Increasing Participation: Understanding Young People who do not Participate in Education or Training at 16 and 17

Thomas Spielhofer, Tom Benton, Kelly Evans, Gill Featherstone, Sarah Golden, Julie Nelson and Paula Smith

National Foundation for Educational Research

department for
children, schools and families

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Executive Summary

Background

This summary presents key findings from research commissioned by the Department for Children, Schools and Families aimed at exploring the characteristics and experiences of young people who are not in education, employment or training (NEET) or in jobs without training (JWT). This study combined three complementary research methods, including a literature review, statistical analysis of Youth Cohort Study data and interviews with 120 young people and 39 professionals. These methods were used to construct a segmentation of these 'groups' of young people, their characteristics and motivations, and what strategies are likely to re-engage them in education or training.

Key findings

- The statistical segmentation analysis confirmed that there are segments within the larger groups of young people who are NEET and in JWT and that there are distinct differences between these segments.

- The research suggests that more than two-fifths of young people who are NEET are generally positive about learning and are very likely to participate in education or training in the short-term. A similar proportion faces a lot of personal and structural barriers, and are likely to remain NEET in the medium-term. A fifth of young people were classified as 'undecided NEET' - they do not face significant personal barriers to participating in education or training, but are dissatisfied with the available opportunities.

- Within the JWT group, almost half are very content with their work and likely to remain in a JWT in the long-term. A third of young people in this group were found to be at risk of becoming NEET in the future, while 17 per cent had taken a JWT as a stop-gap solution before re-engaging in education or training.

- Interviews with 120 young people currently or previously NEET or in a JWT confirmed the validity of the segmentation analysis and showed that different policy solutions are needed to engage or re-engage the different segments of young people.

- The research suggested that in order to increase participation, young people need better information, advice and guidance before leaving learning or while in jobs without training to increase their awareness of the learning options available to them and enable them to make more informed choices.

- The study also identified a need for more flexible and appropriate post-16 provision suitable for all young people aged 16 and 17 in terms of content, delivery and timing

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Aims and objectives

The main aim of this study was to achieve a better understanding of those who are either NEET or in JWT at 16 and 17 by providing a more detailed breakdown of the 'types' of young people within these two categories, the structural and personal issues they face and the likely routes into participation in learning for each of them. There were several objectives underlying this main aim of the study. The main ones included:

- quantifying the segments of young people aged 16 and 17 categorised as being NEET or in JWT

- exploring the main reasons why the different segments do not participate in learning and what strategies and support would be most likely to persuade or enable them to do so

- examining how those currently NEET or in JWT would respond to being compelled to engage in education or training.

Summary of research methods

In order to address the aims and objectives outlined above, a mixed methodology approach was adopted that incorporated three key strands as follows:

- latent class analysis of Youth Cohort Study (YCS) data to segment young people who are NEET or in JWT

- review of existing literature relating to young people who are NEET or in JWT

- qualitative interviews in four Local Authorities with 120 young people who were NEET, in JWT or previously NEET or in JWT and now engaged in education or training, and 39 professionals who work with such young people.

What does the statistical analysis of the YCS data reveal?

The statistical segmentation analysis confirmed that there are segments within the larger groups of young people who are NEET and in JWT and that there are distinct differences between these segments. Within the **NEET group**, the largest sub-group (about 41 per cent) included those who were **'open to learning NEET'**. These young people were most likely to re-engage in education or training in the short-term and tended to have higher levels of attainment and a more positive attitude to school. The second largest sub-group within the NEET group (38 per cent) were those who were **'sustained NEET'**. They were characterised by their negative experience of school, higher levels of truancy and exclusion and lack of educational attainment. This group were most likely to remain NEET in the medium-term. The third sub-group, which represented 22 per cent of young people who were NEET, was the **'undecided NEET'** group. These young people were similar in some respects, such as their attainment levels, to those who were 'open to learning NEET'. However, they seemed to be dissatisfied with the available opportunities and their ability to access what they wanted to do.

Within the **JWT group**, the largest sub-group included those who were **'sustained in a JWT'** (48 per cent). These young people were most likely to continue to be in a JWT in the medium-term and appeared to be content with this. Young people who were in a JWT but were **'at risk of becoming NEET'** were the second largest sub-group (35 per cent). Young people in this sub-group were characterised by having a more negative experience of school and higher levels of truancy and exclusion. They tended to be less optimistic about the future

and to feel that they did not have sufficient qualifications to make the progress they would like. The third sub-group included those who were **'transitional in a JWT'** (17 per cent). These young people were similar to the 'open to learning NEET' group in so far as they appeared to have made a transition at the end of Year 11 that was not right for them and had later re-engaged in education and training in the short-term.

What does the review of the research literature suggest?

The review of previous research confirmed the finding of the segmentation analysis that young people who are not in education or training are not a homogeneous group. However, few research studies suggest how best to 'deconstruct' or understand this 'group', choosing to illustrate common characteristics of such young people, in order to make sense of their circumstances and choices. Research studies relating to young people who were **NEET** were often designed to investigate the issues affecting those in the most disadvantaged of circumstances, and so tended to present a rather narrow perspective. Thus, many of the studies reviewed explored issues affecting those who would be closely aligned to the 'sustained NEET' sub-group identified in our segmentation analysis, rather than those affecting young people who were NEET as a whole. Although fewer research studies relating to young people in **JWT** were identified, there was an interesting divergence of opinion about the characteristics of such young people. This hinged upon the sampling strategies adopted by different research studies, with some focusing upon young people who were in JWT and in very disadvantaged circumstances, and others identifying young people in JWT whose situations were relatively comfortable, and who felt they were in charge of their personal destinies.

Key themes emerging through the literature, especially in relation to young people who were **NEET** included having education or learning disadvantages, being in difficult personal circumstances and being affected by external structural factors. However, some authors suggest that some young people make a conscious 'choice' not to participate (for example, by adopting an 'anti-learning culture' as a means of gaining credibility and status with peers). Young people in **JWT** were generally felt to be affected less (although still to a certain extent) by the issues outlined above. Their primary motivation was often reported to be financial reward, with a certain willingness to re-engage with training, but not at the expense of foregoing earnings.

What do the interviews with young people who were NEET indicate?

Interviews with 40 young people who were NEET confirmed that this 'group' is not homogenous and that it is possible to identify segments of young people with distinct experiences, motivations and probabilities of re-engaging. Many interviewees had negative experiences of school and faced issues such as bullying, exclusion, behavioural difficulties, learning difficulties and stress. However those who were categorised as 'sustained NEET' were more likely than any other group to have experienced more than one of these issues whilst at school. Young people in the 'sustained NEET' group were most likely to have no qualifications or to have achieved below Level 1, while most of those 'open to learning NEET' had attained Level 2 at the end of Year 11. Young people classified as 'sustained NEET' tended not to have had any thoughts about what to when leaving school and were least likely to have spoken to anyone other than their parents about their choices. In comparison, young people in the other two groups had much more definite plans. However, those categorised 'undecided NEET' often did not stay on their chosen pathway for very long.

Several young people thought that they had received incomplete or biased advice and guidance. Those who were classified as 'undecided NEET' or 'sustained NEET' were more likely to feel they lacked knowledge about the range of options open to them, and the financial support available, compared to those who were 'open to learning NEET'. Young people classified as 'open to learning NEET' were also the ones most likely to believe that qualifications were important. Whilst they felt GCSEs were generally important, they also rated work-related qualifications very highly. Most of the other interviewees did not value qualifications so highly.

The majority of young people who were **NEET** wanted to work in order to earn money. However, one of the main barriers young people came across when looking for work was their lack of experience. They were unable to get a job until they had experience, but could not get a job to get that experience in the first place. Similarly, most of those interviewed were not averse to the idea of finding a job with training, but few were willing to actively seek out jobs with training.

What do the interviews with young people who were JWT indicate?

Interviews with 41 young people in JWT also confirmed the findings of the statistical segmentation that they do not represent a homogenous group. Interviews were conducted with those who had chosen this route as a stop-gap before moving onto further learning, those who were likely to remain in a JWT in the long-term and others at risk of becoming NEET. Most of the interviewees in JWT had achieved fewer than five GCSEs at grades A*-C. They were most likely to be working in retail, hospitality and catering or in cleaning occupations. Most were earning above the minimum wage for their age group and almost two-thirds of those interviewed said they liked their work. Young people and professionals identified a variety of 'push' and 'pull' factors which led some school-leavers to choose a JWT at 16. The main push factors were negative experiences of schooling, low self-confidence and lack of opportunities for work-based learning. Earning money was seen to be the main pull factor for starting a JWT.

Interviewees who were judged to be 'at risk of becoming NEET' and several of those 'sustained in a JWT' were very likely to report negative experiences of schooling. These experiences had put them off participating in further learning. Those young people sustained in a JWT were also most likely to cite financial reasons for not engaging in learning. Some of them had considered education or training options, particularly apprenticeships, but were put off by lack of placement opportunities or lower financial rewards. More than half of those interviewed could be broadly categorised as sharing the characteristics of the 'transitional in a JWT' segment identified in the analysis of YCS. It included some who had achieved Level 2 at GCSE and started, but dropped out of, a post-16 course. They saw their current job only as a short-term 'stop-gap' to enable them to earn some money or get some experience before commencing their courses. There was a sub-group of some young people who, even though open to education or training, could not decide what to do. Many of them had drifted into a JWT, often via family networks, which offered them easy access to such jobs. Even though they were considering various training options, there was a danger that the financial rewards of working could prevent them from engaging in education or training in the future.

