

**CHILDREN'S SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**  
**POST-16 EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING**  
**NOTES TO ASSIST CONCLUDING DISCUSSION**

This document summarises the main evidence received by the Committee to date.  
The Committee is invited to assess the evidence received against the objectives and discuss any conclusions which may arise from the review.

**Overall aims of the review:**

1. To explore how to sustain improvements and continue to increase the number of young people progressing to, and in, post 16 education, employment and training; and
2. To suggest ways to prevent young people becoming not in education, employment or training (NEET) in the first place.

**Objectives of the review:**

1. To understand the profile of 16-18 and 18-24 year olds in Islington currently progressing to and in education, employment and training; and which groups of young people are most vulnerable to being NEET
2. To assess the strategic role of Islington Council in helping to increase the number of young people in EET
3. To understand the obstacles to progression into EET
4. To identify and assess specific measures which will increase the progression into EET for groups of young people with low levels of participation in EET and other young people vulnerable to becoming NEET
5. To assess the availability and effectiveness of information, advice, guidance and employability skills support for young people regarding post 16 education, employment and training
6. To examine 'promising practice' approaches at school and local authority level that indicate the best success in reducing the number of young people NEET and preventing young people becoming NEET, and how they might apply locally.

N.B. Objectives 2, 4 and 5 cover implementation of the Employment Commission recommendations, an area highlighted by the Committee for review.

## SUMMARY OF EVIDENCE TO DATE

### **1. The profile of 16-18 and 18-24 year olds in Islington currently progressing to and in education, employment and training; and which groups of young people are most vulnerable to being NEET**

- The number of young people classified as NEET changes constantly as young people drift in and out of education, employment and training.
- Snapshot demographic information indicated that, of 99 young people aged 16-18 NEET in December 2015, 59% had cycled in and out of EET. 63% were male; the majority of which were available to the labour market. 36% were female, with around half of those NEET due to pregnancy or parenthood.
- The majority of young people NEET were from white ethnic backgrounds.
- Only around a quarter of young people NEET had attended mainstream Islington schools. Around half had attended New River College or Alternative Provision; around a quarter had attended schools outside of Islington.
- Some young people were NEET and not available to the labour market due to illness, including mental health problems.
- Those who were available to the labour market often had multiple vulnerabilities, including health problems, behavioral problems, involvement of the criminal justice system, and being from a workless household.

### **2. The strategic role of Islington Council in helping to increase the number of young people in EET**

#### Support to Young People

- The Council has statutory duties to support young people to remain in learning until their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday. If a young person has special educational needs or disabilities, this extends to their 25<sup>th</sup> birthday.
- Islington Council's EET support services are provided through two teams. The Progress Team, which supports 16-19 year olds; and the iWork team, which supports 19-24 year olds.
- The Progress Team employs qualified advisors who work with those vulnerable to dropping out and those who have already become NEET. This includes one-to-one support, job coaching and opportunity matching, and follow up support.
- The iWork service provides skills and employability programmes which help people to access vocational pathways, including apprenticeships. The service works with employers, colleges, and also schools to raise the profile of vocational training and broker employment opportunities.
- The Council provides the 'September Guarantee' which gives every Year 11 pupil at Islington schools, and every Year 12 resident in the borough, a named educational offer

### Support to schools

- The council works with schools to identify pupils at risk of dropping out.
- The council provides careers training to staff in-school and arranges other development sessions for careers leads and tutors across the borough. A termly newsletter, termly careers network meeting, and on-line portal is also provided.
- The council also works with schools to help develop their careers education and guidance offer. It was advised that some schools needed support in this area as they either did not have a full understanding of statutory duties and guidance, were unaware of the resources available to support young people, were unaware of what Ofsted expected of schools, or were unaware of best practice approaches.
- The council had introduced a specialist vocational pathway advisor following feedback from schools that they were not confident in giving advice in this area.

### The Council's role as an employer

- The council has an extensive internal apprenticeship programme, having committed to offering 200 apprenticeships between 2014-2018. Vacancies are open to all ages, however recruitment activities are targeted at 16-24 year olds and there is a commitment to providing opportunities for young people who are disengaged or at risk of disengagement. 90% of the 44 apprentices recruited in 2015-16 were aged 16-24.
- Those on apprenticeships were supported in applying for full time positions in the Council.

