

Blaenau Gwent NEET Reduction Strategy 2011-2014



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Section 1: Introduction to the Blaenau Gwent NEET Reduction Strategy

Introduction

Engaging in learning and training are essential if young people are to make a success of their lives and reach their full potential. However, too many young people in Wales choose not to continue in education or training beyond 16 and some are already beginning to disengage from learning well before they reach 16.

No single agency can address this issue alone. For this reason, the Blaenau Gwent Children & Young People's Partnership has developed a strategy for the identification and engagement and support of young people who are NOT in Education, Employment or Training (NEET). This strategy developed in partnership with all key stakeholders, identifies key priorities in relation to the early identification, engagement and support for young people who are NEET.



Context

National Context

The reduction of the numbers of young people not in education, employment or training is a key priority of the Welsh Assembly Government (WAG) as laid out in its document *Skills that Work for Wales (July 2008)*.

In April 2009, DCELLS published a strategy and action plan entitled 'Reducing the Proportion of Young People Not in Education, Employment and Training in Wales'. Although this strategy makes reference to preventative work with children and younger people who may be at risk in future of becoming NEET, the strategy is focused on those aged 16-18 who are not in learning or work. In contrast to policy development in England, the Assembly has decided not to introduce compulsory learning beyond the age of 16, but to 'transform learning provision for young people, by providing broader, more flexible learning options, matched by enhanced support and guidance'. The strategy has three main components:

- i. The right systems - to identify, assess, track and engage young people who are NEET and provide accurate information on overall NEET levels.

- ii. The right provision – action to improve the availability of learning opportunities designed to engage young people who are NEET and meet their needs and those of employers.
- iii. The right support – more intensive learning and personal support for the complex additional needs and challenges young people who are NEET often face.

Local Context

The Blaenau Gwent Children & Young People's Partnership Plan 2008-2011 includes Core Aim 2 to ensure that all children & young people have access to a comprehensive range of education, training and learning opportunities. The following strategic priorities underpin the core aim:-

- to raise educational attainment;
- to raise aspirations; and
- to reduce the number of young people Not in Education, Employment and Training and those at risk of becoming NEET.

The area is characterised by the following:-

- unemployment in Blaenau Gwent is higher than the Welsh average, and this poses additional challenges for the NEETs agenda;
- the Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation 2011 states that Blaenau Gwent has 25% LSOA's in 10% most deprived ward, 87% LSOA's in 50% most deprived;
- the level of pupils eligible for free school meals is representative of the levels of deprivation, with Blaenau Gwent consistently having the highest percentage of pupils that fall into this category – 26.4% in 2009/10 compared to a Welsh average of 17.3%. While the numbers of pupils eligible for free school meals in Wales is rising, the numbers have risen to a greater extent in Blaenau Gwent over the past 2 years; and
- attendance in the Primary and Secondary sector has declined over the past 3 years, as have the attendance figures across Wales. Primary attendance figures in Blaenau Gwent are 0.76% lower than the Welsh average and Secondary attendance is 0.32% lower than the Welsh average. The rate at which attendance levels are falling in Blaenau Gwent is slower than that of some authorities with a similar context.

However, proposed developments at 'The Works' in Ebbw Vale provide real opportunities both for enhanced training and learning via a state of the art Learning Campus, and also for future employment. Additionally, recent transport developments such as the Cardiff rail link have increased the potential travel to work area for many young people.

What do we mean by the term NEET?

The term NEET is used to describe young people who are not engaged in education, employment or training. NEET is often used to describe young people who are disaffected or disengaged from learning or employment and who have become marginalised from society.

Young People who are NEET are not a homogeneous group and it is a continuum representing the level of entrenchment in NEET status. Some possible definitions are identified below:

- a) **Core NEET** – those with social and behavioural problems or other more complex needs, including those who come from families where worklessness and unemployment is a family norm.
- b) **Floating or ‘at-risk’ NEET** – those who lack direction, motivation and tend to have spells of being NEET in between attending school or further education courses or low wage, low skill employment with little or no training opportunities.
- c) **Transition/gap year NEET** – those who have chosen to take time out before progressing to further or higher education. They are likely to return to education, training or employment, but it is not clear when. Such ‘transition periods’ are often short-term and mean that NEET status for this group does not need formal intervention.

Why do young people become NEET?

