# NEET Speaks: Influences Shaping Young People's Choices of Education, Training and Employment

## FINAL REPORT

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**NEET SPEAKS**

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# 1.0   Introduction

1.1   The International Centre for Guidance Studies (iCeGS), University of Derby, has produced this report for South Yorkshire Learning and Skills Council in association with Connexions Doncaster. It is based on the findings from a qualitative study designed to focus on the voices of young people in the Doncaster area, who are not in education, employment or training (NEET). The research aimed to explore individuals' perceptions of the significance of community attachments, including issues such as neighbourhood, fraternities, and young people's access to learning and work opportunities. This report is complementary to ongoing work carried by Connexions Doncaster as part of their NEET Strategy 2007-2008 framework.

**Background**

1.2   This study is designed to add *qualitative depth* to, as well as expand on the findings from South Yorkshire Learning and Skills Council and Connexions Doncaster locally funded 14-19 youth support projects. The approach of the project is based on a belief that young people gain benefits from their experience within their social and geographical (neighbourhood) communities, which are often not formally recognised. Some of these benefits may mitigate the NEET experience.  They may include:

- Skills and knowledge
- Enhanced networks
- Self-assurance within a peer group
- Personal growth
- Communication skills.

The point here is that external perceptions may well be incapable of recognising positive aspects or boundaryless benefits such as those listed above, which may in fact be a key to positive outcomes for disengaged young people. Knowledge of these benefits, it is believed, will help policy makers, Connexions staff, colleges and providers to better understand how to provide programmes of engagement for these young people.

**Aim**

1.3   The project was designed to explore the extent to which hard to reach individuals' learning and career development needs are currently being met, focusing in particular on emerging themes based on their experience of family, community, learning and work. The project aims to inform the future development of suitably tailored and personalised services for young people in the Doncaster area.

**Objectives**

1.4 The four key objectives of the project were as follows:

- To gain a clearer understanding of some of the critical issues which shape young peoples' choices of lifestyle which impact on their choice of education, training and employment.

- To identify and profile the influences outside of school and guidance services affecting young people's decision-making and access to opportunity structures.

- To identify unmet needs and the ways in which the Learning & Skills Council and local youth support services could help address them.

- To build an evidence-base of young peoples' voices reflecting their view about their lives and what influences their personal and vocational choices.

**Methodology**

1.5 The project aimed to consult with up to 30 young people not in education, employment or training (NEET) or those individuals moving in and out of education, employment and training (EET). A total of 6 Personal Advisers and 5 Training Providers from the Doncaster area where also consulted to find out more about local issues and the 'perceived needs' of at risk young people.

The methodology comprised four main phases:

**Phase 1: Inception** **(mid April 2008)**

1.6 An initial mapping exercise was carried out between members of the research team and senior and operational managers at Connexions Doncaster. This mapping exercise was aimed at clarifying the range and distribution of NEET young people (and those young people 'at risk' of becoming NEET) in the Doncaster Metropolitan Borough Council (MBC) area. From this an agreed sample of (i) young people; (ii) Personal Advisers; and (iii) training providers and/or employers were identified.

1.7 In addition, the research was informed by an initial literature search specifically identifying locality patterns of NEET distribution within the Doncaster MBC area, and a scoping interview with the NEET Provision Co-ordinator at Doncaster College. In addition, 37 reviews of relevant literature on NEET issues was undertaken to identify themes and patterns that have emerged from the 1960s onwards.

1.8 As a result of this mapping, a set of 'Interviewer/Facilitator prompts' were produced (see Appendix One) covering five broad topic areas. These included: place, values, self, others and work as identified in the initial brief and key themes

which emerged from a literature search carried out by the research team. These prompts were designed specifically to facilitate a highly interactive, flexible research setting aimed at generating what Willis has called 'chunky' data (Mills and Gibb (2004) in Dolby, Dimitriadis and Willis, p.220) thus giving a rich focus on young people's lives and everyday concerns. The prompts were employed in semi-structured group interviews/discussions (see Appendix Three).

1.9     The local college and voluntary and community organisations recommended by Connexions Doncaster and the Local Learning and Skills Council were approached to facilitate access to potential participants in the focus-group discussions (see para. 1.12 below).

**Phase 2: Fieldwork**                                    **(early May - late June 2008)**

1.10    Separate semi-structured focus group sessions (n=6) took place on four separate days during the initial fieldwork phase. Four sessions were with young people (n=25) who, whilst currently in educational and training provision, had either very recent experience of being NEET or who were deemed to remain 'at risk' of becoming NEET again. Wherever possible, the sample of young people reflected the locality patterns of NEET in the MBC area with urban areas and semi-urban former coal mining areas being represented.

1.11    In addition, separate group discussions took place with E2E and pre E2E work-based learning provider staff (n=5) and with Connexions PAs (n=6) working in voluntary sector, school and specialist settings in Doncaster.

1.12    All discussions were led by a researcher with a second researcher, situated as a 'participant observer', completing field notes as recommended within an ethnographic research approach. Young people's voices were captured electronically using digital recording equipment and were then fully and idiomatically transcribed. The following organisations supported the research:

- Doncaster College
- The Princes Trust
- Balby Youth and Connexions Centre
- GLAD
- Morthyng

1.13    Interesting case studies were identified during the focus group sessions. These individual stories form the basis of quotes from NEET young people and short pen portraits used throughout this report to illustrate key findings.

**Phase 3: Data Analysis**                               **(mid June - mid July 2008)**

1.14 The field notes and reports prepared by the research team were employed as a tool to inform an initial thematic analysis of the transcribed focus group and individual discussions. Sensitising concepts, present through the interviewer prompts, were developed in light of the field notes and used as a framework for interim research team discussions aimed at identifying salient themes which inform and shape the content of this report.

**Phase 4: Reporting**                              **(early July 2008 - mid July 2008)**

1.15 A synthesis of initial findings from the 'research in progress' were summarised in a power point presentation forwarded to South Yorkshire Learning and Skills Council and Connexions Doncaster on 30th June 2008. The iCeGS research team has analysed around 35-40,000 words emerging from interviews with young people in the Doncaster MBC. Some of the interviewees were young people living in urban Doncaster, others were from surrounding former coal mining villages such as Woodlands, Askern, Edlington and Rossington and towns on the edge of the MBC area such as Conisborough and Mexborough.

**Report Structure**

1.16 Following this introduction, the report is set out in a further four sections:

- **2.0 Context.** This section examines the relationship between neighbourhood and NEET young peoples' perceptions and experiences of community, family, learning and work. Specific consideration is given to the factors that can influence and/or inhibit young people's views and experiences of available opportunities.

- **3.0 Employment and Learning.** This section explores the extent to which NEET young peoples' learning and personal development needs are currently being met through an examination of participation in, and perceived barriers to participation in, learning and work. It also considers key factors that empower and/or disempower young people's learning and personal development.

- **4.0 Conclusions.** This section draws together emerging themes and highlights potential areas for development between and across agencies. It reflects on NEET young people's experiences and their recommendations for enhanced provision at a local level. In addition, a summary of Personal Advisers and Training Providers views are also included.

- **5.0 Recommendations.** This section summarises the implications of the research findings and makes recommendations for the future development of relevant tailored learning and work provision for NEET young people.

**Appendices:**
- **Appendix One:** Literature Review
- **Appendix Two:** Examples of NEET Pen Portraits
- **Appendix Three:** Interviewer/Facilitator Prompts

**Sample**

1.17 There were 25 young people in the sample. Table A below summaries the demographic profile of the participants. Although the sample was not designed to be representative, a good balance in terms of gender and age was achieved. In terms of ethnicity the majority (n=23) of the participants were white British with two of the young people coming from African-Caribbean backgrounds.

**Table A: Participant Profile**

| Focus Group | Age | | | | Male | Female | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 14 – 15 | 16 – 17 | 18 – 19 | 20 -22 | | | |
| 1 | - | 4 | - | - | 4 | - | 4 |
| 2 | 1 | 3 | 2 | 1 | - | 7 | 7 |
| 3 | - | 6 | 2 | - | 5 | 2 | 7 |
| 4 | - | 5 | 1 | - | 4 | 2 | 6 |
| **Total** | **1** | **18** | **5** | **1** | **13** | **12** | **25** |

1.18 Table B below summarises the current status of participants. Although all of the participants were in training or volunteer work at the time of the research, as indicated earlier, all had very recent experience of being NEET. It is worth noting that out of the 25 young people interviewed, 9 indicated that over the last 12–18 months, they had taken part in work on a cash in hand basis. The overall total adds up to more than 25 because individuals could indicate if they were engaged in more than one activity.

**Table B: Status**

| Focus Group | In Paid work | | In Training or volunteer work | Unemployed and seeking work | Unemployed but not seeking work | Other |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | FT | PT | | | | |
| 1 | | | 4 | | | |
| 2 | | | 7 | 1 | | 2 |
| 3 | | 2 | 7 | | | |
| 4 | | | 6 | | | |
| **Total** | | | **25** | **1** | | **2** |

**Acknowledgements**

**Feedback**

1.20   iCeGS hopes the findings prove helpful in planning the way forward. The team would be happy to receive feedback on the research and this report:

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## 2.0  Context

> *"Any young people can be NEET, no matter what their attitude, behaviour, anything…. A lot of people when they think about NEET, they think about poverty and disaffection, and they think about things like that but in actual fact, in terms of the way NEET is categorised, you could be from a wealthy background who just happens to not be in college, or work based learning or something like that. Maybe in transition, maybe sat at home thinking about their next steps, and they're NEET. Do you know what I mean, so I mean, NEET, in its broadest sense can affect all young people"*
> (Community PA, Doncaster Connexions).

2.1  This section briefly examines the national policy context which has greatly influenced the design and development of the Connexions Doncaster's 'Not in Education, Employment or Training' (NEET) Strategy 2007-2008. It highlights achievements and challenges to date in the Doncaster area drawing upon local data and key findings from interviews with senior managers from the Learning & Skills Council and the Connexions Service. This is followed by an outline of findings from a literature review designed to provide an overview of current and historical 'NEET' issues. Young peoples' perceptions and experiences of community, neighbourhood, school, learning and work are explored. From this, specific consideration is given to the factors that influence and/or inhibit young people's views and experiences of available learning and work opportunities.

2.2  The UK has one of the lowest rates of participation in full-time education, especially at age 17, compared to its European counterparts. Whilst the proportion of 16 year olds not in education, employment or training (NEET) is reported by the Learning and Skills Council to be falling[1], the latest Labour Market Survey figures show an *increase* in the proportion of 17 year olds who are NEET.

> The proportion of 16-18 year olds in education and training was 78.7 per cent at end 2007 - the highest ever rate and an increase of 1.6 percentage points from 77.1 per cent at end 2006. The total number of 16-18 year olds in education and training increased by 36,000 to 1.59 million at end 2007, the highest number ever.
>
> The proportion of 16-18 year olds not in education, employment or training (NEET) decreased from 10.4 per cent at end 2006 to 9.4 per cent at end 2007. The total number of 16-18 year olds NEET was estimated at 189,000 at end 2007.
>
> The 14-19 Implementation Plan set the government's long-term ambition to transform participation, so that by 2015, 90 per cent of 17 year olds are participating in education and work-based learning. The latest estimate towards this is 78.4 per cent at end 2007, up by 1.5 percentage points over the year.                                         *Source: www.dcsf.gov.uk/14-19/*

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[1] Haysom, M. (2008). *September Guarantee Letter*. Coventry: National Learning and Skills Council.

