that are unrelated to their economic situation (Arnett, 2004). They regard adulthood as attractive in some ways, in the security and stability it seems to promise and the increased status it confers. However, they also regard adult responsibilities as a mixed blessing. It is satisfying to be able to stand on your own two feet, make your own decisions, and run your own life, but at the same time, adult responsibilities are onerous—the daily grind of going to work, paying your own bills, washing your own clothes, making your own meals, and so on. Furthermore, to many emerging adults becoming an adult means the end of possibilities, the end of spontaneity. These changes in the way young people are maturing have resulted in a dissonance in both expectations and reality between many young people and their parents and carers and a resulting lack of support (Bynner, 2001).

**Education, education, education?**

Despite some dissenting voices claiming that, ‘*there is nothing inherently good about education*’ (Harber, 2004:7), the previous government put education at the top of its political agenda, announcing during its 2007 Queen's Speech that it intended to raise the compulsory school age to 18 which was followed by an draft legislative paper a year later (Preparing Britain for the Future, 2008). Prioritising knowledge and promoting education as both a product and a financial asset was an essential reaction to the changing rules of business competitiveness, ostensibly resulting in the transition of our economy to a ‘knowledge economy’ (Drucker, 1969, Brown and Hesketh, 2004).

Despite this concern for extended educational engagement and the focus on wealth creation based on brains not brawn (Brown and Hesketh, 2000), many educators and social scientists continue to question whether it is always a ‘good’ thing for young people to stay in education for as long as possible or whether there are other agendas at work. Harber (2004:17) says that, ‘formal education and schooling is not automatically and inevitably of benefit to individuals and societies’. Wilson (2002) agrees there is some confusion surrounding the importance of education, stating, ‘if education is a good thing, it is not immediately clear what those reasons are’. 
explaining further that there are still some very serious questions to be asked about the ‘goodness’ of education. Within the field of further education, Preston and Hammond (2003) state that there is too much of an obsession with documenting and achieving an educational standard, claiming that their research findings indicate that practitioners do not consider that [studying for] vocational subjects leads to wider benefits. This builds on research originally conducted in the late 1960s by Berg (1971) who argues that the familiar correlation between educational training and job performance is a myth, with little evidence that better-qualified employees were more productive. And there is no doubt, according to Brown and Hesketh (2004:6), that ‘the demand for high-skilled, high-waged jobs has been exaggerated’.

This sceptical approach to post-compulsory education is in direct contrast to the human capital model as originally described by Becker (1964), which states that an individual will invest in more education when the discounted marginal return from doing so is positive. This form of social and personal investment means that the advantages of education have to make it financially viable when taking into account lost earnings and outgoings such as student loans compared with the increase in wage expected at the end. This is the theory and despite the fact that the days are gone when only the privileged few were educated beyond their teenage years and education has become a mass pursuit, the fact remains that many young people would rather just get out there and earn a living. According to Field (2007), many Neets say the rot began at school where no one took seriously their wish to go out to work at the first opportunity. All the effort was to get them to stay on in education, in part reflecting the political commitment to extend opportunity to all (Brown and Hesketh, 2004). This obsession with knowledge is relatively recent: In the 1960s, it was possible to leave school at 15 and get a job. In sociological terms this is termed a ‘fast-track transition’ (Bynner et al, 2002). Typically, the young person would leave school at minimum age and enter the youth labour market, continuing with traditional working class traditions that are, as previously discussed, increasingly ambitious to sustain. It is difficult these days to successfully complete a fast-track transition to adulthood and it is many of these failed fast-track transitioners who end up as Neets (Bynner et al, 2002). There is a general growing complexity of youth transitions with weakening of full-time routes through education and training and a growth of part-
time and mixed-patterns of participation (Furlong 2006:557). The knowledge economy, conjuring a world of ‘smart people, in smart jobs, doing smart things’ (Brown and Hesketh, 2004:1) is increasingly putting pressure on young people to attempt a ‘slow-track’ transition (Bynner et al, 2002), staying on in post-compulsory education and delaying both work and starting a family.

As previously discussed, there are many young people who want to go to work as soon as they can. A lot of these young people are bright and entrepreneurial and want to get out into the world and run their own lives. They do not want to stay on in education. This perceived underachievement of young men, in particular, is in the face of international competition and globalisation a source of political and educational concern. But should we be worried? In a small but interesting ethnographic study of 12 white males in their final year of school in Manchester, attitudes to post-compulsory education were examined. In the survey, aspects of compulsory education appear to be inadequate in preparing school leavers for the labour market. Student awareness of labour market conditions was poor (Barrett, 1999). This lose-lose scenario implies that post-compulsory education does not always prepare future employees for the labour market, and it also might not even guarantee a better job in the first place.

Here we have the discrepancy: On the one hand there are young people, eager to go to work as soon as possible, on the other, this combination of changing expectations of industry and government policies is forcing them to stay on in education and training to feed the economy in industrialised countries which has changed dramatically in recent decades, away from a manufacturing base and towards valuing knowledge and information skills with occupations increasingly requiring post-compulsory education or training.

This is a possible further cultural problem within the UK which leads to exclusion from employment. Doyle (2010) is convinced that this problem stems from raised expectations resulting in a belief that an individual should not be expected to undertake certain types of employment i.e. menial tasks. This idea of over-selling your abilities finds its roots 15-20 years ago when job titles were frequently upgraded
to reflect an altering perception of us as individuals. Refuse collectors have since become known as sanitary ‘engineers’, salesmen referred to themselves as marketing ‘executives’. We have become a nation of employment snobs. Neither the job specification nor the salary changed, but attitudes did, resulting in cheap and increasingly competent migrant labour filling the menial job vacancies. Immigration minister Damian Green (2010) recently stated, ‘It is a dangerous path we have gone down where we say that there are some jobs we want done but the British people just will not do them’.

In summary, the challenge confronting the government is to enhance the employability of its workforce. With high-paying manufacturing jobs mostly going to developing countries or eliminated by new technologies and with menial unskilled jobs going to motivated migrant workers, the economic prospects of young adults who have not obtained higher education are grim, and do not lend themselves to the establishment of a stable adult life (Arnett, 2006). However, post-compulsory education does not guarantee jobs for all those who do manage to develop the appropriate employability skills and should not imply that if they fail to find suitable employment or become Neet they are incompetent. Francis (1999) also argues that positioning education as a solution to a multitude of problems should not be automatically accepted without due consideration as this has a profound impact on students’ current constructions of education and on their future lives. If anything, this obsession with education has created a new burden of responsibility that has shifted to the individual who now has a moral obligation to be employable (Brown and Hesketh, 2004).