## **3. The obstacles to progression into EET**

### Vulnerabilities

- Some young people NEET had complex personal issues or significant skills gaps.
- Some young people were not prepared for the transition from school to college or employment.
- Pupils with special educational needs faced additional barriers to employment, education and training; as did pupils who spoke English as a second language.
- Some young people were vulnerable to gang activity would not travel outside of their immediate local area, which was detrimental to their wellbeing and employment prospects.
- Some pupils found it difficult to find part-time work due to the amount of competition in the local job market.

### Other obstacles

- Some young people had chosen college courses which were not suitable for them and had dropped out.
- Elizabeth Garrett Anderson School had received feedback that some of their ethnic minority pupils lacked confidence in the workplace and was working to improve this.
- Islington Council has recently increased its focus on vocational pathways and apprenticeships; providing apprenticeships and specialist advisors. However, some parents and young people are sceptical of non-academic pathways.
- It was advised that some pupils and their families needed advice on how employment or an apprenticeship could affect their benefits eligibility; Central Foundation School

was aware of instances where families had unexpectedly lost benefits income as a result of their child's employment, one family had subsequently become homeless.

- It was also a concern that young people progressing to university accrued huge amounts of debt, even if they dropped out during their first year.
- Young people are entitled to two years of free learning post-16; however this typically ends on their 19<sup>th</sup> birthday unless they have a special educational need or disability. After this stage young people may have to make a financial contribution to their education.
- Young people need academic references to be accepted onto college courses. The Committee was made aware of one instance where a young person was denied a reference from her college after requesting to change course. She became NEET as a result.
- One young person commented that the letters he and his parents received from his school after he stopped attending amounted to bullying or harassment; and these actually discouraged him from re-engaging with education.

#### **4. Specific measures which will increase the progression into EET**

##### Stepping stone approaches.

- Islington has some 'stepping stone' provision for pupils who are NEET but are not yet ready for full time education or an apprenticeship. These often provide Level 1 qualifications and functional skills in literacy and numeracy. These 'bitesize' options are linked to vocational areas and are geared towards young people who struggle to commit to long term programmes.
- Officers suggested that the council's own employment practices could be improved to better support young people. Although a number of apprenticeships were offered, it was thought that easing selection processes and offering 'traineeships' as a bridge to apprenticeships would benefit the most vulnerable young people.

##### Work undertaken by schools

- School work to support EET was not only limited to information, advice and guidance. The schools which provided evidence to the review advised that they worked to develop the character, ambitions, confidence and skills of their pupils from an early age.
- Some witnesses highlighted the need to raise aspirations, both in pupils and their parents. Schools commented on the importance of positive role models.
- The young people interviewed thought it would be helpful if support organisations and post-16 education providers came into schools to talk to pupils about alternative pathways.

##### Cultural and creative activities

- Schools considered that being located in London provided pupils with huge opportunities in terms of employment, apprenticeships, work experience, personal development, and extra-curricular activities. It is important for pupils to make the most of these opportunities.
- Elizabeth Garrett Anderson School emphasised to parents that it was essential for pupils to have a range of activities on their CV, however some parents did not value creative activities. The school advised parents that providing a range of opportunities to pupils was as important as attaining high grades.

### Islington's vocational offer

- Academic pathways are not suitable for all young people and strong vocational options are also needed. It was suggested that a strategic review of the quality, range and accessibility of vocational pathways would be useful in determining if there are appropriate pathways available. The Committee's previous review of Alternative Provision found that some young people were referred to Alternative Provision as a means of accessing vocational education. A more flexible arrangement, allowing pupils to sit vocational qualifications alongside their GCSEs in school, would be more desirable.

### Partnership work

- Partnership work was vital to the work of the Progress Team. Many young people accessed the team following a referral from Social Services, Housing, their school, or others.
- Progress Advisors and Children's Services officers were asked how support services for young people could be improved. It was commented that Progress Advisors attended some schools on results day and were available to discuss options with the pupils who did not attain their expected grades. However, some schools did not allow them access to the school.
- Not all schools provided information to the council on the pupils who would benefit from support from the Progress Team. Some schools provided the council with details of the pupils that did not attain their expected grades; this allowed the Progress Team to meet with the pupil on results day, or at least speak with them on the telephone. If schools did not identify these young people to the council, then they would only be contacted by the Progress Team after they were identified as not being registered with a local college. This process could take several weeks.
- Members queried if referrals could be made to the Progress Team before young people left school, if it was thought that they may not attain their required grades. In response, officers commented that this would be very helpful, however for this to work the profile of the Progress Team needed to be raised at a strategic level within schools.