2.3    The DCSF (2007)[2] strategy to reduce the number of NEETs by 2013 indicates that: 'reducing the number of young people who are NEET peaked in the mid-80s when youth unemployment was at its highest and, despite falling since then, levels remain stubbornly high', with the regional pattern showing the highest numbers are in the North East, West Midlands, Yorkshire and Humberside areas. The strategy indicates that:

- The NEET group is not static but rather a rapidly changing group.
- The vast majority of the group are moving in and out of the system as they drop out of, or complete, their previous activity.
- Only around 1% of 16-18 year olds are 'long-term NEET', defined as young people who are NEET at each of the three survey points: 16, 17and 18.

2.4    The DCSF NEET strategy (2007)[3] concluded that: 'The NEET group is not homogenous', and contains, *'young people with quite different characteristics'* (p.7) although common features include:

- *The NEET group is getting older (52% are 18, compared with 40% 5 years ago).*
- *The gender gap is widening - '16 year old boys are now more than twice as likely to be NEET as 16 year old girls'.*
- *A higher proportion of young people are 'inactive' and not looking for work or learning.*
- *39% of those with no GCSEs are NEET at 16, compared with 2% of those with 5 or more A\*-C grade GCSEs.*
- *Persistent absentees at school are seven times more likely to be NEET than their peers at age 16.*
- *Young people with Learning Difficulties and Disabilities (LDD) are twice as likely as their peers to be NEET.*
- *An estimated 20,000 teenage mothers are NEET.*

It also states that: 'We know from the Youth Cohort Study that most young people who are NEET say that it is because the *right provision is not available* or that they do not have *the qualifications* to progress' (p.9). It is well known that the NEET group is subject to a large degree of 'churn' as young people move in and out of education, employment and training. As a result, many youth support

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[2] The latest national statistics on participation of 16-18 year olds in education, training and employment produced by the DCSF were released on 19th June 2008 according to the arrangements approved by the UK Statistics Authority http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/14-19/documents/neet_strategy_0803.pdf
[3] op. cit.

agencies have a difficult task in tracking and monitoring young people's learning and work trajectories given the level of resources currently available.

2.5     A major challenge for all agencies and employers working with young people is to find new ways of helping to *raise participation rates* and *improve the skills base*, particularly of those at level 2 or below. This reflects growing government concerns about current and future trends in the UK economy linked to increased competition from new international and European markets. *Social inclusion* and *community integration* also feature dominantly in current political discourse aimed at engaging more *young people to take responsibility* for their own behaviour, attitudes and motivation to become '*responsible citizens*'. Overall, young people, particularly those Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET), remain a priority focus for government and youth support agencies throughout England.

2.6     The government's 14-19[4] agenda, supported by the recently published joint White Paper (2008)[5] 'Raising expectations: enabling the system to deliver' highlighted significant economic and social benefits that can be potentially achieved from young people staying in education and training until at least the age of 18. But the challenge ahead is significant given that just under ten per cent of 16 and 17 year olds in England - around 100,000 young people - do not participate in formal education, training or employment. A further 85,000 are in jobs but do not receive any form of accredited training.

2.7     Since April 2008, Local Authorities are responsible for commissioning and funding education and training for all young people, working alongside the Learning and Skills Council. From now onwards, central government has tasked local government to assess and respond effectively to the supply and demand side of education and training provision for young people.

2.8     Nationally the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) has set a target to reduce the number of young people who were NEET by 2 percentage points by 2010 from a baseline year of 2004. In Doncaster, the set target for the area is 7.7% and 5% for 'not knowns'. Doncaster MBC has made significant progress in meeting its set targets to reduce the number of young people who are NEET. For example, the interim 2008 targets stand at 8.8% NEET and 5% not known, with the finalised figure for October 2007 standing at 9% NEET and 10.5% 'not known'. Although higher than both the national and regional NEET figure in October 2007 (7.7% and 8.7% respectively) it was below the sub-regional figure of 9.5% and the second lowest in South Yorkshire.

2.9     Connexions Doncaster, with its key local partners, has designed an effective NEET strategy which builds upon the 'Aligning Provision Toolkit' first published by

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[4] Department for Education and Skills (2005). *Youth Matters: Next Steps.* London: Department for Education and Skills.
[5] Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) and Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (DIUS) White Paper (2008). *Raising Expectations: enabling the system to deliver.* Norwich: The Stationery Office.

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DfES in 2006. Most notably, it has situated its development work within the context of the *National NEET Strategy, Doncaster's Children and Young Peoples Plan* and *Local Area Agreements.* Fundamental to its partnership working are five key strands designed to support a sustainable reduction in the NEET group delivered through an inclusive partnership approach. The five strands include:

- An intelligence-based approach and improved tracking system
- Early intervention and preventative tactics and strategies
- Information, advice and guidance services for all young people
- Expanding learning and training provision 14-19
- Support, progression and retention measures designed to help those most vulnerable young people to enter sustainable learning and work.

2.10 These strands are closely connected and, so far, they have enabled the Connexions services *and* its local partners to develop:

- Effective mapping of the NEET cohort
- Data sharing among partners
- Targeting of resources
- Understanding of the needs of NEET young people
- Joint development activities with the LSC and local providers.

2.11 A review of 39 NEET literature sources (see Appendix One) revealed a broad range of key themes and emerging issues. For example,

- Bysshe & Berry-Lound (2008) highlight that "within the existing body of NEET research literature, the term NEET itself (as is currently being highlighted by the Nuffield Review of 14-19), although a well used piece of 'policy shorthand', tells us only what *young people are not*, rather than *what they are" (*p.16*)*.

- Brown (2008) has recently undertaken a detailed study in Croydon (South London), using a statistical model based on school leaver data since 2001, reviewing factors which were the *best predictors* of young people becoming NEET.

  The study identified that: 'thirteen factors were found to predict NEET, the most powerful of which was: *'disengagement by age 13*'. Those at most risk of becoming NEET were identified as: *'White British boys in specific schools of low socio-economic status'.* The results of the study indicate young people's disengagement with the qualification system could be averted by *intervention with specific pupil groups* prior to year 9 to ensure success at Key Stage 4.

- Green & Winter (2007) highlighted in a recent Joseph Rowntree Foundation research report the crucial role of understanding *where young*

*people live* and the *social networks they have* given: 'they shape the way young people see the world'. They indicate that *place-specific factors*, such as geographical location, community norms, historical and current patterns of employment are central to understanding how and whether interventions work, alongside who is involved in delivery. This calls for *local flexibility*'.

- Hoggarth & Smith (2004) highlighted that having *care responsibilities* for a family member, having *emotional or behavioural difficulties*, being a *young offender* or being a *teenage mother* are contributory factors to becoming NEET. They also indicated *hidden* and *overt fractures in youth support arrangements* that prevented young people from investing in learning, training and/or work.

- Coles *et al* (2002) shed light on a number of additional factors that led young people to become NEET. These include *truancy from school* before the age of 16, *low or no educational achievements* at the age of 16 and membership of some *minority ethnic groups.*

- Payne (2002) identified *negative attitudes towards school* as contributing to young people becoming NEET. These arose from: 'boredom, poor relationships with teachers, anti-school cultures and viewing education and qualifications to have little value if the world of work'.

- Stone, Cotton, and Thomas (2000), in detailed qualitative research with NEET young people, described how many young people spoke in terms of, *'chains of events'*: 'Where behaviours such as truancy and involvement in drug and alcohol abuse were symptoms of, and reactions to, a series of preceding events'. They indicated that: 'Looking back, the participants often recognised that they were making decisions – leaving home, quitting education – without any information, advice or support'.

- Merton (1998) identified a *range of circumstances and recurring themes* that characterised young people's disaffection and non-participation in education, employment and training. These included: adverse family circumstances; traumatic events (including bereavements); personality/behavioural difficulties; learning disabilities/disadvantage; disaffection with school; truancy; health problems; bullying.; being in care, crime; drug abuse; homelessness; immaturity; lack of support and lack of money.[6]

2.12 The Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) has recently commissioned the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) to

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[6] Also refer to Howard Williamson's work on those young people who were most socially excluded who he defined as 'Status ZerO' (e.g. Williamson H (1997). *Status ZerO and the Underclass: some considerations'* in MacDonald, R. (ed) *Youth the Underclass and Social Exclusion.* London: Routledge.).

undertake further research into those who are NEET, or in jobs without training at 16 or 17 years of age. This research will focus on the *sizes and characteristics of NEET groups*, why certain groups and sub-groups do not participate in learning, strategies of support which would be likely to persuade them to participate, what proportion of NEETs are engaged in the illegal economy and the choices available to young people. *A typology* of those who are NEET is also being developed.

2.13 Earlier work published between the 1960s-1990s (*inter alia*, Willmott, 1966; Marsden & Duff, 1975; Willis, 1977, Seabrook, 1982; Walter, 1985; Armstrong, 1996), consistently emphasise a link between *marginalisation*, *culture* and *norms within local communities*.

**Space and neighbourhood**

2.14 In physical terms, NEETS belong to social groups which are divided into classes, and they are spatially differentiated – whether this is (was) intended or not, (Castells 1977, p.110). They tend to be perceived as 'poor' in economic terms and to live in deprived areas where standards of living are relatively low. This residential space (the neighbourhood) expresses a specific social relation – an indirect domination of deprived, working class people by state-provided, bureaucratic systems and practices which provide state benefits, welfare, housing, education and powers over the environment.

2.15 The NEET neighbourhood is often a localised social and communal unit which has values of its own but it also expresses a social process. Residential sub-cultures (in neighbourhoods) have a relationship and articulation to social representations and practices. Thus NEETs are *expressions of relationships* involving *exclusion* and *inclusion, power* and *powerlessness* and wider *cultural acceptance* and *rejection.* The NEETs are in effect a negative comment, as it were, on the wider society and on those social processes which produce and sustain inequality and deprivation.

2.16 There is no reason, however, to believe that the spatial environment or neighbourhood is necessarily the root of a specific form of behaviour or culture associated directly with those individuals not in education, employment and/ or training (NEET). Our starting point is a belief that it is possible to break the cycle of deprivation and dependency which underpins the NEET experience in such neighbourhoods.

2.17 Specific behaviour patterns do, however, emerge in relation to local social life, particularly in respect of neighbours, associations of family and friends and centres of interest. These close and confining neighbourhoods are a critical focus of the project. There is evidence that where neighbourhoods generate possibilities and life chances are enhanced, then differentiated behaviour occurs

and individuals are more able and likely to adopt positive activity and escape the NEET label and status (*op. cit.).*

2.18 However, space, in our case defined in terms of the neighbourhood, is not just a context. It is also conceptually an element in a certain social practice. The street itself, the houses within it, the street architecture and furniture, the arrangement of space and its accessibility, the patterns of movement and the social and recreational buildings and meeting places are all part of the practice of "inhabiting" a location (Lefebvre, 1967). There is an implicit link between the impact of a place and its cultural meaning, but we cannot simply read-off this meaning. For example, it may be the way that housing is distributed between different categories of families or social groups rather than its architectural qualities which determines how people behave in a particular place or in a particular estate.

2.19 NEETS embody an 'ensemble' of social practices and processes whose different and concrete combinations lead to different forms of behaviour. This is then the basis of our belief in the effectiveness of intervention strategies. However, the essential role of social homogeneity (Whyte, 1986) is significant and is linked to the social characteristics of the residents of a given neighbourhood. Space, location and neighbourhood can accentuate or deflect certain kinds of behaviour but they have no independent effect and thus there is no systematic link between different urban contexts and ways of life and culture. Where such a link can be observed it is a starting point for research and positive intervention.

2.20 In general, working class communities often define themselves as being grounded in the 'here and now'. This re-enforces a form of localism and security around certain primary links such as family and neighbourhood. Relations of high dependency on state providers characterise the neighbourhoods which have high rates of young people who are NEET. Neighbourhoods represent specific types of social relations and therefore provide an 'encounter' (not always harmonious) between the 'system' which allocates resources and the social practices (i.e. behaviour) of the inhabitants.