Young people may become NEET for a variety of highly individual reasons. However, the following risk factors have been identified from various local and national sources, in relation to “Core” NEET:

- pregnancy or parenting;
- caring for a sibling, parent or partner;
- addiction;
- physical/mental illness/disability;
- homelessness;
- poverty (9 out of 10 pupils on free school meals are NEET at 16 [TES Nov ‘07]);
- a history of poor school attendance;
- being ‘looked after’;
- being on free school meals;
- boredom with an inflexible, inappropriate curriculum;
- poor Basic and Key Skills;
- offending; and
- a family norm of unemployment.



Many young people who become NEET experience multiple barriers to engagement. Hence, any strategy to reduce the incidence of young people becoming NEET must include the provision of highly personalised packages of support. Similarly, it must recognise that the journey to becoming NEET begins way before the young person is 16. The strategy therefore must be closely aligned to the wider preventative agenda, including early years, parenting and family support.

Young people who are NEET in Blaenau Gwent

The latest official statistics on young people who are NEET produced by the Welsh Government is available for the academic year 2010. These statistics show the NEET position for Wales is 5.4% compared to 7.1% in 2008. These figures are produced on a Welsh basis. The most recent information on young people who are NEET by local authority is the Destinations Survey undertaken in October each year by Careers Wales. 2011 statistics are yet to be published.

In Blaenau Gwent the percentage of young people who are NEET is currently 8.6%, based on Destinations Survey Careers Wales 2010.

The table below shows the trend of young people in Blaenau Gwent who are NEET, since October 2004. It can be seen from this data that Blaenau Gwent has consistently had higher rates than the Wales averages.

Year	Blaenau Gwent (%)	Wales (%)
2004	10.3	7.0
2005	8.8	6.8
2006	8.1	6.4
2007	10.4	6.9
2008	9.7	7.1
2009	6.6	5.7
2010	8.7	5.4

The data above represents those young people known to be NEET on leaving school at age 16. However, the actual figure is likely to be significantly higher owing to a number of young people embarking on training and learning opportunities and subsequently failing to complete. Currently, there are no robust methods in place to adequately track these young people.

Why do we need a NEET Strategy?

The number of young people who are NEET in Blaenau Gwent is unacceptably high. The personal cost to these individuals was estimated by the DFES to be £97,000 per person over a lifetime in 2002, and the cost to the community of these learners not contributing to society and the economy is too high and needs to be addressed. Previous actions have failed to impact on reducing the numbers of young people who are NEET in Blaenau Gwent. The aim of this strategy is therefore to provide a coordinated, multi-agency response to tackle this issue and to put in place systems, procedures and activities, drawn from best practice elsewhere, in order to significantly reduce the number of young people who are NEET, year on year.

The strategy will identify key priority actions aimed to address the issues identified above. A cohesive action plan accompanying the strategy will allow for robust monitoring of the strategy's effectiveness

How the strategy has been developed

This strategy has been created as a result of a series of working-party meetings involving different agencies in a multi-disciplinary approach. In order to harmonise use of resources and maximise our impact in decreasing the number of young people who are NEET in Blaenau Gwent. The strategy has also been informed by consideration of best practice from other local authorities including Wrexham and Swansea.



The strategy has been widely consulted via a series of stakeholder events. The launch of the strategy will include a formal sign up from all relevant agencies.

How young people have influenced this strategy

The Blaenau Gwent Children and Young People's Partnership believes that nobody understands the issues facing young people better than young people themselves. Listening to the voice of young people will ensure a robust strategy that addresses the real difficulties young people may face in relation to education, employment and training.

The views of the young people have been used to inform the priorities of this strategy.

The Blaenau Gwent Vision for tackling the issue of NEET

The vision of the Blaenau Gwent Children and Young People's Plan is:

"Working together we will strive to ensure that all children and young people will be supported to achieve their full potential"

This strategy underpins that vision and partners will strive to ensure that all young people have access to a wide range of training and learning opportunities and are appropriately supported to meet their full potential.

Section 2: Priorities for Action

Overall Aim

The aims of this strategy are;

- to reduce the number of young people who are NEET within Blaenau Gwent;
- to support the development of young people so that they are able to take the choices made available to them; and
- to promote longer term employability of those young people.