Most of the young people interviewed were happy with the information, advice and guidance received before leaving school. However, some young people said they had ignored this advice after leaving school in favour of finding a job. Interviewees who had achieved more than five GCSEs at grades A*-C were also likely to complain about not having received information on all the options open to them. Almost all the young people interviewed said that they were at least considering engaging in education or training in the future. Some interviewees said they were planning to do so through their current jobs, while others said that the experience of working had persuaded them to achieve more qualifications.

Professionals argued that experience of such jobs could lead young people to this realisation.

What do the interviews with young people who had re-engaged tell us about how best to engage all young people in education or training?

Interviews with 39 young people who had re-engaged showed that their reasons for being NEET or in JWT were often complex and that they had followed various routes back into learning. Some of the young people who had re-engaged had previously been NEET or in a JWT because they were waiting for a course to start, were taking some time out or wanted to earn money when they left school. There were also some who were NEET or in a JWT because they had complex lives, were disillusioned with learning, or had experienced bullying and social isolation. Some young people had re-engaged in learning because they had always intended to do so and were NEET or in a JWT while they waited for a course to start. Others had realised that learning was worthwhile, or wanted to improve their circumstances. Some continued to be undecided and were engaged in learning to explore options.

The evidence from the journeys of these young people shows that, in order for young people to re-engage and for the policy of raising the participation age to be a success, there is a need for provision to be appropriate in terms of content, delivery and timing. Young people also need to receive good quality guidance and support from the Connexions Service and schools to pre-empt disengagement. In addition, awareness of, and access to, financial support is necessary for some young people.

What were young people's and professionals' views of raising the participation age to 18?

Most of the 120 young people interviewed as part of this study responded positively to the notion of raising the participation age to 18. While they recognised that they might have resented it when they were 16, they appreciated the value of continued engagement in learning post-16. They also thought it would encourage providers to give them 'a second chance' and compel providers to offer courses suitable to all young people's needs, levels of learning and preferred learning styles.

Where interviewees did not welcome the policy of raising the participation age to 18 this was because they did not like being compelled to participate. In addition, some did not appreciate the value of education and training in terms of longer-term financial and employment gains and considered that the opportunity to learn by experience would be lost.

Young people and professionals thought that the success of the policy depended on various factors, including employers being encouraged to provide sufficient placement opportunities to allow more young people to engage in work-based learning; schools, colleges and providers providing more practical and non-classroom based learning provision; and the offer of better financial support for those staying in education or training, including universal provision of the Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA), regardless of parental income, and raising the level of EMA payments.

What are the main policy implications of the research?

The main conclusions of the research are that young people in JWT and NEET can be broadly segmented into six sub-groups, each with different experiences, achievements and motivations and that different pre-16 and post-16 policy solutions are needed to engage or re-engage such young people. This includes meeting the needs of each of the following sub-groups.

Young people who drop out of learning post-16 and become NEET or get a JWT need:

- better information, advice and guidance pre-16, and more information about the range of options available to them, to ensure that they make a more appropriate choice at 16

- more flexible provision in terms of start dates in order to accommodate young people who want to change direction.

Young people who are sustained in JWT need:

- more information, advice and guidance from Connexions or other agencies while in work to make them aware of the learning options available to them - this support should be specifically targeted at young people around 18 years old, when, as the research suggests, young people often start to explore alternatives and to consider re-engaging in education or training

- to help to make sure that they choose appropriate courses that provide development and progression opportunities, when offered the opportunity to engage in training by their employers

- more work-based provision below, and at, Level 2 to reflect their preferred learning styles and lower levels of achievement.

Young people who are averse to education or training due to negative experiences at school need:

- schools to provide more opportunities for applied teaching and learning, engender a more respectful relationship between teachers and learners and implement more effective anti-bullying strategies to minimise the impact of disruptive pupils on their peers' learning opportunities
- more informal learning opportunities (with clear progression pathways to more structured learning) to help them to appreciate the value of learning in a non-threatening way and progress onto positive learning outcomes.

Young people in JWT or NEET who lack a clear direction need:

- more post-16 provision to reflect the indecisive nature of this sub-group, such as taster courses and opportunities to sample a range of employment opportunities
- more information about the opportunity to 'bank' any elements of a qualification that they achieve through the Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF) to ensure that any achievements by those who change options can be built up over time.

1 Introduction

1.1 Background

The recent literature review examining the likely benefits of increasing the participation age to 18, Spielhofer, *et al.*, (2007) showed that there are many previous studies indicating the main characteristics, barriers and needs of young people who are not in education, employment or training (NEET). Many of these studies emphasise the heterogeneity of this 'group' (Spielhofer, *et al.*, 2007; Archer, *et al.*, 2005) and provide details of the characteristics most likely to be associated with them. Thus, for example, 35 per cent of 16 and 17 year olds who are NEET have no qualifications and 44 per cent have qualifications below Level 2 (DWP, 2006). Many of them are also found not to have enjoyed school, to come from lower socio-economic backgrounds, and to face particularly serious barriers to engagement including teenage pregnancy and parenthood, being homeless, having a disability, having mental health problems, having misused drugs or alcohol, or being a young offender.

However, very little evidence is available on the actual segmentation of this 'group' - how many young people have no qualifications and face personal barriers and how many face none of these issues, but are, for example, disaffected from education? And how many refuse to participate in education, employment or training for personal reasons alone?

Furthermore, very little is known about those in jobs without training (JWT). Although a few qualitative studies (IFF, 1998; Anderson *et al.*, 2006; Maguire *et al.*, 2008; Quinn *et al.*, 2008) have been conducted exploring the characteristics of this 'group', very little published statistical evidence is available detailing their qualifications, ethnicity or socio-economic backgrounds, for example.

The lack of such detailed knowledge about young people who are NEET and in JWT means that it is hard to estimate the size of different 'sub-groups' of young people and how best to engage them in learning. Such knowledge is crucial to support the government's proposed policy that from 2015 all young people should be required to participate in some form of education or training until they reach the age of 18. The DCSF commissioned NFER to undertake a study of young people who are not in education or training (NET) in order to fill these gaps in understanding.

1.2 Aims and objectives

The main aim of this study is to achieve a better understanding of those who are either NEET or in JWT at 16 and 17 by providing a more detailed breakdown of the 'types' of young people within these two categories, the structural and personal issues they face and the likely routes into participation in learning for each of them.

There are several objectives underlying this main aim of the study. These include:

- Quantifying the sub-groups of young people aged 16 and 17 categorised as being NEET or in JWT, in terms of their previous qualifications, ethnicity, genders, socio-economic backgrounds, and any other available data relating to their characteristics and barriers to participation

- Exploring the main reasons why the different sub-groups do not participate in learning and what strategies and support would be most likely to persuade or enable them to do so

- Examining whether many of those categorised as being NEET or in JWT are actually engaged in some form of learning, albeit not leading to a nationally recognised qualification at level 2 and why they had chosen this route

- Approximating what proportion of those registered as NEET are working in the 'grey' economy or are making money via illegal activities

- Examining how those currently NEET or in JWT would respond to being compelled to engage in education or training and what, if any, routes they would be more likely to follow (work-, college-, training provider-, or school-based; part-time or full-time) - how many of them would be attracted to the new Diplomas as these become available?

- Examining whether young people in JWT do not engage in training out of choice or because of lack of opportunity, and whether they are more likely or willing to engage in training related to their current employment or in alternative education or training settings.

1.3   Research methods and issues

In order to address the aims and objectives outlined above, a mixed methodology approach was adopted that incorporated three key strands as follows:

- Statistical segmentation analysis of Youth Cohort Study (YCS) data

- Review of existing literature relating to young people who are NEET or in JWT

- Qualitative interviews in four areas with young people who are NEET, in JWT or previously NEET or in JWT and now engaged in education or training, and professionals who work with young people.

Further details of the research methods adopted for each strand are provided below.

1.3.1   Statistical segmentation of YCS data (Chapter 2)

In order to explore the extent to which there were segments or sub-groups of young people within the groups who were NEET or in JWT, a statistical segmentation analysis of YCS data was conducted. The YCS was chosen because it enabled sufficiently large numbers of young people to be identified who are defined as NEET or in JWT for a robust statistical analysis to be undertaken. In addition, it contained attitudinal information about their experiences of education and training pre- and post-16 as well as key background characteristics about young people such as their attainment at the end of Year 11, their gender and ethnicity.

The analysis was based on young people who were NEET or in JWT in sweep 1 of cohorts 11 and 12 of the YCS. Young people's responses in subsequent sweeps (2 to 4) of the YCS enabled the analysis to explore their future activity and therefore the extent to which they moved out of the cohort of young people who were NEET or in JWT. Latent class analysis was used to identify sub-groups within the group of young people who were NEET and again within the group who were in JWT. Further details of this analysis are provided in Chapter 2 and Appendix A.

The segments that emerged from this analysis, and the characteristics of young people within each segment, formed the basis of the qualitative phase of the study (see Section 1.3.3) which sought to provide further in-depth understanding of the nature, motivations and attitudes of these sub-groups.

1.3.2   Review of literature (Chapter 3)

The second strand of research, which was undertaken simultaneously with the segmentation analysis, was a review of existing literature relating to young people who are NEET or in JWT. This review explored relevant literature that has been published since 1999 that related to young people who were more then 16 and were NEET or in JWT in England. The review focused particularly on the characteristics and the barriers and enablers to the participation in education and training of young people who are NEET or are in JWT. Full details of the search strategy that was adopted, and the literature that was included, are provided in Chapter 3, Appendix B and the references section at the end of this report.

1.3.3   Qualitative study (Chapters 4, 5 and 6)

The third strand of research followed the first two strands and it sought to explore further the issues and sub-groups identified through the segmentation analysis and literature review through primary research with young people who were NEET or in JWT, young people for whom this had previously been the case, and professionals who work with, or are in contact with, young people who are NEET or in JWT.