2.21 Young people NEET and their families and social relations are not just the 'effects' of how urban/sub-urban life is organised or of certain sub-cultures (e.g. gangs). Instead, we need to discover their significance. We need to know what young people NEET represent socially as persons and we need to find out what they think and experience themselves. Such understanding we believe, will yield key insights for the resolution of the problems that accompany the NEET generation.

2.22 The 'insider' to a NEET group finds perhaps a highly organised and integrated social system – unavailable to the outsider. Or alternatively is the NEET an isolated individual – not engaged in a group system of mutual obligations? Perhaps both exist within a spectrum of behaviour? What seems to be

increasingly clear is that working class children may be rebelling against school and employment experience that is essentially middle-class. The anti-education culture, according to the Rowntree Report (2007), may be something that boys take refuge in as something that offers an alternative identity and which places value and self-esteem on things other than those offered in school (Evans, 2006). What seems clear is that a key issue is the lack of forms of education that engage and seem relevant to *every* young person.

2.23    NEETS inhabit problematic cultures and neighbourhoods and therefore are in the consciousness of professionals in the worlds of education, employment, social welfare and public policy.  They represent a potentially lost future for a significant part of a generation and at a point in history when Britain could offer them real opportunities to acquire skills and a life of better value and worth. It seems little short of criminal to condemn them to future poverty and continuing dependence. In addressing this issue we need to carefully define and delineate the indicators of social breakdown associated with NEETS which inform our research.

2.24    The iCeGS research team and Connexions Doncaster have listened to and recorded the voices of young people in order to distil from their life experiences, factors that influence and/or inhibit their views and perceptions of neighbourhood, space and community. The short pen portrait overleaf provides a useful starting point to 'tune into' the reality of life from a NEET young persons' perspective.

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**Pen Portrait 1: Male, 17**

I'm from Bentley, shit 'ole. Went t primary school, that were alright, went t' xx school. Alright through to t' year ten and eleven. In year eleven I got excluded f' offerin' m' teacher out. Then went t' college f' half a year, jacked it in, then went on a coupla trainin' courses, went back t' college this year an' ballsed it up, jacked it in. Originally doin Media Studies but it were borin'. I thought it' d be alright at first then it got crap so….They changed us tutors half way through an' we 'ad a reight arse'ole an' I ended up kickin' off wi' 'im. Our final project were t' mek a film of our own choice an' he ended up pickin' choices f'r us. He said you're doin' this, your doin' that, so I ended up going fuck y' college an' fuck y' course and just walkin' out. I went t' a trainin provider… it were all paperwork. xx were ace, then did Travel and Tourism until we came 'ere. Work got too 'ard an' cou'n't cope wi' it. Too difficult, no help, I asked xx but she just said, its same as last one, an I needed help on last one! Colleges are crap, the' ain't got no fundin' or owt."

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**Neighbourhood and community**

2.25    During the research focus groups/interviews, young people reported mixed views on their neighbourhood and community. Some communicated *acceptance of their*

*environment* and a sense of *hidden rules to be adhered to* in order to keep out of trouble with peers and/or local drug dealers.

> *"I've been livin' in that environment an' after a while you become immune to it [..] an' where as once you might a thought ' oh god that's a bit…..you think its normal"* (Male, 17).

> *"Its like what y've grown up wi' an' what y' used t', its like a religion i'n't it. You grow up and y' taught a religion an' y' stick by it. Like y' grow up in Conisborough, an' y' know who's there, what everyone does"*
> (Female, 17).

> *"It used to be a proper shit hole [..] like trollies all over and bag 'eads"*
> (Male,17).

> *"I got threatened, telling me t' move out the village an' stuff. I got fireworks through my letterbox [..] they di'n't want me in village cos I were new an' I wa'n't from Doncaster. I got my window put through an' I got followed around, still get followed around.  But also m' mouth, I've learnt, now I've learnt t' keep m' mouth shut but because I used t' say stuff, wrong stuff to wrong people"* (*Female, 14,  excluded from school since Year 8).*

> *"I lived in Rotherham then Sheffield, I got excluded in a school in Rotherham, and Maltby School, then I wasn't allowed in any other school, then I applied for one in XXX and they wouldn't let me in and then I went to XXX and they wouldn't accept me either so the choices were either like the' send me t' a school three or four buses away or m' mum goes t' jail or I 'av t' do home school. So we chose home schoolin' which im doin' very well on at moment"* (Female, 14, excluded from school since Year 8).

> *"No one like me at my end, no one my age likes me in my village cos I knock about wi' lads from Hyde Park. There's about four a five lads in my area that I get on with and then when I go out I'm either in Scawthorpe or Scawsby but they don't like me there […] they are all dick'eads, they just sit on their bikes outside Bentley Library drinkin' Cider! […] or they g' t' Bentley Park where all gypo's ar*e*"* (Male, 17*).*

> *"Scawthorpe. Bit of a shit 'ole. Nowt t' do really. There's couple a drug dealers an' the' all go about in cars so y' don't know em unless y' buy off 'em. The' not known t' everyone"* (*Male, 17).

> *"Walk 'round an' get y shoelaces nicked"* (Female, 17).

> *"Its like everytime I go out drinkin'. I go out 'round Conisborough cos I feel comfortable. I've been around town like three of four times and I felt  so (emph) uncomfortable [..] cos when I go out round Conisborough I know*

*everyone, you feel safe and secure cosy' know that if you get absolutely drunk, one a y' mates is gonna tek y' 'ome whereas when y' in Doncaster y' just stand there like ' I don't know anyone"* (Female, 17).

2.26 Some young people indicated they had *moved around from 'area to area'* in response mainly to a family crisis or a critical incident(s). For example,

> *"I've lived down near pit, on a really nice new estate near manor, near the actual manor junior school then I moved from there just round corner to a smaller 'ouse cos the big nice 'ouse that I lived in got repossessed, so moved into a smaller 'ouse for about eighteen months then came to Doncaster"* (Male, 17*).*

> *"Went through school, did my GCSEs, planned to do my sixth form but then we moved to Cornwall, then we moved to Doncaster in February, been here ever since"* (Male, 17*).*

> *I were born in Scotland an' then I moved t' Portsmouth an' lived there f' ages then moved here […]I moved back t' Scotland, got back about three month ago. I moved t' live wi' me dad but I got kicked out (laughter) so I had t' come back. Parents 'd split up ages ago, dad's wi' step mum, total bitch. Now I just go 'ome, get changed then go out again"* (Female, 19).

2.27 In some cases, young people reported a *fatalistic perception* of the 'here and now' within their neighbourhood. In essence life wasn't really going to get any better for them. For example:

> *"When ya get older an y' start going t' pub for a bit it becomes clear to y', its just a big drugs den really. Everywhere, people off their 'eads at nine o clock in the mornin [..] don't like it but just got t get used to it really"*
> (Male, 17).

2.28 Conversely, some young people voiced a sense of *optimism* and *hope* for a better future:

> *"There's better places d' ya know what I mean. Woodlands it is a shit 'ole t be livin cos half a time its full a crack 'eads, smack 'eads, drug dealers left, right and centre so really cant avoid it. Its either ya tek that life or ya tek no life so way I see it the sooner I get out the better [..] if I sort me self out then yeah"* (Male, 17*).*

> *"I'd like it t'[my future] to look like workin in a mechanics workshop an that, doin good f'me sen an that, nice car, nice 'ouse, probably rentin one"*
> (Male, 17).

*"There was like a part of our area that was like called Devil's Island and that's like one of the roughest places where all teen mums live an', [..] I actually had a really close friend an' she moved into that area an' I actually stopped goin' 'round there. People were comin' round there an' causin' trouble, sayin' little pathetic stuff that I 'a'n't said an' I lost a really good friend outa that. Then she completely changed and ended up bein' just like them. Even though she 'ad kids, there were people in 'ouse an' erm, she almost lost 'er 'ouse cos a stuff like that. I managed to keep myself away from it really. Came 'ere, y' know an' made new friends. I know the person that I am, an' I know that I can be quite strong. Turn 'round say no I'm not interested. Of course I'd rather be out y' know, doing somethin' in m' spare time but, if it's gonna cause me trouble then I'm not bothered"*
*(*Female, 17*).*

One young man articulated his aspiration to:

*"Let an 'ouse out, rent an 'ouse, two bedroomed 'ouse or summat, erm see meself in sorta stable career, you know, standard job an I like nice things in life, nice clothes, car, probably a girlfriend an that's about it really"*
(Male 17).

Though when asked if he thought this might happen, he stated:

*"No in all honesty I really don't know what's gonna 'appen at minute because t' be honest with ya I don't even know what career I wanna be in; like try an get into an I've ad like meetin's with like careers advisers an stuff, still, still I always, I'm never hundred percent positive wi' what I wanna do but in all honesty what do I actually think I'll be doing when I'm twenty five, mebe sharing a 'ouse or sharing a flat wi' me mate or possibly even still livin' at 'ome. Normal job, nowt too special, do like odd job on side, d ye know what I mean, car an av a bit a money like, few holidays, 'bout two 'olidays a year"* (Male,17).

2.29   It is clear that these young people moving in and out of NEET are predominantly rooted within the confines of 'known safe space', neighbourhood and community. Steer (2000) found that approaches to supporting and motivating NEET young people were particularly successful when project workers had an *understanding of the community* where young people came from. The research indicated too that most evaluations suggest that disaffected young people particularly benefit from '*individual attention and support*' that all too often is unavailable at school. They also recommend that: '*achievements should be celebrated* and *assessment undertaken primarily as a process that can be used to aid the development of young people*. The research stressed the importance of participation being: '*completely voluntary where young people themselves are entrusted with making choices*', thereby: '*gaining a sense of ownership over it*'.

2.30  We found evidence of Personal Advisers in Connexions, YWCA and the Prince's Trust working closely with young people on an outreach basis to help open their horizons to new possibilities beyond their immediate locality. Some reported that the systems, procedures and resources they are working with are to some extent restrictive and becoming increasingly bureaucratic. Drawing on their experiences, it appeared that in order to get the best for NEET young people, and to be 'truly on their side' they need to practice in maverick, fluid and flexible ways to genuinely place the young person at the centre of provision.

**Self and cultural identity**

2.31  *Self and cultural identity* also emerged as a key issue in terms of how young people perceive 'their place and that of others' in the local neighbourhood and community. For example:

> *"Whilst going to college and everything like that, certain people refused to touch me because, well as you can see (touches her arm indicating her blackness). Its like in this building, everyone is shaking your hand, everyone is shakin' your hand. They'll like brush against you, making jokes, and that's quite good, that's really precious because you don't usually find that anywhere, you really don't find that anywhere for an ethnic person an' this place really do give you that refuge to say yeah I'm different, yes you are unique"* (Female, 19).

Here, this young person felt excluded from society until she found refuge in a voluntary and community initiative that gave her respect and a sense of self worth. She felt young people need more one-to-one and group support rather than classroom activities.

2.32  The participants in focus group sessions raised issues regarding those who *belonged* and *did not belong* in their community. There were strong and problematic views in regards to this. For example:

> *"Bentley has got four or five campsites, there's one near town centre, one near back of train station one near Tollbar and one past Arksey as well!"* (Male, 17).

> *"It's not like we invaded their country so why should they invade ours […] its not bein' racist, its just like a national hate really, everyone hates Kosovans.... Immigrants, they get everythin' free, free 'ouses, free cars they don't pay tax"* (Male, 17).

> *"I don't mind Asians or Blacks a 'owt like that, that live 'ere, that were born 'ere. It's just them that come over like …Polish. Like flat next t' me […] windo's just gettin' bricked"* (Male, 17).