**Post-compulsory retention: Do financial incentives work?**

Offering cash rewards and gifts to encourage young people to go to school, is not new. In the years after 1870, rewards were offered by schools to encourage attendance, among which were ‘certificates of merit and the return of fees’ (Ellis, 1985:34 in Harber, 2004:22). During the past few years, there were further attempts both at keeping young people
in education and reengaging Neets who had left formal education. ‘Supporting young people to achieve’ provided an overview of the systems of financial support available to young people, including the Neet group (H M Treasury, DfES, and DWP, 2004). Not since the 1988 Social Security legislation, which withdrew mainstream entitlement to Income Support among 16 and 17 year olds, while at the same time re-classifying this group of young people as Neet, had there been a review of the financial needs of young people who do not participate in education, employment or training. The review of financial support for 16-19 year olds recommended the need to offer financial support alongside the introduction of a series of approved activities as a means to encourage greater levels of participation in mainstream education and training provision among this group of young people. Provision included e2e, a full-time activity offering support and training to young people in preparation for apprenticeship training. Financial support is also available to young people who are ‘estranged’ from their parents and/or who drop out of full-time training or employment, through the payment of a Bridging Allowance (Maguire and Thompson, 2006).

The impetus to pilot a new system of financial support targeted at young people in post-16 education was driven both by a need to boost post-16 education participation rates and by evidence which highlighted the chaotic state of discretionary funding available to 16-19 year olds in full-time education. The introduction of an Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA) scheme in 2004 was to provide a package of support for young people from low income families who undertake a recognised full-time course at a college or school after the age of 16 and it aimed to remove credit constraints that might restrict access to education for young people from lower income families. The main constraints are that participants attend regularly and work towards achieving a recognised qualification.

There is conflicting evidence on whether the EMA scheme had the intended success. Maguire and Rennison (2005) found that the evidence available from the evaluation from the EMA pilots indicated that funding young people from lower income families to remain in full-time education beyond compulsory schooling was an effective measure in preventing some young people entering the Neet group. On
the other hand it appeared that once the learner had disengaged, there was no going back as they explain, ‘there was little evidence to suggest that the EMA, in its early pilot phase, was effective in re-engaging young people back into education between the ages of 16 and 18, once they had become Neet’. Also, non-participants who had disliked education and studying and those with a high motivation to enter employment or take up work-based training were unlikely to be influenced by the prospect of EMA (Legard et al, 2001). Knight and White (2003) also found that amongst many young people who left post-compulsory education early, EMA was not a strong reason to stay in education. For males in deprived areas, the impact of EMA appears particularly sparse and weak (Choudry et al, 2007). There is further indication that EMA does not significantly reduce the 16-19 Neet population, with Maguire and Thompson, (2006:33) explaining that ‘increases in post-16 participation and retention rates were achieved by drawing young people from the work/training route rather than through making significant inroads into reducing the Neet group population’. This raises alarm bells about young people being ‘warehoused’ in education, as opposed to providing young people with the opportunity to make progress in terms of qualification enhancement within post-16 education. In addition, the increase in the size of the Neet group populations in EMA pilot areas among 18 and 19 year olds needs to be noted. Maguire and Thompson (2006) suggest that EMA could be holding numbers of young people in education, many of whom subsequently fail to make successful transitions beyond their participation and retention in post-16 education. And we should not forget that despite incentives such as the EMA and other policy attempts to engage more young people in education and work-based training, the proportion of young people who are categorised as Neet has remained relatively unchanged since the mid-1990s (Maguire and Thompson, 2006).

However, for many young people the impact of receiving a regular weekly allowance has a positive impact, especially in terms of punctuality, attendance, retention and levels of achievement (Knight and White, 2003). The scheme can also have an impact on the commitment of young people to study and do well and it encourages some young people with a fragile motivation to study to remain in education who might otherwise have dropped out (Legard et al, 2001). Both males and females in
relatively disadvantaged areas experience higher participation and attainment, and these improvements are ‘nontrivial relative to their base levels’ (Choudry et al, 2007:27). It appears that parents and young people are broadly in agreement with the aim of the scheme to encourage young people to continue in post-compulsory education. Families on low incomes, especially, are more likely than those in the higher income band to stress the financial burden that this imposed on them, viewing EMA as a big incentive to stay on in education. In addition, there is substantial evidence that the structure of the EMA initiative, combining a financial incentive with a clearly enforced learning agreement, has an impact on the way in which young people participate in post–compulsory education (Legard et al, 2001). A poll for the National Union of Students (NUS) even suggested that 61% of EMA recipients would not be able to continue without the allowance and that

‘41% of recipients in post-compulsory education are unable to cover the essential costs of their course despite the EMA’ (Murray, 2010).

As mentioned earlier, offering cash incentives to encourage attendance is not a new development and many secondary schools also offer cash and other incentives to attend regularly, for example, a school in Halifax offers £80 if no day is taken off throughout the year (Harber, 2004) and the new academies also utilise their financial independence to offer incentives for attendance. Results indicate that financial incentives such as the EMA have, at least in part, met the policy objectives of increasing participation and retention in full-time post-16 education and have reduced the number of young people who become Neet. In addition, it appears EMA has a disproportionate, positive, impact upon the destinations of specific target groups who tend to be under-represented in post-16 education, namely, young people from lower income families and young men (Middleton et al, 2005). The comparative success of EMA remains short-lived with the new government stopping the EMA scheme to new applicants from January 2011. Instead, depending on your viewpoint, EMA will be replaced by either ‘learner support funds ... available through schools, colleges and training providers to help students who most need it to continue in learning’ (The Department of Education, 2010) or EMA will be replaced ‘by a tiny tin of hardship money for unhappy college principals to disburse in extremis’ (Toynbee, 2010)’.
Improving employment prospects: Is increasing ‘Identity Capital’ the answer?

Many countries have introduced education reforms during the past few years as a result of the emphasis on human capital in recent economic planning (Bassanini and Scarpetta, 2002). Is it really that important to gain an increasing number of qualifications to even get an entry-level job? It appears the modern labour market requires job applicants to display and an increasing amount of ‘identity capital’ (Côté 1996), a term that Côté uses to describe a combination of a person’s educational and social capital or worth. He explains that ‘identity capital’ refers to two types of assets, the tangible assets such as qualifications, peer groups and good looks and the intangible ones such as the self control, confidence in oneself and a sense of purpose. The tangible assets can clearly influence the intangible assets.

It is useful to be aware of identity capital as a concept. This is reflected to a certain extent in the Neet projects all of which include elements designed to improve overall identity capital such as improving confidence as well as working on personal development and communication skills, all important soft skills for young people wishing to progress. Another consequence of this increased emphasis on ‘identity capital’ is the extension of education and training while young people acquire the qualifications and skills that will increase their identity capital while enhancing their employability.

September guarantee or an empty promise: What programmes out there are having a positive impact on reducing the number of Neets?

Although the luxury of the ‘September Guarantee’, a government commitment to offer a ‘suitable place in education or training to all young people reaching the statutory school leaving age in either 2009 or 2010’ (DCSF, 2010), has now been abandoned in the fervour of spending cuts, this section will attempt to evaluate current and past education and training options for young people, as well as the support that is available to them.
The policy focus of previous governments on the 14-19 age groups did at least reflect some concern about the importance of the whole transition process. The Dearing Report (Dearing, 1994) preceded changes in the national curriculum that recognised the need for a balance in both vocational and academic education and qualifications. One example was that for Key Stage 4 the school’s discretion should be extended even further, with art, geography, history and music made optional, giving students the choice of studying more vocational subjects at this level (Dearing, 1994). The former government initiated several strategies to ensure that the education system was also appropriate both for young people whose interests and talents lay in vocational areas as well as the socially disadvantaged young people who faced other issues pitting them at a greater risk of becoming Neet (Cullen et al, 2009). As well as the September Guarantee, further strategies included the creation of 35,000 additional apprenticeships and the investment of £650 million in financial support to 16-18 year olds. We look at here some of the options available through the September Guarantee.