Key Strands

The following priorities for the strategy have been identified:

- *Effective management and leadership to ensure full ownership of the NEET Reduction Strategy*
- *Bridging the gap between training en employment*
- *Early identification*
- *Improving curriculum provision and training opportunities*
- *Improving Information Sharing, Data Collection and Coordination*

Effective Management and Leadership to ensure full ownership of NEET Reduction Strategy

Effective leadership and management are essential in order to construct a visible way for stakeholders to work together taking full ownership of the NEET Reduction Strategy. In order to achieve this we will:-

- Deliver regular NEET summits to identify need, share best practice and inform action planning.
- Establish a multi agency Raising Aspirations Group to ensure effective delivery of the priorities in this strategy via strong strategic leadership, working towards key priorities, supporting and challenging partners and effective joint working.
- Establish mechanisms to ensure accountability amongst partners via appropriate reporting arrangements.
- Implement and monitor policies and procedures for NEET with specific reference to quality assurance, data sharing, equality and diversity, wellbeing and evaluation.
- Undertake annual review of NEET Reduction Strategy to inform future action planning.

Bridging the gap between training and employment via effective pathways

Clear links need to be established with local business in order to ensure that opportunities for young people are maximised. This will include delivering the following actions:

- Ensuring that labour market intelligence is used to inform curriculum provision and establishing dialogue with local employers to establish skills required and shape training provision accordingly.
- Ensuring that social clauses are used effectively to provide opportunities for young people at risk of NEET (particularly in relation to The Works development in the Ebbw Fawr valley).
- Enhancing opportunities for volunteering as a means of gaining work experience and becoming work ready.
- Via 14-19 Network, identifying annual programme of work based learning placements, collaborative courses and apprenticeships.
- Developing clear pathways linked to a ladder of progression.
- Build on the success of programmes such as, Tools for your Future, to offer individual learning pathways within vocational contexts.
- Developing a commissioning strategy arising from Pre-VENT 14-19 to ensure that services offered by agencies are sufficiently flexible to meet the individual needs of young people.

Early Identification

Clearly and effectively identifying vulnerable individuals and groups who may become NEET is essential in order to provide timely preventative interventions. A responsive approach should be adopted which differentiates those young people needing little or no intervention (e.g. gap year students) from those young people with extensive risk factors who may need intensive multi-agency support. The strategy also recognises that the factors which make a young person susceptible to becoming NEET may begin as early as birth. It is important therefore, that this strategy builds upon and informs other preventative interventions including early years, parenting, Team Around the Family, YISP, etc. Ensuring early intervention and timely support to young people will necessitate the following actions:-

- Development and implementation of a new model for early identification of young people vulnerable to becoming NEET;
- Development of NEET toolkit for practitioners and the delivery of multi agency training;
- Development of effective referral routes and pathways, including robust mechanisms for transition from key stages 2-3 for young people vulnerable of becoming NEET;
- Undertake market segmentation exercise to enable effective targeting of groups of young people who are vulnerable to become NEET;
- Ensure that young people identified as being NEET are provided with an Individual Action Plan setting out their needs in terms of Essential Key

Skills (Wales), and providing access to activities which will lead to accreditation and improved self esteem. This will also include career planning in order to facilitate decision-making in relation to progression into chosen pathway.

- Establishing a NEET panel to coordinate individual pathways through services and developing a Key Worker approach to effectively mentor young people and assist them in making the transitions necessary to progress through the opportunities available.
- Continue to implement a range of preventative programmes, including Pre-VENT, Oasis, Team Around the Family, Attendance Project, in order to assist young people to improve basic skills, improve resilience and emotional intelligence and tackle disaffection.



Improving curriculum provision and training opportunities

Improving provision for ensuring a rich, relevant and varied curriculum and training opportunities is essential in order to engage young people and promote the longer term employability of young people at risk of becoming NEET.

Many young people who are NEET are disengaged because they lack basic employability skills such as having the confidence to work well with others, or have poor levels of numeracy and literacy. Our strategy needs to address these skills deficits. Links will be made with the literacy and numeracy strategies of the Borough in order to allow this to happen in a coordinated manner. In order to improve curriculum provision and training opportunities, the following actions will be delivered:

- Undertake audit of education, training and learning opportunities for young people at risk of becoming NEET;
- Work with third sector providers to create a richer Key Stage 4 curriculum involving work placements, Basic/Key skills, volunteering opportunities and Coleg Gwent;
- Implement findings of social marketing exercise to effective targeted services.
- Monitor and track impact of alternative curriculum solutions;
- Ensure compliance with Learning and Skills (Wales) Measure for 14-19;
- Develop, implement and evaluate a Care Leavers employment scheme;
- Actively promote an “alternative curriculum agenda” including learning and engagement through adventurous activities and the natural environment; and
- The Raising Aspirations Strategy Group will also undertake specific research on local labour market needs and produce a report for relevant stakeholders in an attempt to ensure that the curriculum offered is informed by the needs of the economy within the travel to work area.