*"Its alreight when they doin' it in their own country, that's what they do up there innit but they think that they can come down here an its not reight at all"* (Female, 18).

While young people quite commonly showed an inclination to retreat into racist views almost as a received way of asserting their own identity they would often, and paradoxically, articulate an ambivalent and more complex view. Indeed, it is important to note that individual NEET young people held quite *differing* views on self and cultural affiliations. They would also sometimes actively distance themselves from racism in their communities. For example:

*"I don't mind 'em really, not done owt t' me. Like Pakis, I think they're alright them cos if it want f' them on Christmas Day, they're al'y's open ar'n't the"* (Male, 17).

*"It depends. Like when I first started workin f' em I cou'n't stand em but when y' get t' know em its alreight, the' nice people"* (Female, 17).

*"Half a people in Conisborough are racist, they order food from 'em but the' racist. Its weird inn'it. Like my dad is racist, he d'n't like me workin' f them but its not up t me dad, its up t me. I totally got different views to my dad, oh don't even get me started! If you said there were anythin' wrong wi' foreign people, he's have a conversation wi ya f' about ten days. But so long as they not hurtin anyone, I don't mind"* (Female, 17).

2.33 In conclusion, the participants acknowledged significant changes taking place in their local surroundings in terms of who belongs in their neighbourhood and where they fit into the community. It was clear that some groups were more acceptable to them than others e.g. Gypsies and Travellers living traditionally in the area were more acceptable than recent East European economic migrants. Equally, however, different groups were often conflated.

2.34 Ethnicity was not seen as a problem but rather the recency of immigration. These NEET young people described 'foreigners' and 'outsiders' were described as individuals (and families) who have invaded their community and who clearly 'do not belong'. In some cases, young people described a gang culture operating to keep certain individuals out of the area, wherever possible. There was also a gendered aspect to the hostility expressed towards East European migrants with young women expressing an open dissatisfaction about being stared at.

**Fraternity on the Streets**

2.35 Wilmott (1966) used the term 'fraternity' in his study of Adolescent Boys in East London. Drawing upon this, we have broaden the term to describe '*people with something in common*' or a group or society formed by '*people who share the same interests'* or a form of brotherly love, i.e. *feelings of friendship or mutual*

*support.* We found examples of young people expressing *comfort* and *discomfort* in their peers, family and /or existing networks. For example:

> *"Well in Denaby everybody knows each other, people have lived here years and years an' family after family"* (Male, 17).

> *"It's like sometimes it just gets too far an' that. But I still go down 'cos they're me mates an' if no ones got any money t' chip in like, going in, going out, throwin' bricks at windows. You know, like people who'll proper like go mad on y' and then thy'll like throw bricks at windo's just t' get a chase, do some windo's in just t' get police t' chase and then that place is jus' full wi' police and then its just like runnin' all night till like three o clock in the morning"* (Female, 17).

> *"Fightin an stuff down Maltby, is really quite bad an that [...] as people get older an they don't get themselves out a there then it just gets worse. Thi do it f'' like a name y' know"* (Male, 17).

> *"It's just like if you go out one night an' everyone else is like drinkin; you decide that night that you not gonna drink an' jus' sit down an' reflect. Look at everyone else an' see what they're doin. Actually see how stupid (emph) it is. ……] You have t' want t' do it y'self first. Y' have t' want to start it yourself, 'cos before no one could actually tell me that I'm actually goin the wrong road cos nooo, cant be me, but when I actually sat down an' think about it and reflect about it I'm actually hurtin' my mum at the same time. She's like cryin at 'ome, prayin t' god that I'll change or somthin' like that"* (Female, 19).

2.36    We asked young people who they were with 'most' in their spare time: many said they were hanging around mostly with their mates and for the most part stayed in their known local areas unless going into Doncaster for a 'night out'. Among those who did belong to a group, some (though not all) used marijuana and other substances on a fairly routine basis. Heavy and regular alcohol use was common and the use of 'coke', amphetamines and anabolic steroids were all mentioned a number of times in the focus group sessions. The ways in which young people used such stimulants varied. Some simply used them for "the experience" which made them feel good about themselves. For example:

> *"When I were at school I only used t' drink on weekends then m' mates said d' y' fancy gettin' stoned, cos I already smoked anyway I said yeah, ill give it a go an' I thought, yeah, its alright this. Mainly give up on drink an' just start smoking weed. I've took 'shrooms before, ive 'ad LSD, iv 'ad coke, used t' sniff coke like more than I had weed but it's a waste o' money wi' it bein expensive an' that but a tenner bag, sit wi' three a four a y' mates an ay a smoke; chills y' out, av a laugh. It's better than beer"*
> (Male, 17).

> *"When we went on that residential an' we di'n't ay it f'r a week I felt more healthy an' that but when I got back that Friday, straight in have a bag a weed"* (Male, 17).

2.37   Some indicated that they 'knew when to stop' and 'used drugs only with trusted friends'. A few indicated that drugs were used 'to escape' and some admitted that they had 'no control once started' and were likely to consume with people who they didn't necessarily trust. The latter suggests a degree of recklessness based sometimes on, as one young person said, "a lack of self worth". The three quotes below illustrate *drivers and influences* that impact on some NEET young people lives:

> "*Drink like every weekend, get into trouble, like fightin', got arrested cos a drink. Drugs, I used t; still do every couple a week. Used t' take coke every now an' then, well actually used t' tek it quite a lot like all way through weekend me an' m' mates used t' go out quite a lot but then I calmed down a lot, don't tek it as much now. Drink is one a m' main problems on a weekend [ …] im not an alcoholic [..] I do like 'avin a drink like, I know where m' limits are but I just think fuck limits, just carry on drinkin [..] cos there's nowt else t' do. When there's nothin' else t' do y' just think well, get blitzed, 'av some fun"* (Male, 17).

> "*Smoked weed for a few year now, smoked weed since I found out about me mam, an' then got bored a that so started t' take stronger stuff than that when m' brother died an' I were on Es an' that but I stopped that cos thought about it an' then, thought what the fuck am I doin'?! Every weekend off me 'ead, yeah it were pretty bad. Then I used t' go down Harworth an then be doing it. I still take coke an'. Say if I were at a rave an' someone put an' E in me 'and I wou'n't say no"* (Female, 18).

> "*There is a drug dealer problem in Askern, some from Bentley come to Askern"* (Female, 18).

Just over half of the research sample were young men and in general they reported a pressure on them to be 'hard' and 'able to stand up in their neighbourhood for themselves and their mates'.

> "*Its alright f' lasses though I'n'?. Like say if lasses come from Cantley t' Scawthorpe its different f' lads, they'd get the shit kicked out on 'em*"
> (Male, 17).

In most cases, drugs and alcohol impacted on their attitudes and behaviour and, for some, this was accepted as part of everyday life. These young people commented that training providers and employers did not understand the uniqueness of their circumstances/situation. They reported that if they were to

come off drugs and/or reduce their dependency on alcohol they would need to have a support worker who could help them to adjust to coping with the demands of work. The majority of NEET young people seemed to experience difficulties in believing that they can take control and attempt to direct their lives toward future goals.

**Gender**

2.38    It is particularly interesting to note that male and female perspectives differed in relation to who has most access to learning and work opportunities. In some cases, Personal Advisers and Training Providers suggested that young males are viewed as a priority when it comes to designing local provision:

> *"In terms of provision the young men get all of the attention because they will be doing all of the fighting"* (Connexions PA).

In contrast, others argued that new provision needs to take account of the benefits of building confidence amongst young men to help them move away from negative stereotypes and learn from positive role models. Some PAs and training providers indicated that:

> *"There is nothing that is just for men. I mean you've got YMCA … I think it's as equally important to have a male only service so you can build those relationships"* (Connexions PA)

2.39    From the young women interviewed it became apparent that supportive, targeted, women-only provision, such as that delivered by YMCA, was providing a vital role. The provision model offered a safe, supportive environment in which young women could recover self-confidence, share emotional concerns and begin, as a number attested, to turn their lived around. It was constantly clear from the interviews that young NEET people are perfectly capable of expressing themselves with great articulacy and emotional maturity. There is significant potential to involve young people more directly in discussions on the type of provision that would attract their interest and to link this to short taster programmes. In nearly all of the focus group discussions with young people, Personal Advisers and Training Providers, the issue of finding *suitable* 'second chance' opportunities – almost on a mature student 'access' model - geared towards helping adolescents build their confidence, experience life outside their immediate neighbourhood and sample new learning and work opportunities became a dominant theme. This is discussed more fully in section 3.

**Kinship and Family**

2.40    We asked young people if they could imagine moving away from their neighbourhood and/or family. Many reported that they would find moving away difficult, though there was evidence of the ambivalent relationship between the

security of 'staying' and the possible independence of 'leaving' that Bauman (2001)[7] has noted as central to the experience of community. Furthermore, some young people from the former pit villages in the Doncaster coalfield showed a strength of attachment to locality that has long been noted as a characteristic of the 'archetypal communities' that the industry sustained.[8]  When asked if they would move out of the area if a suitable job offer came along, one young person indicated:

> *"If it were a job that I really liked an' wanted t' tek further, id move [..] it'd be really difficult cos like my family is like really close like when we went away f' that week (residential) I were on phone t' me dad ev'ry night so it'd be difficult but I'd do it if circumstances were"* (Female, 17).

2.41    Some young people felt that they fitted well in their local community, with family ties being really important to them. For example:

> *"I'd rather have no money an still have me family and friends, ye can al'ys turn to em if you need anythin, that's if the' proper mates anyway. An family, ye can al'ys turn to em if ye need anythin anyway [..] if they say they'll be there for ye, they'll be there for ya for owt"* (Male, 17 ).

> *"It's weird really, they al's keep their families together. Like we've got a place called xxx in our village an it in't a very good place, it's where all proper druggies are. [..]  Most a people are alright, its just where most a proper crack 'eads an people that take heroin live. They always keep the families together, they'll be like thirty a one family livin' in same estate"* (Female, 17).

2.42    It is important to note, however, that many of the young people who took part in the research articulated the importance of their family. Even though their perspectives were important to the young people, the researchers did not feel that they conveyed any sense of undue pressure to achieve, or make their parents proud.

2.43    Some reported a feeling of being *vulnerable* and *at risk* of being singled out from their peers. For example:

> *"I don't really socialise in my area, I'm singled out from the rest of the people there because I won't do what they do. They go round drinkin', smokin, chuckin' up, goin' around being offensive to members of the opposite sex, etcetera, etcetera, offensive to people of all ages. I*

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[7] Bauman, Z. (2001). *Community: Seeking safety in an insecure world.* Cambridge: Polity.
[8] See for example, Dennis, N., Henriques, F. & Slaughter, C. (1956). *Coal is Our Life.* London: Eyre, and Spottiswood (2nd ed 1969), Warwick, D & Littlejohn, G. (1992). *Coal, Capital and Culture. A Sociological Analysis of Mining Communities in West Yorkshire.*  London: Tavistock.

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*completely refuse to do things like that so I'm singled out and ignored; so I come here where people are nice"* (Female 17).

*"Well I've been told, cos I'm only fourteen, that apparently I act a lot older than I do, erm and I'm not like immature like, I don't go an' play on park, stupid games like, erm, an' I get bullied f' that cos I act a lot older than I do and because m' bodies more formed than a fourteen your old I get bullied f'rit"* (Female 14).

2.44   When asked about the value of love and/or money, young people indicated a strong connectedness to their local kinship and family ties. For example,

*"People that got a lot a money, they don't 'av much love f' their kids d' they, give em what they want so the' spoilt brats. Like a poorer family they got more love than a rich family if that makes sense. There's this family on my street what a quite poor an' stuff like that but the' proper like love each other, they do everythin' together but there's this other family on my street that are quite well off an' that but the' don't spend no time together. When kids like wanan go out, want some money its like 'ere's twenny quid, fuck off f' day"* (Male, 17).