**Sixth form college** is the post-16 option of choice for a standard academic route appealing to students with good passes in English and Maths (A*-C) if they want to continue to A-Levels and higher education. However, if a young person is at risk of becoming Neet, for example because of particular barriers to engagement, previous spells of inactivity or because they have been excluded from school or are in temporary employment they will be approached by the **Connexions service** and offered advice and guidance. This service was established in 2001 as a result of the demise of previous ‘Youth Training Schemes’ (YTS), which resulted in an expansion in counselling services for young people, such as this one, specifically targeting young people from disadvantaged backgrounds (Côté and Allahar, 2007). Despite being intended to cover the needs of all young people, it was given a specific target to reduce by 10% the number of 16–18 year-olds not in education, employment or training (Connexions Service National Unit, 2002). Connexions was envisaged as a method to improve transition by providing more support over an extended period and avoid the lack of progression and danger of not being in education training or work (Dyson et al, 2009). Evaluations have since shown that schools and colleges do not
have the capacity (or sometimes the willingness) to provide guidance to the majority of young people deemed ‘at risk’ to enable them to make appropriate decisions about their post compulsory options (Morris et al, 2001). The National Audit Office (DfES, 2004) reported that in nearly two-thirds of the 580 schools they surveyed, careers guidance was being delivered by staff without formal qualifications for the role, and that over half of the schools said they were unable, due to time pressures, to find space within the curriculum for careers education lessons. As well as providing insights into their decision-making, the study also revealed the absence of an adequate support system to assist young people while they establish the advantage and disadvantages of the alternative routes open to them (Beck et al, 2006).

Further Education Colleges are ‘the real powerhouse of opportunity and second chances: picking up those who failed at school, finding those not in education, employment or training and giving them something to aim for alongside the technical high-flyers’ (Toynbee, 2010). Two-thirds of students drawing EMA are at FE colleges and two-thirds of all those aged 16-19 study in an FE college (Toynbee, 2010). This is also where the discrepancy in funding lies: FE A-level students get £4,631 per head, while regular sixth form colleges get £5,650 per head, although the FE colleges teach twice as many of the socially disadvantaged (Toynbee, 2010).

The entry to employment (e2e) course was recently abandoned in favour of Foundation Learning which was developed for low attaining 14-to 19-year olds (as well as 19- to 24-year olds with high-level special needs) to help raise their participation, attainment and progression. There have been a number of e2e-like engagement projects available, mostly running under different names such as ‘success’ and ‘mind the gap’, most of them with no overarching qualification; instead young people work on a personalised programme that should lead to a mix of small, flexible qualifications, as a basis for progression to further learning or employment.

Foundation learning can be delivered in schools and colleges, or by private or third-sector training providers (Department for Education, 2010). Foundation Learning is supposedly more relevant than previous programmes, realising that
teaching subjects such as ICT, Literacy and Numeracy discreetly is not as engaging as embedding these basic skills into vocational subjects. One wonders whether instead of constantly changing government policies it would be better to follow the ideas of Lave and Wenger, (1991) and introduce the learning of technical and social skills associated with being able to do or make things in the context of a real, productive environment. But Foundation Learning at least attempts a further step towards making learning relevant, as the provision of teaching vocational skills was previously often de-contextualised, with abstracted forms of learning that did little to engender enthusiasm, especially amongst urban young people.

**Apprenticeships and employment with training to NVQ Level** are the current buzzwords. Unlike in many other European countries, young people can theoretically still leave education at 16 to enter a labour market where there is no obligation of any form of training (Beck et al, 2006). But an apprenticeship combines on-the-job training with a national vocational qualification (NVQ). The government funds employers for the cost of training school-leaver apprentices in the 16-18 age brackets, while it partly funds those aged 19 and above. Apprenticeships vary considerably in terms of availability quality and likelihood of completion. Only one third of apprentices completes their programme and achieves the prescribed qualifications (Apprenticeships Task Force, 2005). The changing nature of the UK economy with its decline in manufacturing and expansion of the service sectors means that many apprenticeships have no real validity, a fact confirmed by Beck et al (2006) who conclude that they offer not much more than induction training. Apprenticeships take different lengths of time to complete, for example it can take three years to complete an engineering apprenticeship and maybe a year to complete an apprenticeship in retailing. Because good quality apprenticeships provide a strong platform for lifelong learning and career progression young people should be given more detailed information about how to compare work-based pathways with full-time education. At the same time, some sectors may result in very limited opportunities for career advancement (Beck et al, 2006) and this all needs to be made explicit when choosing an apprenticeship. An alternative to an apprenticeship is work-based training. Research conducted by Anderson et al (2006) suggest that many young people would respond better to working for a salary and
given accreditation for skills learned while on the job. Volunteering has also been used as a way of integrating Neets into community and working life. Schemes involve getting young people to carry out repair work and other cleaning work as well as to do two days work a week on personal development. This usually includes studying or training. The aim is to give them experience of work, while improving their skills with a view to getting a job (LG, 2010). In May 2010, the new coalition government announced plans to introduce a National Citizen Service, a project that to provide all 16 year olds an opportunity to develop skills and give them experience of the work place (Insidegovernment, 2010), although it is not clear whether this would be as an extended work placement or a form of volunteering.

Not all available programmes to reengage Neets have been successful and there have been casualties. The Social Exclusion Unit (1999) proposed a qualification referred to as ‘Graduation’ which aimed to reduce the number of Neets by offering a qualification that included a selection of five both academic and non-academic components including key skills in communication, maths and ICT to a Level 2 standard (Cullen, et al 2009). The project did not take off with Lindsay and Maguire (2002:4) establishing that it would put the Neet group at an even greater disadvantage,

‘as the most disadvantaged young people at 16 are likely to have the greatest challenges to achieve graduation’.