Improving Information Sharing, Data Collection and Coordination

The tracking of young people who are NEET needs to be more thorough and effective in order to effect a reduction in numbers. This means improving information sharing, making data collection robust, and needs effective coordination. In order to achieve this, the following actions will be undertaken:-

- Use EMS to develop data to support early identification of young people at risk of NEET;
- Provide data on regional and local economy, skills shortage, current vacancies and labour market information;
- Evaluate effectiveness of Keeping in Touch strategy;
- Use retrospective data to consider if destination survey offers made are converted into actual statistics;
- Develop a system to be used to identify young people who repeatedly enter/re-enter group following periods of education, employment or training; and
- Establish robust mechanisms for tracking outcomes for reports and use to identify and monitor vulnerable groups.



Section 3: Delivering the priorities

Partnership Arrangements

Governance Arrangements:

Reducing the number of young people not in education, employment or training is a key priority of the Blaenau Gwent Children and Young People's Partnership. As such the partnership will maintain an overview of the NEET agenda.

The Raising Aspirations Strategy Group was recently established to drive forward the strategy. This includes representation from the following:-

- 14-19 LAN
- NEET Coordinator
- Careers Wales Gwent
- Youth Service and Youth Support services
- Coleg Gwent
- Post 16 Social Services Team
- Voluntary Sector Network
- CYPP Partnership support
- Education Department, including Inclusion Services
- SNAP
- Youth Offending Service
- Schools
- Jobcentre Plus
- Regeneration

Other partners may be co-opted onto the group as required.

Effective links will also be established to the Local Area Network in order to ensure appropriate information sharing and seamless planning.

Operational Partnership Arrangements

A Providers' Network will be established to ensure appropriate coordination of opportunities for young people who may be NEET. The network will be managed by the NEET Coordinator. Full terms of reference for this group will be developed in consultation with all stakeholders.

Financing the Strategy

The following sources of potential funding have been identified for taking forward the priorities of the strategy:

- Core schools budgets
- Families First grant funding
- ESF funding : Pre-VENT Key Stage 3 and Pre-VENT 14-19, Genesis Cymru Wales, Job match

- 14-19 Learning Pathways funding
- Post 16 education funding from Welsh Government
- Core funding Careers Wales Gwent
- Youth Service (Core and Grant)
- 3rd Sector funding e.g. Rathbone, Communities First
- Reach the Heights

Much of the activity envisaged in the strategy could be supported by funding streams, such as, convergence funding. Where grant funding is being used, there will need to be a clear exit strategy to ensure sustainability. Wider consultation with a wide range of stakeholders will explore opportunities to access additional funding to progress the priorities of the strategy. However, service providers are expected in implementing this strategy:

- to work in partnership;
- to identify gaps; and
- to agree collectively how to take things forward, avoiding duplication of services and making best use of resources available.

Monitoring and Evaluation

The strategy will be closely monitored by the Children and Young People's Partnership.

Blaenau Gwent has set specific targets for reduction of young people who are NEET negotiated between Local Authority, School Improvement Advisors and Schools. The 14-19 Network will ensure this happens with other providers too - e.g. College. From this, global reduction targets will be as follows:

	Baseline	Targets		
	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13
% of young people (16-18 year olds) who are not in employment, education or training (NEET)	6.6%	8.5% *	8.0%	7.5%

In addition the following performance indicators have been developed:

- reduction in the number of young people who are NEET in Blaenau Gwent;
- development of an assessment tool in order to identify levels of need;
- % sign up of agencies to NEET Strategy;
- % uptake of one-to-one support and guidance;
- increased number of learning opportunities;
- increased number of work experience placements; and
- 6 month review - % continuing intervention, % disengagement.

For further information on the strategy please contact Joanne Sims, Community Development Manager and Alison Prowle, Integrated Services Manager for Children and Young People.