*"I'd rather have no money an still have me family and friends, ye can al'ys turn to em if you need anythin, that's if the' proper mates anyway. An family, ye can al'ys turn to em if ye need anythin anyway [..] if they say they'll be there for ye, they'll be there for ya for owt"* (Female, 19).

*"Im xxxxx, Im from Edlington, went through school, then sixth form f' IT and Business Studies but I di'n't like it, di'n't get on wi' any o' teachers. Course were a bit 'ard as well but I still passed one on 'em, the other one I completely failed cos I di'n't really listen. They di'n't say I c'n't carry on, the' just said your not gonna do very well so I jus' went t' work after [..] but got bored of it. It were m' next door neighbour that I were workin' f' so…[..] it were cash in 'and……"* (Male, 17)

2.45   There was also a real sense of tension and, in some cases, violence experienced by these young people from within their family homes. For example,

*Police turned up like an' I were goin' t' m' dad an' said, ill phone police on you, turned round an they were already 'ere an' I went get 'im locked up, 'e 'it me …an' I di'n't press charges cos its m' dad an' that, […] he were officer in Navy, if I would a got 'im done it woul'n't a just got done by.. 'e would a been done by Navy […] he's been in Navy since most of his life, started when he were sixteen an' he's forty two now so its most on 'is life"* (Female, 19).

2.46    Also, in a few cases, young people indicated that tragedies had impacted severely on their families which had, to some extent, affected their relationship building with others. For example,

> *"Me father, er well me uncle, I dint get to meet me uncle cos he died of a drug overdose, so me mum was broke up about that so if she found out that me or any a me two brothers were doin it, she'd be, she'd be 'eart broken really. An me father (breathes out deeply) I wou'n't even put it across him really. He wou'n't think twice really, if he found out I were doing shit like that, he'd go mad, off his rocker!"* (Male, 17).

2.47    From Personal Advisers and Support Workers' perspectives, it was emphasised that young people's aspirations were often very basic, influenced mainly by their family and peers. For example,

> *"I mean it's been a generational thing that families all went down the pit. But then obviously Thatcher came in……literally now parents and grandparents are saying, 'Oh, you know, you'll be all right, you'll get your benefits and all that sort of thing. And all that sort of, I'm not saying all, because I could never categorise, but that is part of the culture we see when we go out into the pit villages. And I'm from a pit village you know and, the days when you used to hear the miners coming home and they'd stop and have a pint and all that there's no community cohesion anymore… once you've lost that what have you really got in a community? What is there?" (*Connexions PA*)*

As a result, these young people's aspirations remain low with limited opportunities to see a different way of life that they themselves could realistically be part of. The concept of 'role models' and the need for parity of esteem between young people's oral and written skills were highlighted as key success factors. It was also perceived by these young people that their aspirations are generally quite low because of their failure to fully complete programmes of study at school or college.  For the majority, schools and colleges were perceived as institutions that had seriously failed them by not recognising individual potential and individual circumstances. This is discussed more fully in section 3.

**Drop-outs or look-outs?**

2.48    Walter (1985) coined the phrase '*drop-outs or look outs'*. He argued that "most of the unemployed are actually sentenced to a life of passivity, with every odd stacked against their taking charge of their own lives" (p.9). He suggests that what is less well known is that not only do the unemployed find it not difficult entering paid work in the *formal* economy, but also can sometimes be difficult for them to engage actively in other *economies* such as *household, informal and black.* He also highlighted that there is no difficulty finding people who are making a pretty good life out of the dole.

2.49　Young people were asked to indicate how they and their peers earned money. One young person stated:

> *"It depends what for really, I know people what get odd bit a work off local tradesman an that, a bit a plasterin'. Or if ya fancy doin a bit o' labouring for a few week y' get a couple a hundred quid for doin' that. Some on 'em 'll just get a little job on a Saturday an' that an' then there's some people that go out nickin' car stereos an' speakers [..] an they know that if they tek it somewhere, nine time out o' ten, possibly a drug dealer cos that's where people go; th've got somethin' an the' need some money for it, where can I tek it, they tek it 't a dealer, well that's case in Maltby anyway"* (Male, 17).

Also, many informal opportunities seem to occur on a regular basis. A few young people highlighted:

> *"You get people askin y', d' y' fancy earnin' y'self a couple a extra quid doin this, that an' other like"* (Male, 17).

2.50　In most cases the earning of money didn't seem to be driven by family necessity or any conventional notion of poverty but rather by a wish to be able to have enough money to get 'out and about' and consume in ways that are seen as characteristic of having a 'good life'. In some cases, parents actively facilitated young people earning by paying them for jobs done within the family. Indeed, such 'earning' was seen as strongly preferable to being 'spoiled' by being given money. Young people talked of being able to move fairly easily into and out of 'cash in hand' work in the *informal economy* with access to such employment being facilitated by mates and family members on an *ad hoc* basis. Examples of such work included work in 'the corner shop' and, commonly, unskilled construction work in a sector that was, at the time the fieldwork was carried out, still buoyant. Indeed there was a general sense not of 'dropping out' but of participating realistically in a situation where the borders between 'work', education, training and unemployment are more fluid and permeable than the NEET reporting categories allow. In one case, a young people described his experience of work as follows:

> *'ad like a sat'd'y job at this place called xxxx, 'bout twenny pond a day cash in 'and an' then when I left school I went there full time, no not full time, it were about thursd'y, frid'y, sat''y, then I got a job next door to it in a Chinese and I used t' bike there an' bike back and I would a bin like sixteen when I left school id like cycle there, work, go 'ome an' I never went anywhere"* (Male, 18).

2.51　In summary, it would thus seem that NEET definitions and categories are the labels given by policymakers (and researchers) given mainly to working class young people. Each young person we spoke to stated that their middle class

counterparts are often portrayed by the media and employers in a much more positive light. Generally speaking, for the NEET young people in our sample there is no such thing as a 'gap year' or 'time out' designed as part of a socially acceptable discourse of growth and discovery i.e. to engage in different types of informal learning, instead 'NEET time out' is perceived by 'outsiders' as largely problematic.

2.52 For some of these young people the reality of everyday living and survival (now and in the future) appears to reside primarily in their existing knowledge of local neighbourhoods and informal networks. Each young person had his/her story to tell about life experiences, friendships or lack of 'proper friends', and their hopes and dreams for the future. In one case, a young woman told us of her transition from feeling suicidal to gaining a sense of self worth.

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**Pen Portrait 2: Female, 17**

*"I went to the doctor's 'cos I felt like quite suicidal, depressed an' stuff like that. I went t' the doctor's an' said I really need to do somethin' now, I'm at an all time low, I shou'n't be like this, I'm only young ….'cos I wa'n't in employment needed help wi' that an' I went t' Connexions, the main Connexions in town an' I felt like I was just getting pushed into employment cos I wasn't in school anymore but XXXX of Connexions, er, it felt like I could connect to them as a person, not just about what I wanna do with my life but what I wanna do as a person and what I need to get there basically, y' know not just puttin' me in a job. And I like built relationships with the people here and so I felt like a bit more supported so I had a bit more confidence like and ever since then I have got like into the Arts Award and done things like meetings and like conferences and we have been to like London to do performances for poverty and like other campaign so like that's my story.[…] I needed one specific person that I could see on a level who could know me for the person that I was and what I wanted to do […] it works so much better, y' know….. I just had so many different things that I wanted to do and it was like you need a job, you've left school and it were pick pick a…, admin, customer services, stuff like that, specific stuff and it was like always seeing somebody different so you're always explaining yourself…. they'll just print a load of admin jobs off and they'll like say phone 'em. F' god sake, I might have confidence problems, I might not be able to pick up the phone or I might be dyslexic".*

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2.53 Lessons learned from these NEET young people's stories highlighted the extent to which they managed to find:

- safe and familiar places to 'hang out with friends';
- different forms of learning, work and on-the-job training in the household, informal and/or black economies;
- access to paid work on a casual basis;

- trusting relationships with some Personal Advisers and Support Workers; and
- activities that keep them occupied though not necessarily focused on formal training and work.

2.54 For the majority, chance and happenstance i.e. being in the right place at the right time, seemed to feature prominently in these young people's lives. These NEET young people articulated clearly that if they are to eventually succeed in learning and work then greater flexibility and support is required with access to new and relevant types of learning and work situated in their locality.

## 3.0 Learning and Work

3.1 This section explores the extent to which these young people's personal development and learning needs are currently being met through an examination of motivation for, perceived barriers to, and participation in learning and work.

3.2 All young people indicated that they had participated in some form of learning, defined as *'any course that was meant to lead to a qualification (accredited)'* or simply *'help to develop job-related or practical skills (non-accredited)',* in the past 12 months. Young people were engaged in differing types of programmes at Level 1 through to Level 2. The learning programmes included a variety of subjects such as basic skills, job readiness, and vocational elements such as mechanics, catering and business administration.

3.3 When asked if they knew where to access information on learning opportunities and provision, most young people were able to name a range of local organisations, including Jobcentre Plus, Doncaster College, The Prince's Trust, GLAD, Connexions and Morthyng. Given most had engaged with learning as a result of their association with Connexions Doncaster or a participating voluntary and community organisations, all mentioned these organisations as a valuable sources of support. One young woman stated:

> *"I went t' Connexions, the main Connexions in town an' I felt like I was just getting pushed into employment cos I wasn't in school anymore but XXXX of Connexions 'ere it felt like I could connect to them as a person, not just about what I wanna do with my life but what I wanna do as a person and what I need to get there basically, y' know not just puttin' me in a job"* (Female, 17).

3.4 Most young people were keen to try out new activities, to use their talents and skills and to learn more about the things they are good at and enjoy most. In many cases, negative experiences of school and/or college had affected their confidence. They were particularly keen that services offered should be impartial with practical help, beyond writing CVs, to help them discover new and positive things about themselves. They stated clearly that they did not want to be channelled down a specific route(s) which were inappropriate.

3.5 Personal Advisers talked about some of the difficulties young people encounter as a result of their existing literacy and numeracy skills. In many cases, it was suggested that some training providers are not diagnosing and assessing needs properly (or in a sensitive manner) which means that many NEET young people are left with a sense of re-enforced failure as a result of trying to participate in new forms of learning and work. For example:

> *"One of the barriers I'm coming across I think with two of the young people I'm working with: they've been to the providers, and they have a*

*foundation, If one has done a foundation mechanics course, one has done a foundation bricklaying course; however, that doesn't equate to any numeracy and literacy skills. So they've both applied to a local college to do a level one course, and they've been knocked back because they don't have GCSE grade C or above. So what is the point of that year, of a foundation, when they're gonna get knocked back the minute they apply to college?* (Connexions PA).

Interestingly, training provider staff equally felt that the information they received on young people from referring staff was often incomplete. As a result, there appears to be scope for closer working links to be established between PAs and College and Training providers so that shared assessments of NEET young people's hidden talents and skills can take place. It was generally agreed that the current use of applied formal assessment tools could be acting as a barrier to progression. Those PAs and support workers who have developed trusting relationships with young people were keen to engage in a dialogue with providers on differing forms of learning styles and assessments for NEET young people. PAs highlighted that many young people do not like or enjoy being in a classroom environment.

3.6     When asked what they would like from youth support services, participants were in agreement that they would want a service that was accessible and approachable; where the staff were non-judgemental; good listeners; and were honest and open whilst being supportive. The issue of confidence in decision-making was explored during the focus-group discussions. Participants across all groups recognised that not all decisions are the same and judged the seriousness of the decision in terms of the *likely impact the outcome would have on their life*. Young peoples' confidence in decision-making in relation to any aspect of life, including work and learning, appeared to depend on a) the perceived severity of the consequences and b) the level of support available.