Despite the controversy surrounding many issues affecting the changes in transition and the social and academic pressure on young people to stay on in education and training, increasing the proportion of young people who successfully complete post-compulsory education is not only a means of reducing the so-called skills gap (Keep and Mayhew, 1999) but also crucial if young people want to become employable in the future. Young people who drop out of post-compulsory education will have missed opportunities for acquiring skills in the labour market via apprenticeships and government-sponsored training programmes, which are unlikely to be abandoned completely. Consequently, dropouts may be forced into dead end jobs or unemployment, including long-term unemployment (Bradley and Lenton, 2006).
The question that will be examined later within the research is how young people who have both cognitive barriers in engaging in the educational process as well as often very physical and real barriers impeding successful participation, can be both inspired and motivated to improve their attendance in a Basic Skills class which will in turn help them get onto apprenticeships and training programmes and avoid a lifetime of unemployment.
Methodology

Justification in using a case study as a research paradigm

The research presented in this study takes the form of a case study set within an interpretative paradigm enabling the research to capture the complexity and the unique aspects of the case. Case study research is often accused of lacking generalisability to a wider context in comparison to positivist research data. Critics of case studies believe that the study of a small number of cases is not adequate in establishing reliability or generality of findings. However, Yin (1994) explains that case study results can not only help explain complex causal links of real-life situations, but also describe the real-life context in which the intervention occurs, the intervention itself as well as situations in which the intervention being evaluated has no clear set of outcomes. Bassey (2002:108) feels that the definition of a case study needs ‘pulling into shape’ and has created a lengthy definition of an educational case study that includes the words ‘localised’, ‘interesting’ and ‘worthwhile’, which he feels should all be adjectives that apply to this particular kind of qualitative research paradigm. Even though the study of a small number of cases may not always be adequate in establishing reliability or generality of findings, a case study is a well-suited methodology for this chosen topic.

Case studies can be used to build upon, produce and to challenge theory, or to describe an object or phenomenon. They can also be complex, involving multiple sources of data and may produce large amounts of data for analysis. The six sources of data identified by Yin (1994) are documentation, archival records, interviews, direct observation, participant observation, and physical artefacts. One of the reasons multiple sources of data are collected is triangulation of evidence. Triangulation increases the validity and reliability resulting in reproducibility of data and corroborates the data gathered from different sources. When data is collected by different methods and still produces similar meanings, this implies that the research methods used have not influenced the content of the data. Reliability means that standard techniques are described and used so any difference in answers relates to differences in the research respondents and not the way in which
the research instruments are used. All data collected needs to be organised and documented so that other researchers are able to use the material based on the descriptions contained in the documentation.

This case study was conducted over a six-month period at a training provider in London. The training provides training both on 16-19 year old Neet projects as well as projects aimed at other welfare to work projects. As with many post-compulsory training providers students to not attend a purpose-built college building but are invited to attend classes in an office block. There is no canteen, no common room, but a KFC nearby provides lunch for all students enrolled on courses. There are at any given time up to 30 young people enrolled on Neet projects. As discussed above, a case study works well as a paradigm for this research partly because of the comparatively small size of the group.

Review of methods of data collection and analysis

Data was collected using mixed methods and initially included analysing archival records (10) which are kept on each of the ten students involved in the study. These ‘learner files’ include a number of different information sources and are made up of a record of the Initial Advice and Guidance (IAG) discussed with each student as well as personal details, academic records, Individual Learning Plans (ILPs), attendance
records, regular reviews, reports conducted by the Connexions advisors as well as the results of individual risk assessments conducted on students. The **archival records** also include notes of conversations between staff at the training provider and social workers, probation officers and Connexions advisors. There are also comments on why the student left secondary school prematurely, usually excluded as a result of repeated absence, fighting or behaviour. They are confidential and remain in a locked filing system when not in use. This information was put into a chart for easy analysis (**appendix 1**). **Archival records** were also partly used to complete a table analysing the presence of the ‘ten key factors identified amongst Neets’ as decided by the DCSF (2000) (**appendix 3**).

The information from appendix 1 and 3 was triangulated with the results of a **semi-structured group discussion** (20 minutes; **appendix 2**) during which, according to Punch (2009:147),

> ‘the role of the researcher changes […], functioning more as a moderator or facilitator and less as an interviewer.’

During this discussion, the group was provided with topics, questions and asked to suggest solutions to problems. Next, individual **semi-structured interviews** (20 mins each; **appendix 5**), were conducted, with the most important elements of these being the degree of structure and how deep the interview goes (Punch 2009). This type of interview was chosen instead of a structured interview so respondents did not have to

> ‘fit their feelings and experiences into the researcher’s categories’ (Cohen et al 2007:271),

Within the semi-structured interview, however, there is a varied order of questions with the interviewer allowing prompts, probes, rephrasing, and respondent comments. Cohen et al (2007) remind us that this flexibility can result in different interviewee responses and reduce reliability and validity. These interviews explored the respondents’ reflections on growing up, previous experiences in education, issues that had affected their relationship with teachers and other students, problems they faced in their personal lives that affected attendance and were potential barriers to engaging and their aspirations and plans for the future and were fed into a **structured questionnaire** (10x20 minutes **appendix 4**). In general, the larger the size of the sample, the more structured, closed and numerical the questionnaire. The
smaller the size of the sample, the more word-based and open the questionnaire can be (Cohen et al, 2007). Despite the small sample, the questionnaire used here is structured, making it easy to analyse with multiple choice, Likert scale and yes/no questions. The reason was that an unstructured questionnaire could have been perceived as more work and too much like a literacy test. It was also designed to give the students the possibility to respond to potential issues anonymously. The respondents were observed and results noted in an informal diary throughout the research period from February until July 2010. These notes focussed on issues affecting attendance, personal issues that created barriers to learning as well as when and why students either join or leave this roll-on roll-off course. The mixed methods chosen reflected the potential sensitivity of the issues likely to be raised and also tried to reflect the fact that issues affecting attendance were very much part of the participants’ lives. Finally, these results were triangulated to create a narrative.

**Ethical considerations**

Honesty, integrity and transparency in accordance with Bera (2004) are crucial elements of this research. All written work such as transcripts of conversations and questionnaires was held securely and kept for reference purposes. Interaction with participants took place within the training organisation and was kept as transparent as possible throughout and given the option of being involved in the research or withdrawing. At any stage of the research, both the students and staff of the training organisation were offered complete access to any research conducted thus far. Data was also collected clearly, with all data kept and filed in case it was needed. Findings were also be displayed and reported in a clear way.

Before commencing the research, permission and approval was obtained from both the line manager and the assignment was discussed with the managing director of the training organisation where the research took place. It was agreed that relevant findings would be shared with all stakeholders in the form of a presentation at the end of the research. The name of the training provider would not be mentioned at all in the project on in the interviews. The details I used from confidential student folders
would be kept securely in the office and not taken home. It was also discussed that the aim of the research was to improve the student experience and that any criticism would be strictly constructive.

The students who formed the sample of 10 were informed of the reason behind the research and they were asked for approval and letters were sent out to their parents and these were followed up with a telephone call. The students were informed that the research consisted of a selection of students and the students were asked to confirm that they agreed with this method. While research took place, students were encouraged to talk about issues affecting them at any time. Wherever student and colleagues were quoted directly, permission was requested and the final version was shown for confirmation.

One of the key aspects was confidentiality. Many students discussed issues which were and will remain confidential. These issues are confidential for many reasons. Some should remain confidential because they describe personal aspects of the students’ lives. Some aspects might potentially have legal ramifications with information being shared on drug habits and criminal behaviour. But most of the confidentiality is because the learners talk a lot about themselves and their experiences in life to members of pastoral staff at the training organisation and it is crucial that they have their privacy respected. This privacy will be respected by having no names of people, schools, education providers, care homes, ages and dates of birth or boroughs mentioned in interviews. Interviews and questionnaires were shown to the students soon after taking place and with numbers instead of names. Any private information that is held will be held completely privately for and destroyed or returned to the student or training provider six months after the research has been submitted. Results of data will only be used for this research assignment and not shared with any third parties.