## **5. The availability and effectiveness of information, advice, guidance**

- Careers education previously had to be delivered in accordance with statutory guidance and prescribed materials; however this duty was removed in 2012. Schools still have a statutory responsibility to provide information, advice and guidance; however this is without prescriptive guidance or funding. As a result, each school has a different approach to careers education and the impact of this varies. Ofsted found that 75% of schools nationally do not provide the right level of support to their pupils.
- The Council's CEIAG specialist works across schools to fill gaps in delivery, ensuring that all pupils receive consistent and high-quality careers education.
- Around half of young people NEET were previously in New River College or Alternative Provision. As a response to the Employment Commission recommendations, the council developed a 'gold standard' for careers education in NRC and AP. This is a pack of activity plans comprised of six modules across key stages 3 and 4; and is intended to ensure that these pupils receive high quality careers education.

- The young people interviewed indicated that they were very satisfied with the council's support services, however acknowledged that most young people did not know about the services offered by the council. Some young people commented that if they had known that support services were available then they would have accessed them sooner.
- The young people interviewed by committee members commented that schools put a disproportionate emphasis on GCSEs, and young people didn't know the range of alternative qualifications and pathways available, or how to access them. The young people had thought that without GCSEs they would not be able to gain employment or access further education.
- The council's vocational progression advisor commented that some young people needed sustained intensive support and at times the caseload was so great that it was not possible to support every young person in this way.

## **6. 'Promising practice' approaches at school and local authority level**

### The use of data

- Islington's NEET rate had significantly reduced in recent years, from an average of 8.3% in 2011/12, to 2.2% in 2015/16. Officers suggested that service improvements had been secured by improving the accuracy of data, which allowed officers to provide an effective and focused service.
- The Council stopped routinely collecting destinations data for young people at age 19. It was commented that collecting such data becomes increasingly difficult as time goes by.

### Innovative approaches

- The Council led the Islington Youth Employment Network, which arranged opportunities for local employers to meet young people NEET through speed-networking sessions and TED style talks. It was noted that the last such event was attended by 60 young people and 17 employers; within a fortnight 14 of those young people were in employment.
- The council was trying new methods of engaging hard to reach young people. Organisations had recently been commissioned to carry out peer to peer outreach work on a pilot basis; the results of this had not yet been received.

### The work of schools

- Some schools had partnership arrangements with high-quality businesses and universities. Some businesses supported mentoring programmes in schools, provided guest speakers at assemblies, hosted school-trips to their offices, or provided work experience.
- Central Foundation School commented that it had a two-way relationship with its business partners. After working with the school's pupils, one employer changed its recruitment practices to target school leavers as well as university graduates.

## **7. Other findings**

- The Chair commented on the importance of small community organisations in supporting the development of young people and queried how the council could best support such organisations. In response, it was advised that community groups were able to engage with the council's community and voluntary sector development officers, who could provide advice and guidance on funding and other aspects of running a community organisation.
- It was advised that all schools were supposed to have a governor with responsibility for careers education, however not all governing bodies had appointed someone to this role.
- It was advised that an increasing number of young people were interested in creative media, graphic design, web design, and similar pathways; however few opportunities in these fields were available.
- The young people interviewed suggested that schools and colleges should advise their pupils on their options if they don't attain their expected grades; this should be practical advice, delivered positively. The young people identified that schools, colleges and their peers did not talk about back-up plans. One young person reported that he was worried he would not achieve the required grades, but his school mentor refused to consider a back-up plan, instead encouraging him to focus on his studies. When he did not attain the required GCSEs, he didn't know what to do, what pathways were available to him, or how to access support.
- Some of the young people thought that their becoming NEET was entirely avoidable, and that they would have moved directly from school into another pathway had they known about the options available. They stressed the importance of stopping young people becoming NEET.
- Members suggested that the Progress Team could make use of advertising at bus stops and in the local press around results day.