3.7     When asked if they knew where to look for work, the majority of young people were familiar with the most common methods of job searching and sources of advice, including: the local press; Jobcentre Plus; and the Internet. Many relied on 'word of mouth' through their networks of family and friends to identify possible job opportunities. As discussed earlier, these young people showed very limited knowledge and awareness of the labour market outside their immediate locality, including neighbouring towns. The indications suggest that this lack of confidence in interview situations is, at least in part, a result of uncertainty about how to effectively present and promote themselves to potential employers.

3.8     It became apparent during the group discussions that individuals felt empowered to make decisions if they had access *to relevant information* to help inform their decisions **and** *back up support from a trusted adviser/broker* who was willing to advocate on their behalf:

> *"I used to be agoraphobic and the women's centre helped me to go round to Newcastle an' stuff an' I actually felt a lot better for it"* (Female, 17).

3.9 The opportunity to discuss and/or affirm decisions with peers and/or family members was important to the majority of young people. One young person stated:

> *"Me personally I don't know, obviously bloods thicker than water as they say but sometimes I could go an talk to t a mate about somethin' that I couldn't necessarily talk to some a me family about. I can talk t me dad about anything, I could tell him anything at all but some members of my family I couldn't. Bar me dad and me sister it's me mates really"* (Male, 17).

3.10 Opportunities provided by Connexions Doncaster and voluntary/community organisations to meet informally with young people facing difficult domestic circumstances appeared to be highly valued. Indeed it was apparent during group interactions that peers were a vital source of information and support, not least because they had an appreciation of what others in the group were going through and could provide advice to those who were facing decisions either for the first time (for example, first-time young mothers), or after a substantial period engaged in the same activity (for example, individual's job hunting):

> *"I think its been good for us as young women, listening to other people's stories and know that people are from different backgrounds, sometimes you get so wrapped up in your own y' don't realise what else is going on around you, then sometimes you appreciate what you have got because other people are in different situations"* (Female, 17).

> *"And not only that, you've got all this inside, you didn't know that you got all a this information inside o' you an' the chance to let it all out"*
> (Female, 19).

3.11 Although each young person has their own unique set of circumstances, there is a degree of complexity common to all that appears to impact on their ability to make effective decisions about learning and work. It was suggested that in order to further enhance local training and delivery arrangements, the Leading Empowered Organisations (LEO) initiative promoted by Connexions Bournemouth[9] may be of interest to local organisations.

The groups also identified a diverse range of mediating factors that impact on the process and/or outcomes of decision-making.

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[9] LSC Case Studies of Best Practice derived from Bournemouth Borough Council. Contact Simon Thomas
email: thomass@connexions-bdp.co.uk.

**Other factors that influence decisions about learning and work**

*Cost versus benefits*

3.12 Although not entirely motivated by money, the majority of young people indicated that *suitable wages* were a key determining factor when deciding whether to apply for a particular job or training place. Young people expressed concern regarding the costs incurred simply by working, for example, the requirement to dress smartly and, therefore, purchase a suit, the need to buy specific items such as safety boots, and the likely costs incurred travelling to and from the workplace.

3.13 Some had concerns over the potential loss of benefits linked to anxiety about *job security.* A few questioned whether it was worth pursuing a job of a temporary and/or insecure nature because of the time and effort involved in re-applying for benefits after the contract was completed. These concerns were compounded by their perception that employers would be reluctant to take on board the complexity of their personal lives and in the case of a crisis would seek to terminate their employment.

3.14 Participants indicated that they would be reluctant to embark on a course that they did not believe they would find interesting and enjoyable as well as useful. Some reported examples of negative experiences that remain with them and this has affected their motivation to engage in formal learning and work. For example:

> *"I got took out of mainstream lessons; 'copy this off a board', day in, day out, do this, do that 'why', 'cos you got to', you know what I mean. Treat ya like monkeys. Do this, do that, for what?  D' y' know what I mean [..] I kicked against it, 'you do this', 'no I won't'. If someone tells you to not do summat, your gonna aren't ya. If I told you not to think about a blue bus, you'd think about a blue bus"* (Male, 17).

Overall, these young people cited numerous examples of situations were they felt let down and angry about how they had been treated at school by their teachers and/or peers.

*Interests and qualifications*

3.15 Participants reported they were unlikely to decide to take up a job or programme of study unless it was suited to their interests and needs:

> *"I enjoy talking, sometimes arguing an I think im good at stuff like written work. I'm not like an idiot an I been t' college an I can do like practical work like bricklaying an labouring an stuff cos I used to work wi a bloke down my end but I prefer, not s' much … but I feel I'm good at like written work an speakin' an' putting things together an ye know what I mean" (* Male, 17).

3.16    The perceived necessity to *gain a particular qualification/level of qualification* in order to undertake a particular job or to improve one's prospects of getting work acted as both a 'barrier' and 'enabler' for these young people. Some young people were of the view that employers attach greater importance to qualifications and experience rather than to skills. They expressed frustration that, despite possessing what they regarded as transferable skills and enthusiasm, many colleges, training providers and employers appeared reluctant to give them a chance because, on paper, they did not have 'suitable qualifications' or experience:

> "*It's a chicken and egg situation - can't get the job without the right experience but can't get the experience without the job*" (Male, 17).

3.17    The majority of participants possessed at least a Level 1 qualification, and in most cases this was sufficient to gain entry into a programme of study or training. However, one of the participants who did not possess any qualifications indicated that their lack of qualifications had deterred them from applying to undertake a course or training programme. The findings suggest, however, this it is not necessarily the lack of a qualification in itself that deters NEETs, but rather their lack of confidence in their own abilities, particularly if they have poor literacy and numeracy skills. The fear of failure appears to be a powerful influence on those who lack confidence in their ability to learn. In particular, not being able to manage setbacks effectively appeared to have undermined many young people's confidence in their own abilities. This was highlighted by young people, PAs and Training Providers as an area for development in terms of introducing new forms of relevant provision and support. In some cases, the need for a 'new flexible and personalised curriculum' was referred to as a means of building confidence, offering support and introducing NEET young people to different forms of relevant learning and work.

3.18    In addition, age was also perceived by some to be a barrier to achievement:

> "*I'm twenty one, I'm wanting to do a modern apprenticeship and I can get into oracle and that and that's all right, a training provider and you go into salon four days and you go into oracle one day, part o' y' trainin' course but the salon don't wannna take me on cos I'm not sixteen, I haven't just left school*" (Female, 21).

Personal advisers and training providers also highlighted that the age at which the young person comes into contact with services can act as a barrier to progression.

> "*If above the age of 19, or 25 (LDD) they suffer discrimination in terms of the training programmes available to them*" (Training Provider).

3.19 A major theme which emerged through the interviews with young people and personal advisers related to the notion of *false promises*. Young people felt that they had been let down, particularly by adults in authoritative roles and quite commonly within an educational setting. Being promised something, the autonomy to design and create a project of your own choosing, for instance, and then having that opportunity taken away affected young people acutely, particularly the young men who were part of the focus groups. This is significant for two reasons, both of which are connected to the issue of *respect* and its critical importance to marginalised people (Sennet, 2003)[10]. Firstly, if someone is not good to their word, i.e. they break a promise, they could arguably be seen as untrustworthy, and therefore legitimately not due respect. Secondly, for the young people on the receiving end of the broken promise, they are reminded of their lack of autonomy and agency, *someone else* makes decisions which *affects them*. The apparent lack of consultation that some of the young people recounted could be seen as disrespectful and/or offensive. Some Personal Advisers reported:

> *"There's a significant minority who didn't enjoy school not because they felt that teachers didn't respect them, but these are the kids who were quiet and sat in the back of the class while the teachers were sorting out the kids who were making the noise and who've got the behavioural problems. And they got passed by I think, and the parents come in and they say, you know, 'He's left school and he can't read or write properly' and it's because nobody ever really acknowledged that they were there or, because they weren't shouting because they weren't presenting any behavioural problems that needed addressing they were just allowed to sit quietly and be passed by, and I think that that is a problem"* (PA).

> *"My learners do say that they enjoy coming to training centre because they aren't talked down to and they are treated like adults…I feel one of the essential parts of my job as a mentor is to be building relationships and confidence"* (Training Provider).

3.20 Personal Advisers highlighted the negative attitude of *some* training providers and employers towards NEET young people. This was a particularly significant in terms of young people being 'offered of a place' with an agreed outline of what this would entail, followed by a non-negotiated change of plan which in effect disempowered young people to own and take responsibility for their learning and development plan. This was supported by young people's individual stories, for example:

> *" I went t' college f' half a year, jacked it in, then went on a coupla trainin' courses, went back t' college this year an' ballsed it up, jacked it in. Originally doin' Media Studies but it were borin'. I thought it' d be alright at*

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[10] Sennet, R (2003*). Respect: The formation of character in an age of inequality.* Allen Lane: Penguin.

*first then it got crap so….They changed us tutors half way through an' we 'ad a reight arse'ole an' I ended up kickin' off wi' 'im. Our final project were t' mek a film, of our own choice ,an' he ended up pickin' choices f'r us. He said you're doin' this, your doin' that, so I ended up ………walkin' out"* (Male, 17).

*Motivation*

3.21 Participants identified a range of factors that had motivated and/or enabled them to engage in learning or work:

- *Information*: participants across all groups had initially found out about learning opportunities through the voluntary and community organisation they attended. There was evidence to suggest that PAs and support workers frequently research opportunities on their clients' behalf and promote personal development opportunities. One respondent commented:

  *"I used to be agoraphobic and the women's centre helped me to go round to Newcastle an' stuff an' I actually felt a lot better for it"* (Female, 17).

- *Advice and guidance:* all of whom had been successfully engaged in one or more learning and work programmes in the last year, attributed the success of their achievements to the quality of the initial advice they had received,

- *Support*: The majority of participants reported that the support and encouragement they had received from staff at the various voluntary organisations and Connexions service had a positive impact on their attitudes and experiences

- *Feedback*: Young people valued open, trust-based and communicative relationships with their support workers including feedback on progress made so far.

3.22 Nearly all of the participants highlighted that their ability to engage in 'meaningful work and learning' was determined by the *limited* opportunities available locally. PAs indicated that labour market information is something that these young people do not seek out, instead they rely heavily on their peers, family, PAs or local Training Providers. In discussions with staff, the issue of PA and support workers' level of awareness of local job opportunities was raised given the emphasis currently placed on building relationships with young people; this was perceived by some to be at the expense of building relationships with employers and training providers.

3.23 Some, particularly younger, participants who had expressed their intention to engage in learning had been deterred by friends and family who had questioned the value of the proposed course. Those young people who were currently

seeking work reported that they had experienced negative attitudes from members of staff at the 'benefits agency'. They felt that they had been made to feel as though they were personally to blame for their current situation and that they had somehow deliberately made themselves homeless/unemployed and *'were sent to Job Clubs for people who don't want to work'*. These experiences appeared to have had a negative impact on their self-confidence and self-esteem, which acted as a barrier to their future progress.

3.24 The majority of young people NEET had received formal or informal information and advice from sources including their local Connexions service, voluntary and community organisations, and Jobcentre Plus. A number of young people indicated that they had found the information and advice they had received useful. Many were unclear about their chosen career path or learning and development needs and were critical of the support they had received and identified a need for more in-depth guidance. One respondent commented:

> *"the Job Centre can only help if already you know what course you want to do"* (Female, 18).