It was challenging to research the learners who rarely attended class. The strategy for this was for me to personally invite them all to come to a special discussion workshop, which included a snacks and drinks, during which we had a group discussion during which issues were raised as well as decisions on how further
research could be conducted. In actual fact, most of the sample were happy to participate and as with the course itself, took part when they wanted to rather than when I requested it.

Selection of sample

The sample of students involved in this research study was chosen according to the definition of a ‘purposive sample’. A purposive sample is a sample selected in a deliberative and non-random fashion to achieve a certain goal. The goal here was to consciously seek out respondents at both ends of a spectrum, as well as some in the middle, to insure that all viewpoints are adequately represented. Some subjects had also been preferentially recruited as they have the best knowledge and experience of various education and training options offered to Neets. A purposive sample shares the same weaknesses as a convenience sample and there might be some difficulties making strong quantitative inferences from such a sample. Within this sample, it was decided to choose six male students and three female students as this approximately reflects the gender ratio of students generally participating on the e2e courses. The students chosen for the sample come from very different backgrounds. Two female students are parents and one of them is currently pregnant with her second child. One of the boys is a father. Some students live at home and care for their parents, either because of ill health or substance use. Amongst one of these students, in particular, there often appeared to be a concern that they would be needed while away from home and the ill health of parent was used as a reason to keep mobile phones on in class. The ethnic backgrounds reflect the part of London they live in, multi-cultural, Polish, Irish traveller, Turkish, the other students are of mixed heritage or Afro-Caribbean and African heritage.

Had I wanted to explore the training provider and the culture amongst the tutors, I would have organised the research differently and would have interviewed staff and observed more lessons but for this case study I was interested in the learners and what motivated them or hindered them attending the Basic Skills classes I also thought of the option of conducting a deeper and broader ethnographic study but the
time was limited to six months and because of the changing government policies this form of case study seemed the most relevant.

There is always a danger of these young people leaving the course without prior warning. Firstly, this is because e2e is by its very nature a roll-on roll-off course lasting between 12 and 24 weeks. Some learners leave and then return, often on a similar course with different funding. Some students also have other barriers affecting attendance and completion for example they have small children or parents to care for or health or housing problems. Some have problems with criminal activities. But the sample was not chosen because they displayed good attendance, as it was also important for the sample to reflect a spectrum of Neets with different issues affecting their attainment and motivation. The individuals were also chosen because they were from a variety of backgrounds. All had had negative experiences at secondary school and had either left before completing GCSEs or had left with very few GCSEs that were below a C Grade.

Outline of the research sequence/process that was used to gather data

The first step in the research sequence was to request permission and ethical approval from the management of the training organisation where the research was set to take place. This was basically a formality, but because of the training organisation itself going through a restructuring programme, the importance of confidentiality was stressed. The second step was to research the background of the topic and the feasibility of the study. It was important to select ten students from the training organisation who would be used as the purposive sample. These students were then briefed on any ethical issues and a discussion was held on aspects such as confidentiality but also openness and honesty. The next step was to create a time frame, in this case six months for the research and a further six months to analyse the research and review relevant literature. After this, the archival records of the 10 representatives were written up in the form of a chart. The sample was invited to take part in an open discussion to establish themes that would inform the rest of the research. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the students and later followed up by a questionnaire. Throughout the whole period, the students were observed in a variety of environments, to assess aspects of attendance, issues
affecting attendance, ill health, attitudes to learning and motivation as well as which aspects of the engagement programme they enjoyed. The results of all these methods of date collection were triangulated. This data was then analysed and the findings were reported in narrative form. Finally, conclusions were drawn as to how attendance and outcomes could be managed and improved within a Neet functional skills class. As previously discussed, numbers as pseudonyms were employed throughout and identifying details were removed or altered.
Findings and discussion of findings

The triangulated results of the data collected from both tables and combined with the results of the discussion, interview and questionnaire are presented in the form of the following narrative. This is partly because of the qualitative approach taken to data collecting and partly because it seemed useful to hear the stories behind the statistics and to hear how the representatives see their lives.

The findings are initially structured around some of the archive data available for the learners. I have only included data that was directly relevant to the research question. Ethnic background, for example, was not included in the analysis of findings. The archive data is presented as a table (Appendix 1: table of archive data). I thought it would be interesting to establish whether this sample group conformed to the government expectations of how Neets could be identified and created a further chart assessed these factors (Appendix 3: DCSF ‘10 key factors’). After analysing these two charts, I initiated a discussion, transcribed the recording of it, (Appendix 2: transcription of 20-minute discussion) from which various themes emerged. These themes informed the resulting questionnaire (Appendix 4: questionnaire of 20-minute 2xA4 pages) and interview (Appendix 5) to clarify certain points. Finally, I observed the learners over the course of 6 months making notes of issues arising and reasons given for absence, problems that arose, behaviour observed on outings and trips.

The following analysis and discussion of the findings takes place as part of the narrative and relates back to the review of literature

Secondary school experiences
The findings confirm much of what was previously discussed in the review of literature. Not having any qualifications and exclusion from secondary school are amongst factors the DCSF (2000) identified amongst Neets. Many of the sample representatives also state that secondary school experiences were largely unsuccessful. Seventy percent of the representatives left before taking GCSE
exams, either because they were excluded or because they thought they would do badly anyway. The main reasons they left prematurely were:

- pregnancy
- fighting
- truancy

M4: ‘I had problems with my teachers and if I had not stopped going [to school], I would have been excluded anyway.’
M5: ‘I took GCSEs but my English was not good so I did badly in all of them.’
F6: ‘I got pregnant when I was 14...I couldn’t stay. They wouldn’t let me.’
M10: ‘I was always getting into fights. It wasn’t my fault. The teachers didn’t like me’.
M9: ‘Even though I didn’t go [to] school much, I took GCSEs. I would’ve done better if I’d gone more [to school].’

In discussion with the learners, there was often a feeling of the inevitability of not gaining GCSE passes.

F7: ‘Even if I hadn’t had my son, I would’ve still not done well. I hated school.’

In the review of literature it was discussed how Daniels et al (2003) argue that the key to success in engaging young people in learning is relationship building between young people and skilled, committed adults. McNab et al, 2008 also explain how crucial it is for staff members to genuinely support young people. This was clearly not the case for the majority of the respondents.

M1: ‘They [the teachers] didn’t care, man. They knew they couldn’t control us. They couldn’t touch me. They were scared’.
M10: ‘I hated the teachers. They were rude. They’d be texting, on the phone; doing other stuff... they just wanted to get out [of the classroom].’
F7: ‘They didn’t like me because they thought I was ‘pikey’ (traveller). I switched schools but they were all like that.’