This strand of the research was focused in a sample of four Connexions areas. These areas were not identified to be representative of all areas in England but rather to provide a range of contexts in which young people may be NEET or in JWT. The sample took into consideration the following characteristics:

- **Geographical location** - one area was rural and three were urban. The four areas were located in the Government Office Regions of London, North West, East Midlands and East Midlands

- **Deprivation and opportunity** - as the research aimed to explore the issues for young people who may not be in the most deprived areas of the UK, two of the four areas were selected because they had fewer than the average proportion of young people who are NEET, were below average on measures of deprivation and had above average employment rates and participation in education and training post-16. Two areas were selected to be the converse of this and had more than the average number of young people who are NEET, above average levels of deprivation and unemployment and below average participation in education and training.

The research focused on three groups of young people as follows:

- those who were 16 or 17 and were currently NEET

- those who were 16 or 17 and were currently in JWT

- those who were 16 to 18 and were currently in education or training but had previously been NEET or in JWT.

In addition, interviews were conducted with professionals who work with such young people in the four areas including Connexions Personal Advisers and tutors.

In order to identify young people to be interviewed, the research team worked closely with Connexions Service personnel in the four areas and adopted a range of approaches. All young people were offered an incentive of a £10 high street voucher if they participated in an interview[1]. The range of approaches included the following.

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[1] Due to difficulties gaining interviews with young people who were in JWT, these young people were offered an incentive of £20.

1 Introduction

- Young people who were NEET - Connexions staff distributed leaflets in their local offices inviting young people to participate in a research interview and, in some instances, arranged appointments with researchers. A total of 40 young people who were NEET were interviewed face-to-face.

- Young people who were in JWT - in three areas Connexions staff sent a letter to all young people who were classified as in JWT on their databases asking them to respond if they did not wish their contact details to be passed to the research team. In the fourth area, Connexions staff telephoned young people, and invited them to participate. In all cases, Connexions staff sent NFER the contact details of those who agreed for their details to be shared with the research team. The team then contacted young people and arranged for a face-to-face interview at a convenient location such as a Connexions office or café near to their place of work. In most cases the young people attended these interviews, albeit not necessarily the first appointment. Where they did not attend two appointments, or were unwilling to participate in a face-to-face interview, a telephone interview was conducted. A total of 41 young people who were in JWT were interviewed.

- Young people who were in education or training - Connexions staff identified local colleges and training providers where young people who had previously been NEET or JWT had embarked on courses. Staff in these organisations identified young people who had previously been NEET or in JWT and they were invited to participate in an interview. A total of 39 young people were interviewed.

Details of the background and characteristics of interviewees are provided in Chapters 4, 5 and 6.

In order to gain a wider understanding of the experiences, motivations and attitudes of young people who are NEET or in JWT, and to substantiate the sub-groups that emerged through the statistical analysis, interviews were conducted with 39 professionals. These individuals were the Connexions Personal Advisers who worked in the offices visited by the research team, and tutors and student support workers who worked with young people who had re-engaged in course provide by colleges or training providers.

Interviews with young people explored:

- their experience of school and learning pre-16

- their experiences of the transition at 16 and the support and guidance received

- their experiences of education, employment and training post-16

- their attitudes towards learning and qualifications, including their views on being compelled to participate between 16 and 18.

The interviews with professionals explored their views on these issues, concerns and priorities for young people and also examined their views of the sub-groups identified through the statistical analysis.

The interviews with young people who were NEET or in JWT were analysed using the broad typology of sub-groups identified through the statistical analysis. This analysis explored the validity of these sub-groups in so far as it enabled an investigation of whether the identified sub-groups reflected the experiences of young people. In addition, due to the greater level of in-depth information about the young people gained through the qualitative interviews, it enabled the extent of any further sub-groups within the identified groups to be explored. The analysis then examined the similarities and differences between the sub-groups of young

people and aimed to identify the distinct characteristics of the sub-groups of young people within the larger group of young people who are NEET or in JWT.

In order to provide a notion of the size of the segment, or the scale to which an issue or concern was expressed, Chapters 4 to 6 in the report present some indicative figures of the number of interviewees for whom a characteristic or issue applied. However, it is worth considering that, during the interviews, respondents were not all asked identical questions with a range of responses (as would be the case with a questionnaire survey). The responses of interviewees in a semi-structured interview reflect their priorities, issues and concerns and may not be fully representative of the wider population.

2 Segmentation analysis

Key findings

- The statistical segmentation analysis has confirmed that there are segments within the larger groups of young people who are NEET and in JWT and that there are distinct differences between these segments.

- Within the NEET group, the largest sub-group (about 41 per cent) was those who were **'open to learning NEET'**. These young people were most likely to re-engage in education or training in the short-term and tended to have higher levels of attainment and a more positive attitude to school.

- The second largest sub-group within the NEET group were those who were **'sustained NEET'**. These young people represented about 38 per cent of the NEET group and were characterised by their negative experience of school, higher levels of truancy and exclusion and lack of educational attainment. This group were most likely to remain NEET in the medium-term.

- The third NEET sub-group, which represented 22 per cent of young people who were NEET, was the **'undecided NEET'** group. These young people were similar in some respects, such as their attainment levels, to those who were **'open to learning NEET'**. However, they seemed to be dissatisfied with the available opportunities and their ability to access what they wanted to do.

- Within the JWT group, the largest sub-group included those who were **'sustained in a JWT',** representing 48 per cent of the JWT group. These young people were most likely to continue to be in a JWT in the medium-term and appeared to be content with this.

- Young people who were in a JWT but were **'at risk of becoming NEET'** were the second largest sub-group (35 per cent). Young people in this sub-group were similar to those in the 'sustained NEET' group in having a more negative experience of school and higher levels of truancy and exclusion. They tended to be less optimistic about the future and to feel that they did not have sufficient qualifications to make the progress they would like.

- The third sub-group within the JWT group included those who were **'transitional in a JWT'**. Representing 17 per cent of the JWT group, these young people were similar to the 'open to learning NEET' group in so far as they appeared to have made a transition at the end of Year 11 that was not right for them and had later re-engaged in education and training in the short-term.

- The professionals who work with young people who are NEET and in JWT recognised the sub-groups that had been identified and broadly agreed with the size of each sub-group.

2.1   Introduction

In order to identify segments within the groups of young people who were NEET or in JWT, a statistical segmentation analysis of Youth Cohort Study (YCS) data was undertaken. This chapter presents:

- the findings from this analysis

- the implications for policy for the different groups of young people who are in this position

- professionals' reflections on the identified segments.

2.2   Details of analytical approach

As noted in Chapter 1, the first strand of the research entailed gaining further insights into the nature of the young people who comprise those who were NEET or in JWT through a statistical segmentation analysis of data available through the YCS. The analysis was based on 1,637 young people who were classified as being NEET and 1,878 young people who were in JWT (using YCS definitions[2]) in sweep 1 of cohorts 11 and 12 of the YCS. This reflected young people's responses to the YCS in spring 2002 and spring 2004, for cohorts 11 and 12 respectively, when respondents had completed compulsory education in the previous summer (2001 and 2003). The numbers of young people in each group for each cohort is detailed in Table 2.1.

Table 2.1   Numbers of individuals included in the analysis

	Young people in jobs without training	Young people classified as being NEET
Cohort 11	1147	930
Cohort 12	731	707
Total	1878	1637

Combining data from two cohorts was necessary to ensure a sufficiently large dataset for robust statistical analysis. Furthermore, some questions that were pertinent to the segmentation analysis were not asked of both cohorts, so a combined dataset allowed the inclusion of a greater range of variables in the analysis.

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[2] YCS defines being in a JWT as being in full-time or part-time employment and not having received any training in the past four weeks

2 Segmentation analysis

The analysis explored young people's response to questions relating to the following variables:

Educational attainment	
Highest Year 11 qualification	Level 2 or above
	Level 1
	Less than level 1

Educational experience	
How would you describe your overall experience at school in Years 10 and 11?[*]	Very good
	Good
	Neither good nor poor
	Poor
	Very poor
Did you play truant in Year 11?	For weeks at a time
	For several days at a time
	For particular days or lessons
	For the odd day or lesson
	Never
Were you excluded from school at any point during Years 10 and 11?	Yes, permanent exclusion
	Yes, fixed term exclusion
	No

Future activity	
Activity at sweep 2	In education/training
	JWT
	NEET
Activity at sweep 3	In education/training
	JWT
	NEET
Activity at sweep 4[*]	In education/training
	JWT
	NEET

Post-16 experience	
Since Year 11, the courses, jobs or training I have done have generally worked out well for me (sweep 2)	Agree
	Disagree
How easy did you find it to make changes from Year 11 to now?	Very easy
	Fairly easy
	Fairly difficult
	Very difficult
Since Year 11 are there any qualifications which you have stopped before any formal assessment?[*]	Yes
	No
I am currently having a break from work or study[*£]	Applies to me
	Does not apply to me

Support and planning

I know how to find out about future work, education and training opportunities (sweep 2)	Agree
	Disagree
I am optimistic about the future (sweep 2)	Agree
	Disagree
I get enough support in planning my future (sweep 2)	Agree
	Disagree
I have not yet decided what sort of job or course I want to do[*£]	Applies to me
	Does not apply to me
I want to do more education and training in the future (sweep 2)	Agree
	Disagree

Barriers

I have got all the qualifications I need for the job or course I want to do (sweep 2)	Agree
	Disagree
I need more qualifications and skills to get a job, education or training place[*£]	Applies to me
	Does not apply to me
There are no decent jobs available where I live[*£]	Applies to me
	Does not apply to me
I have not found a suitable job or course[*£]	Applies to me
	Does not apply to me

Other variables

Making plans for the future is a waste of time (sweep 2)[$]	Agree
	Disagree
Which aspects of a job are most important to you? (sweep 2)[†$]	Job security
	Good starting pay
	High income in the long-term
	Being my own boss
	Interesting work
	Good work-life balance
Have you obtained any qualifications since sweep 1? (sweep 2)[$]	Yes
	No
Left FTE because I didn't like FTE and wanted to leave as soon as I was allowed to (sweep 2)[†$]	Not Ticked
	Ticked
Did you get the place in work, education or training that you wanted?[$]	Yes
	To some extent
	No

All variables relate to data collected in sweep 1 of the YCS unless stated

* Data only available for cohort 11 of YCS

†Data only available for cohort 12 of YCS

£Data only used in segmentation of NEET group

$Data only used in segmentation of JWT group

2 Segmentation analysis

Separate segmentations were carried out on the NEET and JWT groups. Some variables were not appropriate for use with one or other of the groups (for example young people in JWT were not asked if there were no decent jobs available where they live) and so were not included in the analysis for that particular group.