Some individuals stated that they 'don't know what they don't know', as one respondent stated, *'you have to know what questions to ask'*, and are therefore also unaware of which services would be of benefit to them

3.25 In summary, young people's limited access to, and awareness of, relevant learning and work was perceived by all participants as major barrier to progression. Career aspirations are generally quite basic largely influenced by young people's family experiences and that of their peers. Information concerning local labour market information is largely reliant on 'hearsay' amongst peers and family or based on chance encounters available to a few rather than the majority. Therefore, the role of the Personal Adviser is crucial in identifying and brokering suitable training and job opportunities for NEET young people. In addition, training providers, college staff and youth support workers could benefit further by involving young people to tell their stories and personal narratives so that issues such as more accurate diagnosis of need and assessments can be made.

# 4.0 Conclusions

4.1 This research set out to listen to and capture the voices of NEET young people and their perceptions and experiences of learning and work. In addition, Personal Advisers and Training Providers' views were canvassed to gain a third party perspective on local issues and needs. From this, South Yorkshire Learning and Skills Council and its partner organisations may wish to discuss how best to focus funding and resources in 2008-2010. This section is designed to draw together the key findings from the research in order to consider the implications for future provision in the Doncaster area.

4.2 Our research has revealed a great diversity of experiences, attitudes and behaviours of young people in the NEET group. Drawing on the narratives of these young people's lives, it became apparent that at least *five key themes* began to emerge as follows:-

- *Freedom and flexibility:* young people expressed a real desire to move away from anything that seemed remotely like a classroom. PA's also noted the need for flexibility in working practices when it came to engaging young people who had numerous barriers to overcome.
- *Snakes and Ladders*: young people indicated they felt they had made progress in learning a new skill only to be denied opportunities by qualification barriers, i.e. not having 5 GCSE's which prevented progression or led to them being placed on courses that didn't lead to relevant accreditation or activities that the young people saw as particularly worthwhile.
- *Disenchantment:* young people reported a real sense of 'false promises' made by educators and service staff, whether intentional or not, which had serious negative effects in terms of their ability to trust and develop meaningful rapport.
- *Personalisation:* young people highlighted their need for a more customised and individualised service that takes account of the complexity of their lives and the need for a reliable anchor point.
- *Detachment and escapism:* young people stated that those who are on benefits and not in education, training or employment (NEET) are seen by some as 'getting everything for free'; they themselves, however, generally felt anger towards local immigrants, levelling the same criticism that 'they get everything for free'.

4.3 Clearly some, though not all, individuals not in education, employment or training (NEET) face multiple disadvantage. The complexity of circumstance greatly influences and often determines the decisions they make to engage in, or disengage from, learning and work. Indeed many young people appeared to feel so constrained by their circumstances that they perceived that they had *no real choices at all*. Focused on the immediate here and now and, in some cases, basic human needs, a number of participants were not in a 'state of readiness' to

search for jobs or training opportunities. Notwithstanding this, it was clear that *academic under-achievement* is prevalent in this sample of NEET young people and their *talents and soft skills* remain largely untapped and not fully connected to the world of *formal* learning and work. Many described the formal system as failing to get to know them properly by offering them opportunities that on reflection were inappropriate to their individual needs.

4.4     Alcohol and drug use were not uncommon. Marijuana, cocaine, amphetamines and anabolic steroids were all mentioned in the various groups and one-to-one discussions. In general, young people appeared to be pacified through the financial exchanges they were part of, they seem to be denied agency, only achieving it through conspicuous consumption:

> "*Then I went t' college doin' hairdressing f' a day then I quit, ha ha. I bought all m' stuff an' then night before I had taken so much gear, phet, an' I went in next day an cos the were mirrors everywhere an' I kept seeing loads a things! So I thought I'm not doing that anymore so I just quit. Me dad paid loads a money out f' all stuff, three hundred an' fifty quid f' all kit an' what y' av' t' wear* (Female, 19).

4.5     The participants in this research project exhibited varying degrees of confidence in their decision-making, particularly in relation to learning and work. They demonstrated awareness of where to obtain information to help inform their decisions, recognised the value of discussing their decisions with significant others, and weighed the potential costs of their decisions against the perceived benefits.  However, the findings suggest that their confidence can falter when they are required to follow-up and/or act on a decision they have taken. A number of the participants recognised that they possessed low self-confidence, self-esteem and even self-worth. Self perception, along with the perceptions of friends and family, appear to be just as influential as many of the physical barriers, perceived or actual, on individuals' decisions and engagement in learning and work.

4.6     There does appear to be a discernable link between the level of support NEET young people have received and the progress they have made towards achieving a sense of fulfilment. Personal Advisers were highly rated by almost all of the young people participating in the research. The key to success was characterised as:

> "*Actually it's spending the time with them and listening to them on a one-to-one basis. Not promising them anything…I always say to a young person 'what you see with me is what you get' You know, I won't promise you anything but I'll support you, 100% if you'll be honest with me"* (Connexions PA).

4.7    It was apparent that generally training provision does not seem to make good sense to many of the participants in the research. There are many quotes not included in this report mainly for brevity[11]; however, a summary of key themes emerging include:

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- Reports from NEET young people of going round and round in circles and getting nowhere fast *i.e. entry to second chance learning and work generally perceived as restricted or virtually non-existent.*

- Broken promises and fractured learning experiences *i.e. successful entry into formal learning followed by unexpected and non-negotiated changes in the programme which affect young people's motivation levels.*

- Choice viewed by many NEET young people as something of a 'myth' rather than 'reality' *i.e. entry to relevant learning experiences constrained due to local labour market conditions and/or family and peers' perceptions of what constitutes a decent or proper job.*

- Perceived qualification barriers to enter further education programmes *i.e. entry onto programmes restricted mainly because of agencies' formal and sometimes ad hoc assessments of young people's literacy and numeracy skills.*

- Repeated experiences of 'low level courses' *i.e. entry onto programmes of learning were insufficiently challenging or stimulating in order to retain young people's motivation and interest.*

- Gaps in provision such as role model initiatives, exposure to short taster courses with one-to-one back up support from Personal Advisers, family learning projects linked to increasing levels of awareness and knowledge of the world of work, literacy and numeracy skills development that moves away from classroom delivery towards on-line or face-to-face fun learning activities *i.e. entry onto programmes that involve young people as peer mentors and agents for change in their local neighbourhood and community.*

- The interface between support services designed for young people and for adults sometimes confusing *i.e. entry onto learning and work programmes resides with different gatekeepers offering differing levels of information and support.*

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[11] The iCeGS research team have systematically catalogued NEET young people stories and permission was granted by the participants to use these as part of a longer term NEET research project.

**Implications**

4.8   The findings have a number of implications for the funding, development and delivery of youth support services for NEET young people in the Doncaster area.

- Opportunities do exist to re-engage young people who have so far given up on formal education. There is significant potential to draw upon 'live case studies' and narratives as a rich source of information for (i) motivating young people to engage in learning and work, and (ii) supporting the training and development needs of Personal Advisers, College staff and Training Providers.

- Stories of disappointment and meaningless pedagogy in schools featured throughout the research dialogue with young people, Personal Advisers and training providers. From this a new form of personalised curriculum for young people at post-16 was identified as a powerful lever to help bring about change in young people's attitudes, behaviour and exposure to new experiences within and outside the local labour market.

- Flexibility in entry requirements for college courses e.g. new types of diagnostic assessments are required to take account of young people's existing soft skills. Where entry onto a course is denied young people and their Personal Advisers requested sensitive feedback on what they needed to do to improve their chances of progression.

- The relationship of young people knowing their own sense of space and neighbourhood is very significant in terms of how this influences decision-making and access to suitable opportunities. Local agencies play a key role in bringing together young people who would not otherwise socialise with one another or share their experiences of the highs and lows of coping with and managing change. Projects designed to break down barriers in terms of self and cultural identity have the potential to offer new forms of second chance opportunities for at risk young people.

- Taking into consideration Personal Advisers direct experiences of working with NEET young people, it is clear that building a one-to-one relationship with young people is a critical success factor. However, it was also noted that further development of techniques in individual skills coaching, confidence building, mentoring and peer support (with accredited learning) could provide added value to existing arrangements in Doncaster.

- Initial formal assessments undertaken by colleges and training providers generally appear quite restrictive rather than expansive. This has resulted in some young people giving up at an early stage on 'second chance' provision thus perpetuating a perceived cycle of failure either by the young people themselves and/or by local providers.

4.9     On the one hand, for some the black economy provides enough funds for survival and enjoyment, but in many cases this is viewed as precarious and inadequate in the long term. Young people reported they would welcome more personalised information, advice and support on an ongoing basis. There were at least *three* very specific requirements which stood out from the analysed narratives, namely:

> • Top-up literacy support required but this has to be offered in the context of this being something relevant and meaningful to the individuals' needs.
>
> • Access required to relevant vocational taster courses with brokerage support provided from a Personal Adviser or support worker.
>
> • Tailored and flexible provision that helps NEET young people to build their confidence and to gain access to taster courses including positive self-image, managing difficult situations, financial awareness and coping with stress.

4.10    In general, vocational development was perceived by these NEET young people as mainly information giving and CV writing. They argued that a different approach is required which would enable them to 'try things out' in order to help them decide whether or not they were suited to different types of work experiences. Many young people reported that they didn't know where to look for work experience whilst at school or whilst they were excluded from school, therefore, the main source of knowing about work came from their families, peers or the television.

4.11    Knowledge of employer and local labour market opportunities has to be carefully balanced alongside intensive support provided by Personal Advisers to NEET young people. This topic warrants further discussion at a local level to assess the extent to which access to and engagement with employers can be more fully realised with the support of additional funds.

4.12    Finally, identifying a space for NEET young people's voices to be heard within and outside their local community offers some potential for individual's to informally and formally network with others and to extend their horizons beyond the immediate confines of their neighbourhood and community.

# 5.0 Recommendations

5.1     There are *ten* key recommendations offered by the iCeGS research team to local agencies working in partnership with South Yorkshire Learning and Skills. It is hoped that this will feed into discussions with the Learning & Skills Council who are likely to be able to access new and additional European Social Funds to help support enhanced provision for young people in the Doncaster area from late 2008 onwards. These are not presented in a hierarchy of order given young people and local agencies are best placed to determine their priority needs. A guiding principle that lies behind our set of recommendations is that people from *all* walks of life learn from stories and from this new thinking and ideas often emerge.

**Recommendation 1:**
There is scope to increase the level of involvement of young people themselves within the processes and systems which define and handle NEETS. At a practical level, NEET stories and experiences can be used to illustrate powerfully the barriers and enablers to young people's engagement in learning and work. These young people had hopes, dreams and ambitions to achieve more for themselves but they needed greater understanding and support.

**Recommendation 2:**
There is demand for confidence-building and self-awareness courses involving young people who are peer motivators and positive role models. This could be linked to new coaching and mentoring taster programmes, extended over time to offer individuals sustained reflection and the setting of realistic goals. This could also be linked to accreditation, where appropriate.

**Recommendation 3:**
Local training providers should consider how best to give parity of esteem between NEET young people's oral and written skills. Techniques for diagnosing and assessing young people's capabilities should be revisited to establish whether or not opportunities are being missed to involve young people in meaningful training and personal development opportunities. Linked to this, is the demand for more vocational taster courses, with back up support from Personal Advisers and/or learning mentors.

**Recommendation 4:**
The initial and ongoing training of Personal Advisers, Trainers and allied youth support workers should explore more fully tactics and strategies for helping young people to cope and adjust successfully to *unplanned changes* in their learning programmes. Also, there exists at a national and local level, limited training for youth support workers on labour market information and ways of handling this effectively within their communities. In this regard, recent work carried out by

Professor Jenny Bimrose at the Institute for Employment Research (IER) Warwick University, could lend itself well to local developments[12].