In a previous section, it was examined how Harber (2004) discusses the issues surrounding bullying, both amongst students and from teaching staff with some students reporting fear, humiliation, embarrassment and exclusion as a result of punishment from teachers. Most of the sample had experienced bullying.

F3: ‘some teachers deliberately make you feel like an idiot in front of the rest [of the class]. They pick on you when they know you don’t know the answer. It makes you not want to go to their class.’
M6: ‘they’d make comments, like nasty. One teacher threatened me and said he can’t touch me in school but he can outside. He was so dumb.’

Erratic attendance at secondary school was common. Often the parents were unaware of the truancy or felt they could do nothing about it.

F3: ‘I’d bunk off. I’d fight with my step dad but he couldn’t make me. We [with friends] went to xxx shopping centre when it was cold.’

M6: ‘My mum didn’t care. She didn’t know. But she didn’t care.’

M1: My mum kicked me out of bed in the morning and chucked me out and locked the front door. I couldn’t get in until she got back from work. I had no money so I hung out with older kids.’

M9: ‘I went to school mostly but was sick often. GCSEs was hard man, it was so long. If I’d gone to lessons, I would’ve been OK.

Post-secondary school experiences: Pupil referral unit and college

In the findings, the learners refer to any training organisation as ‘college’ whether it is an FE college or third sector training organisation or a pupil referral unit. Fifty per cent of the sample was excluded from secondary school before they could take GCSE. Twenty percent of those questioned said that pregnancy stopped them taking GCSEs. Thirty percent stayed at secondary school long enough to take GCSEs and BTECs. Once excluded from secondary school, learners rarely continue to take GCSE or BTEC programmes at the pupil referral units or other FE or training organisations. The PRUs generally work towards generic Level One employability courses and try to get the learners progressed onto further education or training. As discussed in a previous section, Macnab et al, (2008) remind us that the different atmosphere and older peer group can improve motivation. This is generally agreed by the sample representatives. They agree that the best things about going to ‘college’ were:

• The learners feel they are being treated in a more adult way
• The education is more personal
• Learning difficulties are addressed

M1: ‘When I got excluded I got sent to college. We didn’t do much. There weren’t many [students] but it was still manic. But my teacher was nicer.’
M6: ‘In secondary school it was difficult to get help after the lesson. You don’t know what to do half the time. At college [pupil referral unit] there was always help with writing stuff and finishing off the work and explaining stuff.’

M10: ‘When I got angry and into fights at secondary school, I got excluded. At college they took more time to find out why I got angry. The teacher would talk to me after class and not blame me.’

F8: ‘It’s smaller, in college, like this one. There’s usually not so many in a class. It’s easier to ask questions. You don’t feel so stupid in front of the others.’

M6: ‘In my country you have to get a job even if you don’t finish school. Here, I can work and finish my college. The teachers understand I need to work so if I don’t come in one day it’s OK.

One-to-one support for learning was seen as better in colleges and pupil referral units.

M2: ‘We get a lot of chance to talk alone with the teachers which you can’t do in school. We can go to the teachers and the other staff here at college and tell them how we are getting on, they come to speak to us and listen and help.’

M6: ‘Here, they help to sort out EMA or let me ring my probation officer and help do stuff.’

Improving learning and teaching

During the discussion group, the sample decided that the attributes for a good teacher were

• they are friendly and can have a laugh
• know their subject and can make it interesting
• can keep order but are not too strict

M4: ‘Someone you can laugh with and who doesn’t tell you to shut up all the time.’

F7: ‘A teacher who shows you what you have done wrong and shows you other ways of doing it’

The way that teachers talk and listen is important:

F8: ‘Schoolteachers tell you off for nothing and just tell you to do something. They treat you like you’re a baby.’

F7: ‘College teachers let you do things more on your own and listen to how you want to do something.’

But some discipline is important:
M9: ‘They [the teachers] need to keep the noisy ones quiet. If they don’t though, nobody listens.

M10: ‘Most of us would behave better in class if the teachers were cool.’

M4: ‘We get treated different to school … at college we get treated in a more adult way and it makes us more, like, open to say what we feel about stuff. Tutors invite us to call them by their first names. In school it’s more polite [distant].’

Students emphasised having teachers who are patient and respectful:

M9: ‘…not telling you where you are wrong, acting more as a mentor, just listening…’

M10: ‘asking students how they would like to learn instead of telling them how to learn.’

Students value the practical, hands-on nature of college learning, with what they see as its more relaxed environment:

M2: ‘Doing something different, not just in class room’.

M5: ‘You can have breaks within the lesson’.

Opinions on current college (training provider) and its focus on e2e-type basic skills and vocational tasters and courses

One reason so many of these 16-19 year olds prefer college to school is because they have outgrown school and are ready to move to college which does not give rise to memories of failure and humiliation, but instead offers them more practical subjects, in an adult environment. The main reasons mentioned here are:

• learning useful skills

• more adult environment

• help getting a job

M2: ‘I like the more vocational things we do at this college. It makes me feel like I am learning something useful. Maths and English are boring but the plumbing is ok. And when I can start the NVQ, I know I’ll get a job even though it’s a long thing.’

F7: ‘I started here on the young mum’s course. Now I’m doing childcare. I know it’s not going to be easy but at least I’m getting a qualification [E3 introduction to childcare].’

M6: ‘The trouble with this college is that you can only do childcare and youth work really. The construction courses are hard and long [learners need at least L1 Literacy and Numeracy] I want to do media and music and stuff but I can’t go to the other [FE] college until I’ve done my [Literacy and Numeracy L1] exams here.'
M10: Maths and English is boring. Maths is just difficult. I’m going to try and get my Level 1 and then that’s it I’m gonna get a job’
M4: ‘English is OK when we do fun stuff like games. I can’t spell. I hate reading and stupid questions [text comprehension]. The work is easier than secondary school though. We don’t have to read long books here.’
M9: ‘I hate maths but I know I got to get Level 1. If it’s fun, it’s better. You learn anyway what you need when you work. You don’t all the stuff they try and teach you.’

Experiences in getting a work placement, a job or an apprenticeship

The respondents have all tried at some stage to apply for a job, an apprenticeship or work experience. Quite often the experience is daunting. During the discussion it materialised that is it:

- Difficult to get a job
- Difficult to get an apprenticeship
- Difficult to adjust to working life

M1: ‘I applied for the plumbing course (NVQ Level 1) but xxx told me that he had lots of interested people who have better qualifications than me. He didn’t like me. And then he said, if I get my Level 1 he’ll give me a chance but if I’m late once I’m off the course [this is referring to a construction training provider that is obliged to take on a certain amount of 16-19 year old Neets but has stated privately that it prefers to take on unemployed adult learners as the Neets are unreliable].
F3: ‘I got a child care placement but I was late [for work]. They were really strict and made me stay late until stuff was cleaned up every evening.’
M9: ‘I’d work in a shop, I handed my CV to all the shops in xxx centre but no-one got back to me.’
M10: ‘When the big Asda opened in xxx my Connexions advisor told me but I didn’t get a job there.’