For particular questions, response categories were combined to avoid estimation problems associated with having very small numbers of individuals with particular responses. In addition to this, a small number of variables that were included in the segmentation of the JWT group were not included in the segmentation of the NEET group due to having small numbers of individuals in some of the remaining response categories.

As noted above, a number of the variables used in analysis were not answered by one or the other of the YCS cohorts included in analysis. Furthermore, due to the longitudinal nature of the data, young people who returned information in sweep 1 of the survey may not have returned any information in subsequent sweeps. This meant that variables relating to data collected in sweep 2 or later contained a large percentage of missing values. With such large amounts of missing data, simple strategies for overcoming the problem (such as replacing missing values with the most common response) were not appropriate. This meant that simple cluster analysis techniques such as hierarchical cluster analysis were not applicable.

The segmentation method used was latent class analysis. The aim of this analysis was to find common patterns of attainment, prior experiences, attitudes and re-engagement within the data. These patterns are captured within the definitions of the latent classes and allow a deeper understanding of the ways in which the various variables are related to one another.

Technically speaking, latent class analysis (LCA) is a statistical method that searches for underlying types of individuals (known as latent classes) such that the proportion of individuals within each type and the probabilities of different responses within each type serve to explain the relationships that exist between variables within the data. The latent class model is estimated using a maximum likelihood approach that directly searches for the parameters that define the response patterns of the latent classes. Once the latent classes have been defined it is possible to calculate the probability of any individual belonging to any of the defined latent classes. This approach contrasts to classical cluster analysis which attempts to break individuals into groups initially and then posthumously looks at the overall response patterns of individuals within each cluster. For further technical details on latent class analysis see Hagenaars and McCutcheon (2002).

One particular advantage of latent class analysis is its ability to handle missing data, as individuals with incomplete information can be retained in the analysis, with questions they had not responded to (possibly due to non-response to subsequent sweeps of the questionnaire or to the question not being asked of a particular cohort) coded as missing. For each individual, latent class analysis is able to handle incomplete information by assessing how well any particular segmentation model fits the data that has been provided by them, whilst ignoring the data that is missing. The impact of this is that variables with large amounts of missing data will have less influence on analysis results than variables with complete information.

Initial analysis was conducted to identify the number of segments within the data. Models were run that searched for between one and six segments within the data. For each model the Bayesian Information Criterion (BIC) was calculated. Models with lower values for BIC should be more robust in terms having repeatable results with another similar data set. The model that returned the best value for the BIC for the JWT group was the three-segment solution (see Figure 2.1). For the NEET group the BIC gave virtually identical results for the two- and three-segment solutions (see Figure 2.2). The three-segment solution was chosen as it was deemed to give more illuminating insights into the NEET group.

Figure 2.1   BIC values for differing numbers of segments within the JWT group
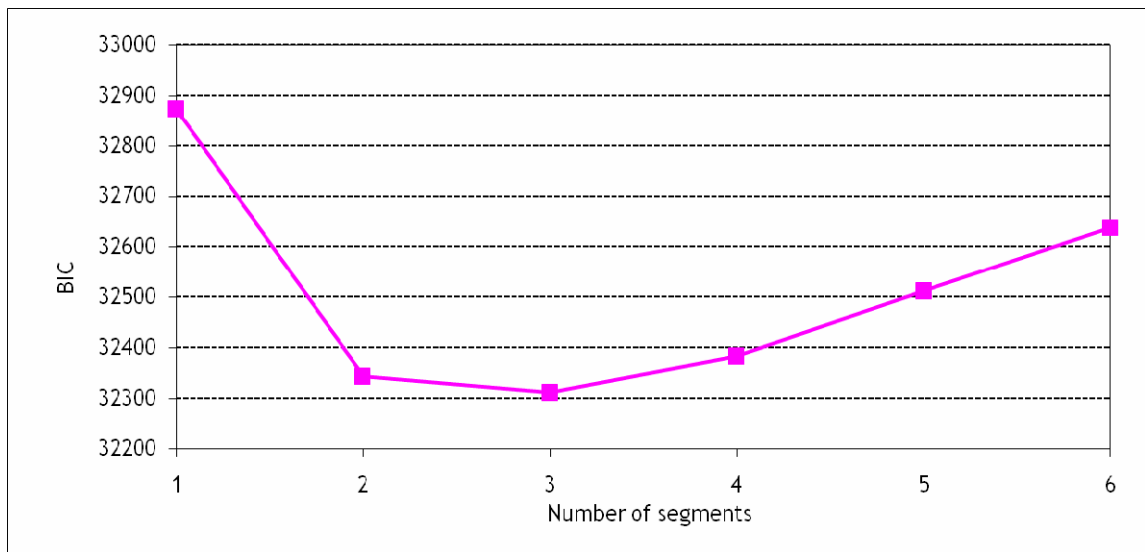
Figure 2.2   BIC values for differing numbers of segments within the NEET group
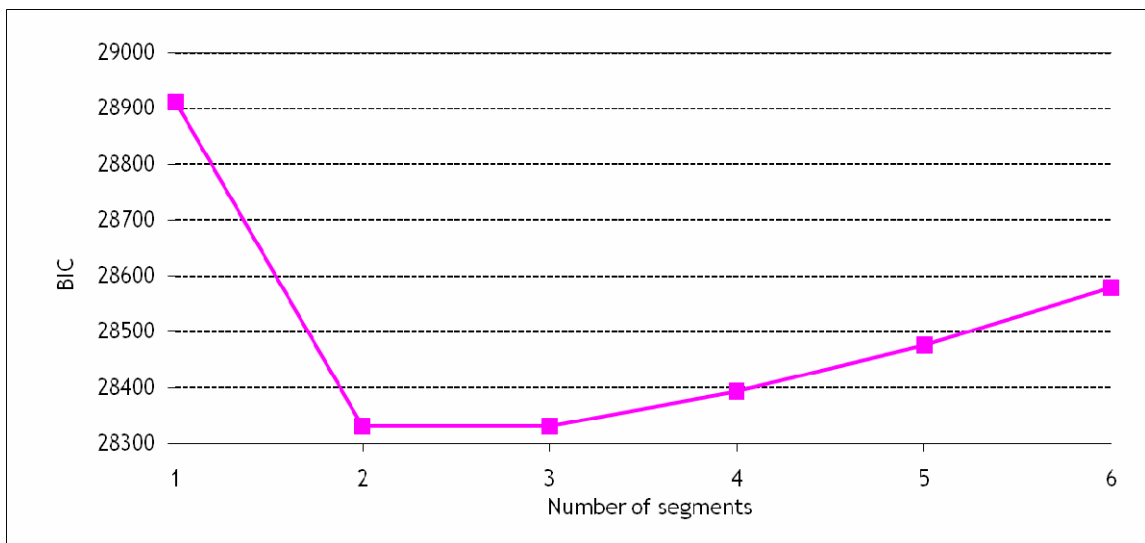
Subsequent to completing the segmentation analysis the data was weighted to take account of non-response patterns within the YCS, using the weighting variables supplied as part of the YCS data. The numbers and percentages presented in this chapter have had this weighting applied to them and show the probability of an individual in each particular segment giving each response to a question[3].

Once the segments were identified, further analysis was undertaken to examine the relationship between each segment and background characteristics such as gender, ethnicity, disability and the occupational background of respondents' families.

It is worth noting that the weighting variables are derived to ensure that the data from all respondents to the YCS is representative of all young people in England (based on region, school type, gender and Key Stage 4 attainment). They are not specifically designed to

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[3] Tables presenting full details of the responses are provided in Appendix A

ensure that data from respondents in the NET group is representative of young people not in education or training nationally. However, provided the pattern of non-response within the NET group is relatively similar to non-response patterns nationally (e.g. females are more likely to respond than males and those with higher attainment levels are more likely to respond) the weighting should enable a reasonable approximation to the size of the segments nationally.

The aim of the analysis was to characterise and describe sub-groups of young people who comprise those who are NEET and those who are in JWT. In order to do this, the differences between sub-groups were explored. It is worth noting that the findings highlight factors **where a segment was most likely or least likely of the identified segments to have a characteristic**. It may be the case, however, that a **minority** of young people in the segment have this characteristic and that the finding describes a tendency within a segment compared to the other segments. For example, while only 11 per cent of young people in a segment may have a disability or health problem, this may be a greater proportion than in the other two segments where, for example, six per cent and seven per cent of young people may have a disability or health problem. Thus while this characteristic is only true for a minority (11 per cent), it is notable because the young people in this sub-group were more likely to have the characteristic than those in the other segments.