**Recommendation 5:**
The role of family, peers and neighbourhood could be further developed into family learning projects designed by young people with Personal Advisers and Training Providers. This should aim to achieve increased exposure to changes and new developments in the labour market, skills and techniques for managing setbacks and seizing opportunities, as well as confidence building. A key learning outcome would be to address perceptions of learning and work and to inform individuals on knowing *why*, knowing *how* and knowing *where* to look for suitable learning and work opportunities.

**Recommendation 6:**
Place-specific factors, such as geographical location, community norms, historical and current patterns of employment are central to understanding how and whether interventions work, alongside who is involved in delivery. This calls for *local flexibility* for PAs and learning mentors with the option of them having more control of *small-scale budgets* designed to support young people's immediate personal development needs

**Recommendation 7:**
An exploration with NEET young people, Personal Advisers and Training Providers revealed a growing need to develop suitable and sustainable' second chance' opportunities, almost on a *mature student 'access' model* geared towards helping adolescents build their confidence, experience life outside their immediate neighbourhood and sample new learning and work opportunities.

**Recommendation 8:**
There is scope for closer working links to be established between PAs, College and Training Providers so that shared assessments of NEET young people's hidden talents and skills can take place. The current use of applied formal assessment tools could be acting as a major barrier to young people's progression.

**Recommendation 9:**
The importance of appropriately trained staff who are empathetic to the views of young people at risk underpins high quality youth support services. Connexions Doncaster is commended for their work in this regard. In order to further enhance training and delivery arrangements, the Doncaster MBC and Learning & Skills Council may wish to assess more fully the Leading Empowered Organisations (LEO) initiative.

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[12] The National Guidance Research Forum (NGRF) Labour Market Information currently being tested in Connexions Kent and Medway. Contact: j.bimrose@warwick.ac.uk.

**Recommendation 10:**

Lessons learned from the Learning Agreement Pilots in eight areas of England[13] should feed into developments in the Doncaster area in relation to Connexions service work with employers. From this a stronger evidence-base for capturing NEET young people's experiences of learning and work could emerge.

At the conclusion of this Executive Summary report, let us listen once again to the voices of NEET young people. Indeed it is their experiences, dreams, and aspirations that lie at the heart of developing high quality youth support services within neighbourhoods and local communities.

> *"I think its been good for us as young women, listening to other people's stories and know that people are from different backgrounds, sometimes you get so wrapped up in your own y' don't realise what else is going on around you, then sometimes you appreciate what you have got because other people are in different situations"* (Female, 17).

> *"You've got all this inside, you didn't know that you got all a this information inside o' you an' the chance to let it all out"* (Female, 19).

The poignant words of a young man from Doncaster reflecting the reality of his life and experience,

> *"I done a lot, a lot a stupid things, like tattoo on me neck, why did I av t' go an get that, ye know I look like a ... someone sees it and they judge it straight away, an I don't care what people say but people are, what d ya say, what d ya call it when people judge ya by your looks, stereotypin …
> An I can understand that but like I said before, **people do change**"*
> (Male, 17).

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[13] Blythe,J., Elo, J., Gration, G. & Hughes, D. (2008). *The Learning Agreement Pilot in Lancashire, England: supporting young people in jobs without training*. Derby: International Centre for Guidance Studies(iCeGS) Occasional Paper, June 2008.

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# Appendix One: Literature Review

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## Appendix Two: Case Studies

**Female A:** M' name's xxxx, I were born in Scotland an' then I moved t' Portsmouth an' lived there f' ages then moved here; Primary School, that were good, Secondary school then straight t' college. [..] Wi' GCSEs I only sat three on 'em [..] I were in a bad way wi' getting wrecked an' that [..] drink an' everythin' really . Started when I were in about year eight then reight through, never went t school a anythin', twaggin pretty much every day. There were a group on us, used t' meet up in morning an' go an get stoned across road from school in woods (danger of getting caught, why not fuck it all off – go further a field) School knew but di'n't bother doin' anythin', when I did used t' g' the put me in unit so I wou'n't run away. Its like where y' go when y' been naughty. [...] Then I went t' college doin' hairdressing f' a day then I quit, ha ha. I bought all m' stuff an' then (embarrassed almost disbelieving laughter) Night before I had taken so much gear, phet, an' I went in next day an cos the were mirrors everywhere an' I kept seeing loads a things (laughter) so I thought I'm not doing that anymore so I just quit. Me dad payed loads a money out f' all stuff, three hundreds an' fifty quid f' all kit an' what y' av' t' wear an that then stayed wi' m' friend f' a year an got a job on market erm then went back t' college t' do performin' arts. I stayed there f' about two month an' then I got kicked out cos I were just being naughty [..] getting' stoned an' drinkin an' all that. I were being late, not turning up, turning up hammered. [..] that were two year ago, or a year ago. I moved back t' Scotland, got back about three month ago. I moved t' live wi' me dad but I got kicked out (laughter) so I had t' come back. Parents 'd split up ages ago, dad's wi' step mum, total bitch. Now I just go 'ome get changed then go out again.

**Female B:** I got bought up in Howarth, then moved t' Bessica when I were six or summert then went t' Cantley, then to Hawcroft. Family get bored of Howarth so moved t' Cantly an' that's when m' life started t' get fucked up [...] well about two year ago m' brother died then m' mum got cancer about four year ago so m' 'ead were pretty fucked, then I started on drugs, like smoking weed an that, then stopped goin' t' school. Thwn m' mum an' dad were arguin' a lot an' that an' then they split up, but the back together now. Then I fucked off school cos I c'n't be arsed wi' it an' I went like a year off school, di'n't go in year eleven. Then I went t' college [....] I went there off m' own back. In me year off school tryin t sort m' 'ead out an that, they knew what happened like, they put me on half days. Got support but di'n't get along wi' person who were…they were talkin' out the' arse really. I went back f' me GCSEs but I only sat maths, English and science and I did crap in them an' I went t college an io fucked off college, cos it were just like school all over again. Like w 'ad t' sit on carpet an' 'av circle time, like tell everyone y' problem's an' that. Id nearly been a year at college but I just quit t' come 'ere. I were doing Health an' Social, I wanted t' be a Social Worker but not anymore, its put me off that course [...] I cant see m'self goin' t' University an' all that.

**Male A:** Well I were born in Nottingham, moved t' Headlow when I were about three or sommert, went t' primary school an' that were a breeze, that were alright, then comp an' then that's when I started t' become a little bastard. Oh well I were just excluded every other day. Day one I lobbed a book at a teacher, so I got excluded f' that [..] Ive al'ys had anger issues me like. Ive 'ad t' see psychologists an 'shit like that but they di'n't so owt f' me, went t' see 'em every week, (takes on pompous silly voice) 'Oh he's a very bad boy, hmm' an' I were like, fuck off, dickheads. Then I 'ad t' see school school psychologist but she were full a shit, they were just chattin' bollocks. The' di'n't do owt for me, the; just sat me in a room an' made me play piano! What good is that gonna do f' me anger! I cou'n't play it, then that did m' ' ead in when I cou'n't play notes an I just used t' chuck keyboard cos I cou'n't do it, then I got kicked out f' that. I di'n't used t' kick off at little school, it were when I got 'ome that I used t' throw me paddy fits. […] Ive al'y's been black sheep a family me. Like me little sister, she's been brought up a spoilt brat her, she' salright, like she's a straight A student, m' other sister's in uni and then the just get me on drugs an' drink, gettin' int' troubles wi' police an' shit.

**Male D:** I went to a catholic school an' it were proper strict an' everythin' […] I went every single day, I were late most o' time but I went every single day an' then when I left school when I were sixteen, at fifteen I 'as like a sat'd'y job at this place called xxxx, 'bout twenny pond a day cash in 'and an' then when I left school I went there full time, no not full time, it were about thursd'y, frid'y, sat''y, then I got a job next door to it in a Chinese and I used t' bike there an' bike back and I would a bin like sixteen when I left school id like cycle there, work, go 'ome an' I never went anywhere, this was before I took anythin' y know, di'n't even know what weed wore. Used t' do that every single day, then I left t' go t' college, then after about a month o' goin' t' college, kept meetin' people, an' meetin' people's mates an' that, then I met someone from m' old school an' he'd changed an' stuff an' I hung around wi' 'im f' few months, then before y' knew it I proper knew everyone, I quit college, I quit work an' everythin [..] and became like a full time bum. Actually, still did work f' m' dad an that. Me mum were alreight so long so log as I were bein' alreight. Say one day I woke up an' m' mum says or m' dad says we need all cars washin', we've got some work f' y' t' do I'd just do it. […] that were about two year ago or a year ago, I don't know.

# Appendix Three: Interview Schedule

**Young people**

Themed questions

1)      Place - Where do you come from?

         Describe your street, your area.
         Is it a good place to live?
         Is there much trouble?
         Are you proud to come from your place?
         Do you think you'll stay or leave?
         Do people stick together?
         Do you travel far off your patch?

2)      Values - What's important to you?

         If you had to choose between love and money which would it be?
         Tell us about a time when you were really happy.
         Tell us about a time when you were struggling with things.
         What do you really enjoy?
         What can't you stand?
         Do you think respect is important?
         Who do you respect?
         Who respects you?
         Who doesn't give you the respect you deserve?

3)      Education and Training

         What have you taken part in over the last year/eighteen months?
         Have you been happy in that provision?
         Do you feel like you have been making progress?
         Have you come up against any barriers?
         Do you feel like you have someone to talk to about your progress of the things
         that may stand in your way?

4)      Other people

         Tell us about your mates.
         Who do you have good times with?
         Who gives you a bad time?
         What kind of people do you like?
         Who is important in your family?
         If you were in a mess who would you go to?

If you've got a decision to make who do you listen to?
Who has got the best chance, men or women?

5)      You

What would you *like* your life to be like at say 25 (e.g. place, home, job, family)?
What do you think it *will* be like?
Can you make things happen if you need to, or do things just seem to happen to you?
What's your life 'dream'?
What do you do – tell us about a week day, tell us about a weekend?
Do you feel that you 'fit in'?
What helps you to get what you want?
What gets in your way?
What do you think about being called 'NEET?

**Practitioners/Training Providers**

Themed questions

1) 'NEETS' Who are they?

What do you think about the term?
Are there general characteristics?
Are there common learning needs?
Are there common personal needs?
Are there gender differences?
What kind of behavioural issues do you meet?
What risks/dangers do your y/p face?
How do they spend their time?

2) Place - Where do the young people come from?

Is neighbourhood important to them?
How do you deal with any neighbourhood loyalties/conflicts in your groups?
Can you tell us anything about attitudes to mobility?
What encourages aspiration?
What stands in the way of aspiration?
Do you notice local pride?
Does attitude to locality have a gender aspect?

3) Values - What's important to the young people you work with?

Are there common values?
Is there a gender aspect?
What are the popular pastimes?
Do you think respect is important to the young people you work with?
Who do they respect?
Who do they feel respects them?
What 'core values' do you promote?
Are they accepted by the young people you work with?
What attitudes to others do you notice?

4) How do they relate to other people?
What do you notice about the significance of: -

- Mates
- Family
- Significant adults
- Authority figures

- Community
- Popular culture
- Where do y/p seek help?
- Where do they seek advice?
- Who influences their decisions?

5) About you…

Why do you work in this sector?
What is the most important personal attribute in such a role?
What is the most important skill?
What is the most important knowledge?
What has the most positive effect on your role?
What has the most negative effect?
What makes the most difference to NEET young people's lives?

The International Centre for Guidance Studies (iCeGs) is a research and development unit based at the University of Derby. The Centre aims to bridge the gap between guidance theory and practice. It supports and connects guidance practitioners, policy-makers and researchers through research activities and learning opportunities; and by providing access to resources related to guidance and lifelong learning.

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