Factors affecting attendance and other barriers to learning and engagement

Most of the sample representatives explained that there were reasons they couldn’t come to class sometimes. The main reasons were:

- Having to look after sick child or relative
- Overslept
- Difficulties with public transport
Learners also had other appointments with social workers, doctors, probation officers. It sometimes appeared difficult to prioritise engagements and invariably going to college on time was a low priority.

M4: ‘I sleep really long... can’t get up in the morning because I stay up all night playing games... I forget to set the alarm.’
M9: ‘I’ve got to look after my mother sometimes. It’s scary. She’s got a bad heart. I’ve got to help her to doctors sometimes. Sometimes my sister helps but I’m the only one at home. I’m scared she’ll die’.
F7: ‘My son goes to nursery. Sometimes I help my sister if she goes to school. I was chucked off work experience because I was late because I had a doctor’s appointment on the first day.’
M6: ‘Sometimes I have to go home early. Don’t want to meet anyone from xxx [nearby FE college] because it’s different postcode. I don’t go on the buses if I can help it.’
M10: ‘It helps when they [the training provider] phone me in the morning. It reminds me I have got to go college. If I don’t go, I don’t get EMA.’
F7: ‘I have to meet my social worker on some days. If I don’t go to college I feel bad but I just can’t go every day. There’s always stuff I got to sort out’.
M1: ‘Teachers here have got to understand that it’s difficult coming to college every day I live at home but I’m not there much. I need to get my own place.’

How the learning environment could be improved

The sample respondents were asked what could be done to make the learning environment at this training provider more fun at the same time improving attendance and engagement. The main suggestions respondents had for improving the learning environment were:

• Provide a canteen or common room on site
• Students should have better access to [healthy] food and drink during the day.
• Access to computers during break

M2: ‘This college needs a canteen, man. There’s nowhere to go in the break except KFC. The machine downstairs [selling soft drinks and chocolate] never works and there’s nowhere to hang out.’
M6: ‘At school you get free school dinners at least. I never eat in the morning and there’s nothing round here.’
F7: ‘Especially young mums. xxx [pregnant learner] nearly fainted the other day coz she didn’t eat.’

F3: ‘Facebook is always blocked [on the college computers]. I have to use my phone to go on-line.’

Some learners are happy to come to the training provider in the morning, hang out all day and then go home, especially as three learners say they are locked out of their houses all day. Seventy percent would be quite happy to hang out all day as long as they could play cards in the break and get cheap food nearby.

M1: ‘I’d like to just come to college in the mornings, work really hard, then go home.

M2: ‘It’s alright for you. I get locked out. I got to wait until my mum gets home and opens the door.’

The training provider organises regular trips and outings for personal development and confidence building. The learners are usually apprehensive to start as many rarely leave the borough, but most enjoy the experience.

F8: ‘The boat trip was cool. I’ve never been on a boat trip. I’ll take my son into London one day.’

M10: ‘Actually it was alright. I didn’t want to go but it was alright.’

Advice and Guidance:
The respondents were generally dismissive of career advice and life guidance that had been issued by previous teachers. They thought that the secondary school teachers were just doing a job and going through the motions and did not care. They appreciated the personal touch of Neets programmes and the Connexions advisors who helped them but felt negatively about any outcomes. There was a general consensus that

- Advice and guidance had not helped them choose an appropriate or relevant career at secondary school
- The barriers to obtaining a good apprenticeship or job were difficult to break down
- The only training options they had were low level, generic and not what they really wanted to do.

M4: ‘you’ve got to find out yourself what you want to do and do it. The Connexions people just want you to do anything so they try and put you on easy things where you do
maths, English and ICT. I applied myself for catering course even though I’m not English. They thought I should improve my English first’.

M7: ‘It’s different for me because I’m pregnant again. If I could, I would work in fashion but probably they think all I can do is childcare with two kids. And it’s difficult to get into fashion’.

M10: ‘I just want a job but even Connexions lot can’t help me there.’

M6: ‘I like music and would love to work in the music business or have recording studio but that’s a dream.’

Future plans:
In discussion, most of the respondents state that they would like to earn their own money as soon as possible and get a job. One of the learners, M10, is applying for unskilled jobs constantly and working with his connexions advisor to send a CV off to every available vacancy. He has not been offered an interview despite applying for more than 15 jobs. These have included stacking shelves in supermarkets, cashier, retail jobs and work on building sites. None of the respondents wants to continue in education for longer than absolutely necessary. Equally, they say they do not want to stay on benefits or rely on their parents. So future plans include:

• Get a job
• Gain independence
• Go to college [and progress further]

F7: ‘I’d like to get a job in childcare when I’ve got my certificate from here. I need the money.’

F8: ‘I’d like my own flat and a job. I’d like to work in a nursery but I would work in shop as well. I live in the hostel with other mums and their kids.’

M2: ‘I know I can earn money as a plumber. I’ll get a Level 1 then go on to Level 2. Then I can start my own business.’

M5: ‘I’m doing catering or maybe chef. My uncle’s a builder and I can always work as a builder but I’d like to open a cafe one day.’

M4: ‘I have got to finish college soon. It’s enough time spent inside a classroom for me. And I need somewhere to live or my dad will kill me.’

M9: ‘I’d like to go to college and do something proper. My mum would like that’.

In general, the courses these learners can be progressed onto are generic low level courses, mostly centred on subjects such as IT and childcare. Many would prefer to
other courses such as football coach or retail. Most of the popular apprenticeships are over-subscribed and difficult to get onto with Level 1 qualifications. Even unskilled jobs such as shop work require good GCSE grades or a lot of experience as well as a positive attitude, professional looks and reliability.

M1: ‘xxx told me I can’t do the [Level 1] plumbing course because there’s no places left and coz I haven’t got maths [Level1].

Jarrett (1991:206) has argued that the ‘single most important goal for a teacher to work towards has to do with the [the student’s] basic attitude towards work’. Many see improving personal development and employability skills of young people as crucial in increasing a person’s identity capital and work prospects. This is an area where the respondents, even though they all agree that they would like to work, explain that any work they would contemplate would have to be on their terms.

F7: ‘I won’t do nothing unless I get paid. Why should I do voluntary work if I don’t get paid? It’s just taking the mick.’

M10: ‘I wouldn’t do cleaning or clearing rubbish. Someone else can do that.’

F3: ‘I wouldn’t do dirty work. Or work outside. My nails would break [laughs].’

These findings remind us that the respondents had unsettled and disruptive experiences both at home and at school, resulting in lives that are not conventionally structured. It is partly because of this lack of structure that issues such as regular attendance are difficult to maintain. The respondents accept that gaining qualifications is necessary to progress onto work or further training, but the skills needed such as concentration, perseverance and hard work cannot compete with the very real barriers the respondents face in their daily lives. A lack of qualifications and constant rejection can lead to these young people feeling isolated and worthless. NEETs are more likely to be living unhealthy lifestyles. That is to say, they are more likely to smoke, drink and have poor diets. They also have more chance of getting caught up in violent situations and having mental health problems. Being Neet between the ages of 16–19 is a major predictor of later unemployment, low income, teenage motherhood, depression and poor physical health. Vaughn (2009) cites a study in the North East, which found that 15% of long-term Neet’s die within 10 years.
Recommendations and Conclusion

The original research question set out to both establish why some young people disengage from education and training and to examine how the management of attendance and outcomes could be improved.