In addition, while the segmentation analysis enables us to explore the characteristics of young people who comprise the 'NEET' and 'JWT' segments in more detail than the larger 'NEET' and 'JWT' categories, the analysis will still not reflect an individual's particular journey and experience. However, it provides further insights to inform our understanding of young people within these two groups, which, as the next chapter outlines, are known not to be homogenous groups.

2.3 Size of the segments within the 'NET group' of young people

Government defines those young people who are NEET and those who are in JWT as constituting an overall group of young people who are deemed to be not in education or training (NET). The segmentation analysis identified three segments within each of the 'NEET' group and the 'JWT' group. Figure 2.3 illustrates the proportions of the NET group falling within each of the segments.

Figure 2.3   Size of the segments within the NET group
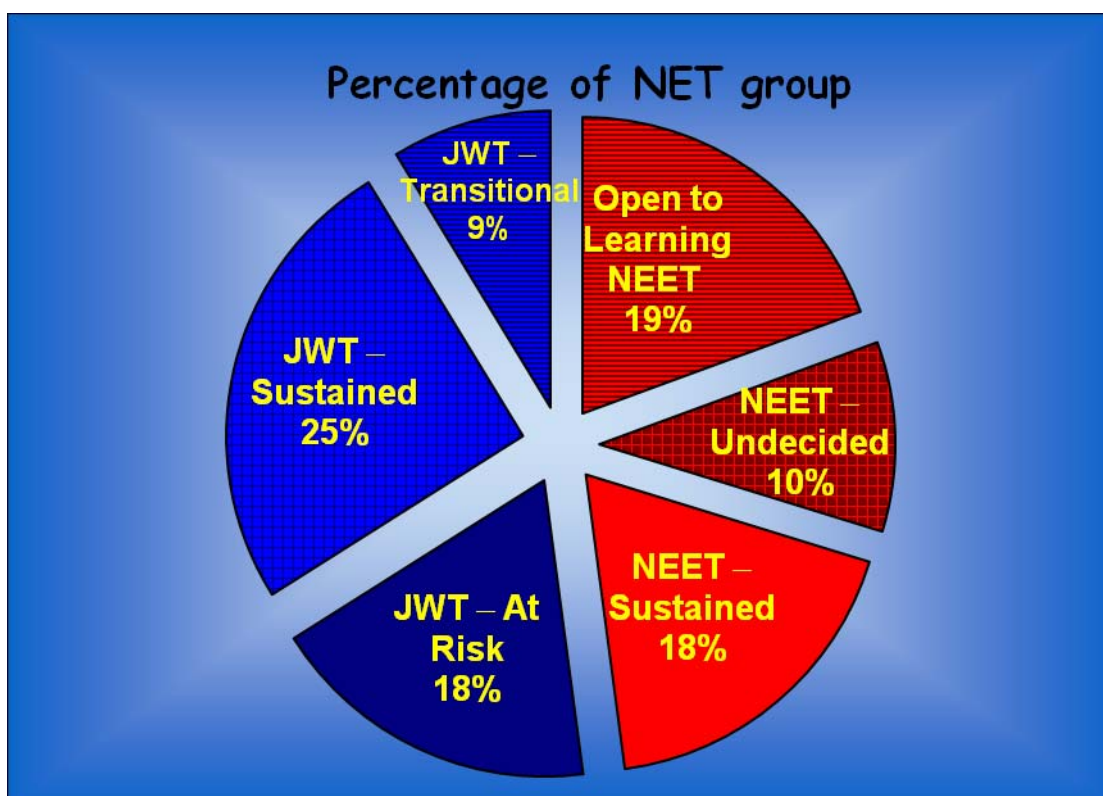
Three segments within the 'NEET group' were identified which can be characterised as follows.

- Young people who were **'open to learning NEET'** who constituted **41 per cent** of the NEET group

- Young people who were '**sustained NEET**' who constituted **38 per cent** of the NEET group. These young people were most likely of the three segments to continue to be NEET in future sweeps of the survey but are not necessarily all NEET for the long-term

- Young people who were '**undecided and NEET**' who constituted **22 per cent** of the NEET group[4].

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[4] Due to rounding, percentages do not sum to 100.

The group of young people who were NEET includes two segments of similar size and one smaller segment who might require different types of support and policies to facilitate their re-engagement with education and training. This was also the case for the group of young people who were in JWT among whom three segments were also identified. These could be characterised as follows.

- Young people who were '**sustained in a JWT**' who constituted **48 per cent** of the JWT group

- Young people who were '**at risk of becoming NEET**' who constituted **35 per cent** of the JWT group

- Young people who were '**transitional in a JWT**' who constituted **17 per cent** of the JWT group.

It appears, therefore, that the largest segment of young people who were in JWT were sustained in this type of occupation and that there is a substantial minority who were in a JWT but were 'at risk of becoming NEET'. The smallest segment were those who were in a JWT for the short-term before re-engaging with education or training.

2.3.1   Future activity of young people who were NEET

One of the main defining characteristics that was used to categorise the three sub-groups within each of the groups of young people who were NEET or in a JWT at the first sweep of the YCS survey was their **future engagement**. For example, young people who were 'sustained NEET' were characterised as having the least probability of re-engaging in education or training. The future engagement of young people in each of the segments is illustrated in Figures 2.4 to 2.9. These charts show the type of activity that young people were engaged in at each sweep of the YCS survey. In summary, they illustrate that:

- Young people who are **'open to learning NEET'** are most likely to re-engage in education or training in the short-term (Figure 2.4)

- Young people who are **'sustained NEET'** are least likely to re-engage in education or training, and most likely to remain NEET or to enter a JWT (Figures 2.4 and 2.6)

- Young people who are **'undecided NEET'** are similar to 'sustained NEET' young people in their likelihood of re-engagement in the short-term, but in the medium to longer term, are more likely to re-engage in education or training (Figure 2.5).

Figure 2.4 demonstrates that there is a segment of young people within the NEET cohort who are significantly less likely to remain NEET in the medium- to longer-term.

Figure 2.4   Percentage of the NEET segments who were NEET at each sweep of the YCS survey
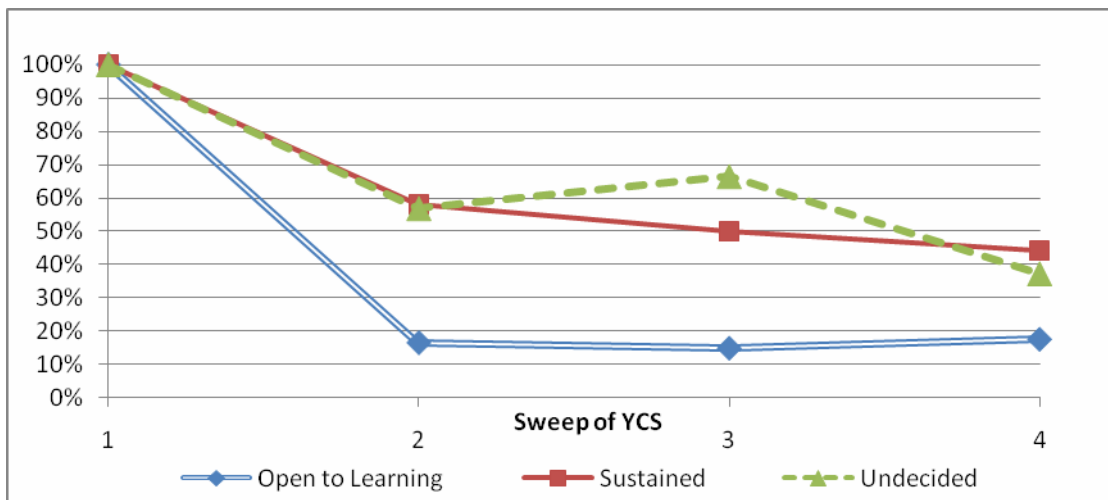
Figure 2.5 shows that the segment of young people who are 'undecided NEET' are more likely than those who are 'sustained NEET' to re-engage in education or training in the medium to longer term.

Figure 2.5   Percentage of the NEET segments who were in education or training at each sweep of the YCS survey
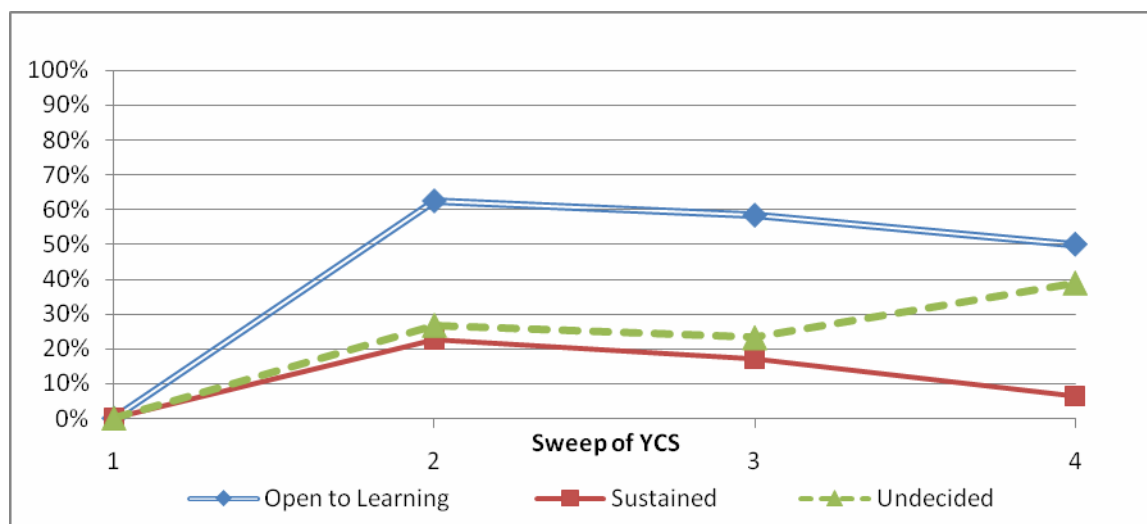
As can be seen in Figure 2.6, young people who were 'sustained NEET' were most likely of the three sub-groups to engage with a JWT in sweeps 3 and 4 of the survey.

Figure 2.6   Percentage of the NEET segments who were in a JWT at each sweep of the YCS survey
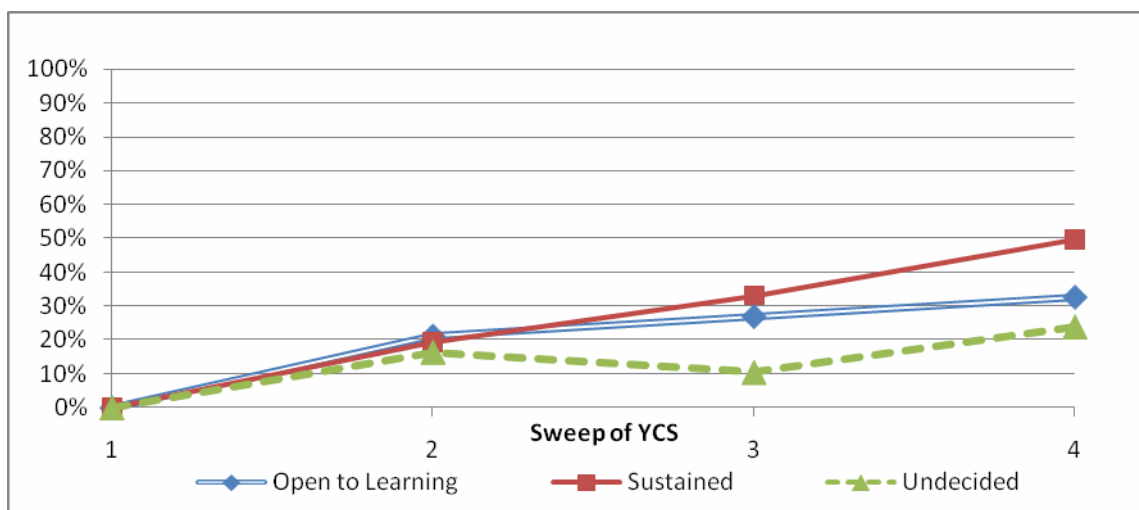
2.3.2   Future activity of young people who were in JWT

Figures 2.7 to 2.9 illustrate the future activities of young people who were in a JWT at the first sweep of the YCS survey. The figures reveal that the sub-groups differ significantly in terms of their likelihood of re-engaging in education or training.

- Young people who were '**sustained in JWT**' were most likely to continue to be in a JWT in the medium- to longer-term (Figure 2.7).

- Young people who were '**at risk of becoming NEET**' followed a similar pattern to the sustained group, but they were less likely to be in a JWT by the fourth sweep and noticeably more likely to be NEET in future sweeps (Figures 2.7 and 2.9).

- Young people who were '**transitional in a JWT**' were least likely to be in a JWT by the fourth sweep and were most likely to have engaged with education or training by the second sweep of the survey and to be participating in education or training in future sweeps (Figures 2.7 and 2.8).

Figure 2.7 shows that there is a sub-group of young people who are in a JWT in the medium- to longer-term (by sweep 4).

Figure 2.7   Percentage of the JWT segments who were in a JWT at each sweep of the YCS survey
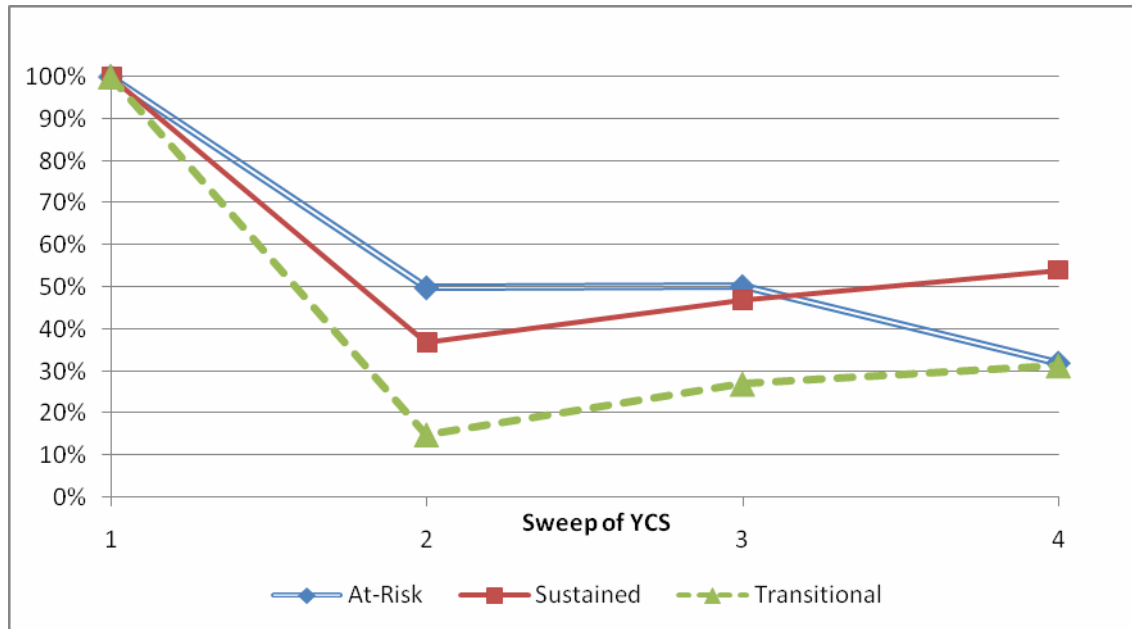
Figure 2.8 illustrates that there is a sub-group of young people in a JWT who re-engage in education and training in the short-term and remain engaged.

Figure 2.8   Percentage of the JWT segments who were in education or training at each sweep of the YCS survey
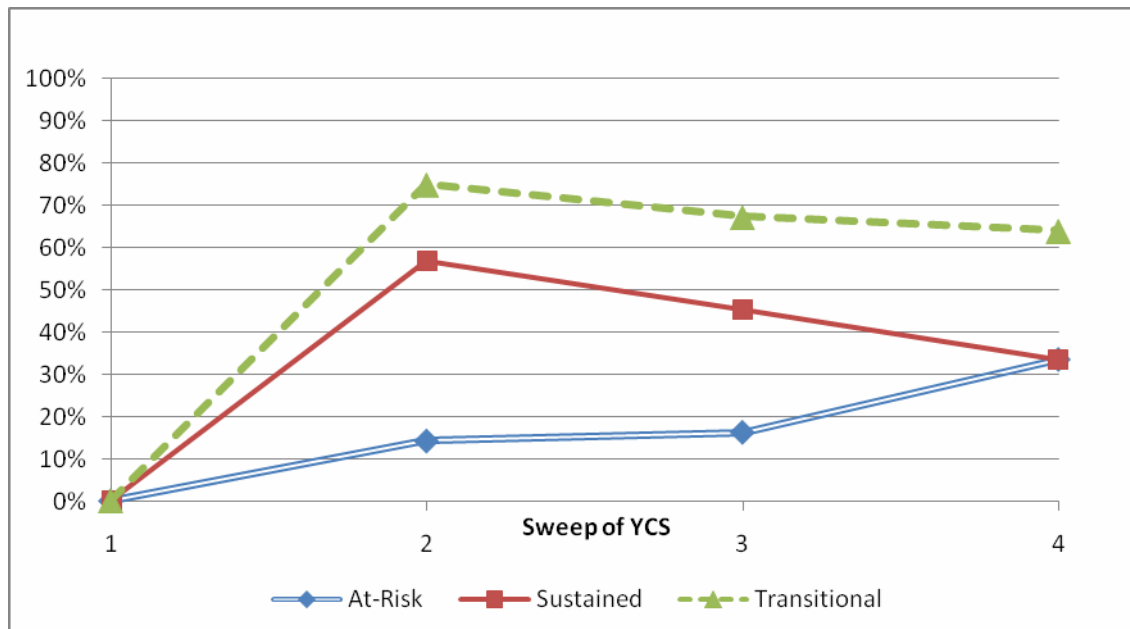
2 Segmentation analysis

Figure 2.9 shows that there is a sub-group of young people who are more at risk of becoming NEET.

Figure 2.9   Percentage of the JWT segments who were NEET at each sweep of the YCS survey
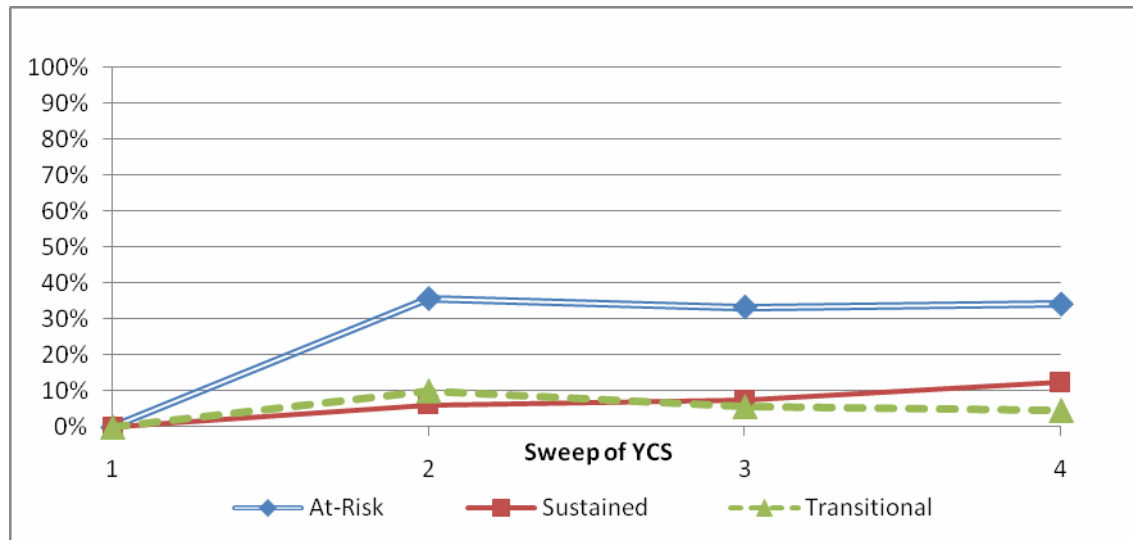
It is evident, therefore, that within the groups of young people who are NEET and JWT, there are sub-groups who may be more or less likely to re-engage, as illustrated in Figure 2.10 below.