These findings reflect some of the research discussed in the review of literature. There are some differences. Interestingly, in this research project, where respondents come from an inner-London borough, 50% of the respondents come from homes where at least one parent is in employment. This contrasts with findings UK-wide where, according to the DCSF (2000), the vast majority of Neets come from workless households. Another factor which could require further research is the ethnic background of Neets. In multi-racial London most of the respondents were of black or dual heritage ethnicity which is not representative of Neets UK-wide, however all surveyed Neets had had unsatisfactory secondary school experiences, which is in line with previous research.

The respondents of this survey all had contact with at least one parent. It was observed during the group discussion that many of the respondents had had social services intervention from an early age. There was a feeling that emerged from the responses, both in what was actually said and in the tone in which points were made which reflected the tension between their independence and their dependency where that on the one hand the respondents fought against figures of authority and rebelled against outside intervention, but on the other hand expected intervention and wanted and needed to be looked after by outside agencies, for example expecting free school lunches, needing wake-up calls, asking to be accompanied by a member of staff to job interviews and requesting help when opening a bank account. This aspect of possibly needing a more structured approach of outside intervention would require further research at a future date.
The following recommendations are made in response to the initial research question and the findings discussed earlier:

Recommendations for managing attendance
1. **Access to a common room with internet facilities, card games and other activities.** This is because the college or training provider is a ‘home from home’ for many of the respondents. Within this sample group, 30% are not allowed to enter their homes during the day until a parent has returned, meaning they are effectively homeless during the day. Other respondents live in hostels or in stressful living conditions.

2. **Free school lunches in the form of ‘healthy eating’ vouchers given to eligible 16-19 year olds and free healthy snacks all day.** Many of the respondents have forms of social, emotional and behavioural difficulties that have not been diagnosed. This is not helped by either not eating or eating the locally available ‘junk food’ which has been connected to SEBD (Wiles et al, 2009). Many of the respondents arrive at college without having had breakfast and often have no real access to healthy meals.

3. **Early intervention in timekeeping and support where necessary.** There are different barriers to regular and punctual attendance and sometimes it is difficult for the young person to prioritise as they might not come from a background where punctuality and regular attendance is considered important. Alarm calls may be necessary as well support in helping in practical ways, for example applying for a free Oyster card or phoning a parent.

4. **Reward systems such as cash bonuses or vouchers for good behaviour and attendance should be put in place.** From a behaviourist view, challenging behaviour and disengagement can be changed by encouraging more appropriate responses from the students. This perspective would seek to negotiate contracts with the students and put reward systems in place.

5. **Acknowledge that learners on Neet programmes have valid reasons for bad attendance.** An environment should be created in which learners feel that the college supports them with aspects of their private lives if requested. This could include for example providing space in which confidential phone calls can be made.
Recommendations for managing outcomes

1. The college should include more personal and social development as well as employability sessions, focusing on soft skills such as attitude, time-keeping, body language and professionalism. This is because many respondents’ attitude to work appeared unrealistic. There are few jobs for unskilled 16-19 year olds and any available for example in sales and marketing, retail or customer service, require the applicant to be extremely self-confident. Young people need to be made aware that unpaid work and any form of work experience is a positive thing for future endeavours.

2. Access needs to be improved to government-financed apprenticeships and NVQ training to run alongside Basic Skills classes. Despite the appearance of accessibility, it is very difficult for young people on Neet programmes to be accepted on vocational training and on apprenticeships. This is mainly because the popular ones are oversubscribed with young people who have proven track records and have above Level 1 Qualifications given priority. Neets are perceived in a negative way, bringing with them preconceptions and prejudices.

3. Voluntary work opportunities and work placements for all 16-19 year olds not in education, employment or training should be provided so that soft skills as well as vocational skills can be tried and tested. If a ‘National Citizen Service’ (Insidegovernment, 2010) is to commence it has to be relevant to young people’s needs and requirements. The colleges and training providers could provide the support to help make the experience successful. Unless a young person really wants to do something, it will be difficult to motivate him/her to attend regularly and display a good working attitude.

4. Literacy and Numeracy should be embedded wherever possible. To want to improve their Basic Skills, young people must see the relevance of them, especially if they had previous bad experiences of maths and English during compulsory education.

5. Awarding personal training grants with personal control so learners have more choice in choosing further training. So much money has been invested in Neets over the past ten years it seems strange that the outcomes are still not satisfactory. If young people had some say about how the funding is allocated, motivation would be higher.
Recommendations for Continuing Professional Development for tutors

1. Tutors need to be able to provide relevant careers advice and guidance where necessary and be given training in recommending progression routes. Tutors within training providers often have generic teaching qualifications and would benefit from more specific training in careers advice and guidance which would help the young person’s transition from education into work or training.

2. Relationship building is crucial to a student’s successful learning journey. The pastoral side of working with Neet groups is as important as the academic side and tutors should receive training in relationship building and pastoral care. This is also reflected in the review of literature which confirms that staff members’ genuine support of the young people is an important factor in the success of provision in further education colleges (Mcnab et al, 2008).

3. Support in classroom management and conflict management. In the event that issues arise with violence or threatening behaviour either between the students or between student and tutor, the tutor needs to be trained to deal with situation and also be able to request immediate help from a trained security guard.

4. The Connexions agency and training providers/colleges need to be encouraged work more closely together regarding individual support. Some of the above respondents had little or no support at home and were even supporting others in their lives. Outside support seemed erratic and inconsistent.

5. Improve SEN training for tutors working with disengaged young people. This could also include more training in dealing with SEBD and also training in the non-diagnosed difficulties that create barriers to learning.

The issue of having young people not in education, employment or training is unlikely to be resolved soon and will probably worsen over the coming years. It was, in previous centuries, always possible for western countries to provide ample employment for an unskilled workforce, employment which is now largely being outsourced to newly developing economies, which are cheaper and often more efficient. Added to this, the UK has always had an inconsistent and undervalued system for young people to enter apprenticeships, with Hutton (2005) claiming that 'Britain suffers from a legacy of low levels of basic skills for many workers, moderate
educational achievement, and an incoherent and insufficiently valued skills and training and skills development system,’ any conclusion must have improving outcomes through offering relevant programmes as its core.

A recent report by the Fabian Society blames the previous government for not reducing the number of teenagers not in education, employment or training and claims it should have provided more one-to-one tuition for children who fall behind in school (Sheperd, 2010). Leong (2009) refutes this, stating that

‘a large part of the responsibility [for being not in education, employment or training] has to lie at the feet of many young people themselves’.

The new government is taking more of a stick than a carrot approach to the issue, abolishing EMA and cutting benefits for anyone refusing work, with its recent White Paper on welfare reform including a requirement for the long-term unemployed to do unpaid work (DWP 2010).