Figure 2.10   Segmentation analysis, likelihood of re-engagement post-16
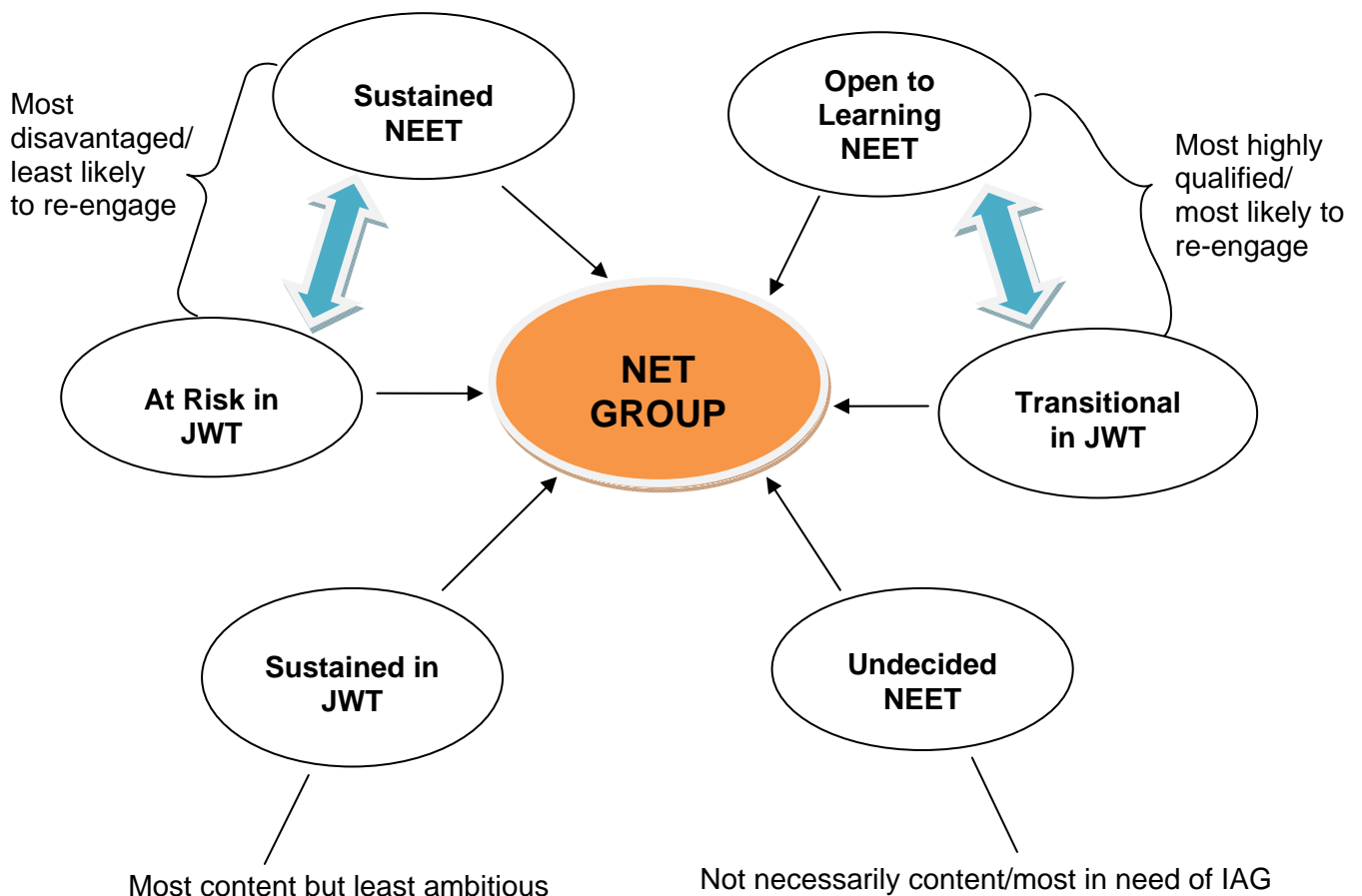
This suggests that differentiated policies may be appropriate to assist these young people in re-engaging. The remainder of this chapter explores these sub-groups in more detail and the implications for re-engaging them in education and training.

2.4   Segmentation of the group of young people who were NEET

As noted above, a total of 1,637 young people who were NEET in sweep 1 of the YCS survey in 2002 and 2004 were identified and three segments within this group were identified. The educational attainment and experience, post-16 experience, future activity, support with planning and barriers encountered by young people in each of the segments is presented in this section.

2.4.1   NEET segment 1 - Young people who are 'open to learning NEET'

Summary

Young people who are **'open to learning NEET'** can be distinguished within the NEET group by their attainment at Level 2, their more positive experience of school and their increased likelihood of returning to education or training in the short-term. In addition, their ability to find out about future choices, the extent to which they feel supported in making choices, their view that they have the necessary qualifications and available courses or jobs and their overall optimism for the future all distinguish them from other young people who are NEET.

	The sub-group of young people who are 'open to learning NEET':
Size of segment	• were the largest sub-group (**41 per cent** of those who were NEET)
Future activity	• were the most likely to re-enter education or training in the short-term • were most likely to say that they **wanted to engage in education or training** in the future (81 per cent)
Educational attainment	• had the **highest attainment** of the three sub-groups - most had achieved Level 1 (67 per cent) and 22 per cent had achieved Level 2 or above
Educational experience	• were the **most positive about their experience of school** - most (68 per cent) described their experience as very good or good and 92 per cent reported that they had never been excluded while 52 per cent said that they had never truanted
Post-16 experience	• tended to have **started a qualification and stopped** before it was assessed (39 per cent) • they were most likely to have **found the transition at 16 very or fairly easy** (15 per cent and 41 per cent respectively) • were most likely to report at sweep 2 of the survey that the **courses, jobs or training** that they had undertaken since completing Year 11 had **worked out well** for them (79 per cent) - this may include courses, jobs or training that they had re-engaged with since becoming NEET

Support and planning	• believed they were **equipped with the ability and support required to identify opportunities for the future,** and had **a sense of what they wanted**, more than young people in the other two sub-groups - the majority (95 per cent) said that they knew how to find out about future work, education or training opportunities and felt that they had enough support in planning their future (86 per cent)
	• **had a sense of what they wanted to do in the future -** were most likely to be optimistic about the future (93 per cent) and were least likely to say that they had not yet decided what they wanted to do in future (37 per cent)
Barriers	• were the most likely group to say that they **had all the qualifications that they need for the job or course that they wanted** to do (40 per cent), albeit that this was still the case for a minority of the group
	• were also the least likely of the three groups to say that they needed more qualifications to get a job, education or training place (28 per cent). - given that this was the group with the highest level of attainment
	• were **least likely to identify lack of opportunities as a barrier** to re-engagement - only 20 per cent reported that there were no decent jobs or courses where they lived
	• were also **least likely to state that they had not found a suitable job or course** - however, it is worth noting that this was still the case for nearly half (47 per cent) of young people in this group
Characteristics	• were **more likely to have both parents in employment** than the sustained NEET group and least likely to have neither parent in employment
	• were as likely be male (51 per cent) as female (49 per cent)
	• were unlikely to have a disability or health problem (94 per cent)
	• were generally not looking after home or family (88 per cent).

2.4.2   NEET segment 2 - young people who are 'sustained NEET'

Summary

This sub-group of young people tend to have had negative experiences at school, to have truanted or been excluded, and to have left school with few or no qualifications. They are most likely to have parents who are not employed and to have a disability or health problem. This sub-group are most 'typical'[5] of the NEET cohort described in the literature.

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[5] See Chapter 3 for the review of the literature.

	The sub-group of young people who are 'sustained NEET':
Size of segment	• were the second largest sub-group - **38 per cent** of those who were NEET
Future activity	• were most likely to be NEET in sweep 4 of the survey
	• were least likely to say that they wished to undertake education or training in future but this was still true for most (69 per cent)
	• were significantly **more likely to choose a work-based route**, when they did re-engage, and were less likely to choose full-time education - 37 per cent chose employment with training and 30 per cent chose Government supported training
Educational attainment	• were the **lowest attaining** of the three sub-groups - most attained below Level 1 at the end of compulsory schooling (58 per cent) and only one per cent gained Level 2
Educational experience	• were most likely to have been **excluded permanently** (11 per cent) **or for a fixed term** (42 per cent)
	• were least likely to have never truanted (14 per cent)
	• were most likely of the three groups to **describe their experience of school as poor** (27 per cent) or very poor (19 per cent)
Post-16 experience	• were least likely to have started a qualification and stopped before it was assessed (22 per cent)
	• were most likely to say that they **found the transition at the end of Year 11 very easy** (23 per cent)
Support and planning	• believed they **knew how to find out about future work and training opportunities** (88 per cent) - however they were less likely than the 'open to learning NEET' group to report this and to feel optimistic about the future (81 per cent) and to say that they had enough support to plan their future (73 per cent)
	• were more likely than the 'open to learning NEET sub-group' to say that they **had not yet decided what they wanted to do** (49 per cent)
Barriers	• were likely to experience **lack of qualifications as a barrier** - they were more likely than the 'open to learning NEET' sub-group to consider that they were under-qualified and most said that they did not have the qualifications that they needed for the course or job they wanted (79 per cent) while 58 per cent said that they needed more qualifications
	• were likely to experience **lack of appropriate opportunities** as a barrier - were more likely than the 'open to learning NEET' sub-group to report that there were no 'decent jobs' available (40 per cent) and said that they had not found a suitable job or course (68 per cent)
Characteristics	• were more likely to have **neither parent employed** (39 per cent)
	• were more likely to be **male** (56 per cent)
	• were more likely to have a **disability or health problem** (11 per cent)
	• were more likely to be **looking after a home or family** (19 per cent).

2.4.3   NEET segment 3 - young people who are 'undecided and NEET'

Summary

Young people in the '**undecided and NEET'** sub-group have generally attained Level 1 at the end of Year 11 and do not face any significant personal barriers preventing them from participating in learning. However, they stand out for being very dissatisfied with the opportunities available to them and do not believe that they have access to the jobs or courses they are interested in. They are also as likely as the sustained group to remain NEET, at least in the short-term, and appear to lack the skills and support to plan for their future

	The sub-group of young people who were 'undecided and NEET'
Size of segment	• were the smallest sub-group - **22 per cent** of those who were NEET
Future activity	• **were likely to re-engage in the medium-term** - they were more likely than those in the sustained NEET sub-group to re-engage in education and training by sweep 4 of the survey (39 per cent) • were also more likely than those in the sustained NEET group to say that they **would like to participate in education or training in the future** (75 per cent) • were less likely, overall, than the 'sustained NEET' group not to have participated in any education or training between the sweeps of the YCS (36 per cent)
Educational attainment	• were likely to have **attained Level 1** at the end of Year 11 (71 per cent) - however 16 per cent had attained Level 2 which is similar to the 'open to learning NEET' sub-group (although fewer of this sub-group had attained Level 2) and a minority achieved below Level 1 (13 per cent)
Educational experience	• were **slightly less positive about school than the 'open to learning NEET' group** - 57 per cent said that their experience of school was good or very good and 12 per cent said that it was poor or very poor • were more likely than the 'open to learning NEET' sub-group to have **truanted** - only 34 per cent reported that they had never done so • were **less likely** than those who were 'sustained NEET' to have been **excluded permanently** (two per cent) or for a fixed term (19 per cent) but more likely than those who were 'open to learning NEET' to have experienced exclusion
Post-16 experience	• were most likely of the three groups to report that they had **started a qualification and stopped before assessment** (53 per cent) • were noticeably the least likely to say that the courses, jobs or training that they had undertaken since the end of Year 11 had worked out well for them (four per cent) and most likely to disagree with this (96 per cent) • were most likely to report that they found the **transition at 16 fairly**

	or very difficult (38 per cent and 16 per cent respectively) and least likely to report that it was very or fairly easy (seven per cent and 38 per cent respectively)
Support and planning	• were likely to feel **under-equipped to make choices and plan for the future** - they were least likely to say that they knew how to find out about future opportunities (69 per cent) and were least likely to report that they received enough support in planning their future (37 per cent)
	• were most likely of the three groups to say that they **have not yet decided what to do** (66 per cent)
	• were also least likely to say that they were optimistic about the future (55 per cent)
Barriers	• were **least likely** to believe that they **had all the qualifications that they need** for the job or course that they want, although the levels of attainment among this group were only slightly below those who were 'open to learning NEET'
	• were as likely as those in the 'sustained NEET' group to think that they **needed to get more qualifications or skills** to get a job or training place (55 per cent)
	• were **most likely** of the groups (51 per cent) to say that there were **no 'decent jobs' or courses available** to them
	• were notably the **most likely** to indicate that they had **not found a suitable job or course** (91 per cent)
Characteristics	• more likely to have both **parents** who were **in employment** than the sustained NEET sub-group (39 per cent)
	• more likely to be **female** (53 per cent)
	• were unlikely to have a **disability or health problem** (93 per cent)
	• were generally not looking after home or family (83 per cent).

2.4.4   Policy implications relating to young people who are NEET

Overall, the segmentation analysis has provided evidence to support the notion that the NEET group is not homogenous. It has revealed that, while some young people who are NEET are characterised by low achievement and high levels of dissatisfaction with school, there are as many who become NEET who do not fit this characterisation. These young people achieve some Level 1 and 2 qualifications and are comparatively happy with school.

The implications of this are:

• Policies aiming to reduce the numbers of young people NEET need to include targeting young people who are not obviously disengaged from learning, some of whom may be achieving at an appropiate level in their education, but are also at risk of becoming NEET

• The introduction of the Raising the Participation Age policy needs to be supported by effective advice and guidance for all young people so that they make a positive choice at 16 that is right for them and which they sustain.

The evidence suggests that the 'system', pre-16 and post-16, does not always fit with what young people want to engage with. Pre-16 this leads to disengagement and consequent low

achievement and post-16 it is associated with young people, who are dissatisfied with what is available, drifting in and out of jobs or courses. The implications of this are:

- On the supply side, the pre-16 system needs to continue to adapt provision in order to offer applied learning opportunities to young people and to ensure that they are aware that such alternatives are available and may be appropriate for them

- The post-16 system needs to continue to aim to identify what young people and employers want and need through consultation and to strive to provide this. This should include exploring how best to provide for people who discontinue to ensure that they remain in some productive, positive learning activity until they are able to re-engage in a longer-term course

- On the demand side, adaptations to provision need to be supplemented by guidance for young people that helps them, before they reach 16, to understand themselves and the available opportunities and to help manage their expectations while retaining their ambition.

2.5   Segmentation of the group of young people who are in JWT

A total of 1,878 young people were identified in the YCS data as being in JWT when they were surveyed in Spring 2002 and 2004, having left school the previous summer. The YCS defines those in JWT as being those whose current main activity is either full-time or part-time work and who have not received any training in the past four weeks. The educational attainment and experience, post-16 experience, future activity and support with planning and barriers encountered by young people in each of the segments are presented in this section.

2.5.1   JWT segment 1 - young people who are 'sustained in a JWT'

Summary

This sub-group of young people who are '**sustained in a JWT'** are distinct within the group of young people in JWT in their contentment with their current situation. They are also more likely to consider that they are able to find out about opportunities for the future and are positive about the support that they receive with this. While their contentment may reflect a higher level of commitment than young people in the other two segments, it may also suggest that this group would be among the hardest to re-engage in education or training.

	The sub-group of young people who are 'sustained in a JWT':
Size of segment	• were the largest sub-group - **48 per cent** of those who were in a JWT
Future activity	• were the most likely to **be in a JWT at sweep 4** of the survey
	• were more likely than those in the 'at risk of becoming NEET' sub-group to be **positive about engaging in future training or education** (83 per cent would consider this)
	• were less likely than those in the 'at risk of becoming NEET' group to have no instances of education or training across the sweeps of the survey (24 per cent)
	• were **more likely, where they engaged in education or training in future,** than those in the other two groups **to enter Government**

	Supported Training (20 per cent of those who were in education or training at sweep 2 of the survey) - although they were most commonly in employment with training in future (44 per cent)
Educational attainment	• were likely to have **attained Level 1** at the end of Year 11 (71 per cent) - however, a notable minority had achieved Level 2 or above (20 per cent) and they were more likely than the 'at risk of becoming NEET' sub-group to have done so but less likely than the 'transitional in a JWT' sub-group
Educational experience	• were most likely of the three groups to report that they had **never been excluded** from school (92 per cent)
	• were most likely to say that they had **never truanted** (63 per cent)
	• were most likely to say that their experience of school in Years 10 and 11 was very good (ten per cent) or good (66 per cent) and were least likely to report that they left full-time education because they wanted to leave as soon as possible (36 per cent)
Post-16 experience	• were most likely of the three groups to say that the courses, jobs or training that they had participated in since leaving Year 11 had worked well for them (92 per cent)
	• were also the most likely to state that they had gained the place in work, education or training that they wanted (41 per cent)
	• were also the most likely to say that they had **obtained qualifications since leaving Year 11** - although this was only the case for a minority (18 per cent)
	• were **least likely to have started and stopped a qualification prior to the assessment** (17 per cent) - this apparently successful transition from their perspective is reflected in the finding that young people in this group were also most likely to have found the transition after Year 11 very easy (21 per cent) or fairly easy (58 per cent)
Support and planning	• were likely to be **confident that they were able to make plans for the future** - they were most likely of the three groups to say that they knew how to find out about future work, education or training opportunities (94 per cent) and were also most likely to say that they received enough support in planning their future (94 per cent)
	• were **most likely to believe that they had sufficient qualifications for the job or course they wanted** (56 per cent) despite being less well qualified than those who were 'transitional in a JWT
	• were **similar to those who were 'transitional in a JWT' in terms of their optimism for the future** (93 per cent) and their views on the value of making plans for the future which only seven per cent considered was a waste of time
Characteristics	• were slightly less likely than those who were 'at risk of becoming NEET' of having neither parent in employment and more likely to have both parents employed
	• were more likely to be **male** (60 per cent)
	• were unlikely to have a **disability or health problem** (97 per cent)
	• were unlikely to be looking after home or family (98 per cent).

2.5.2 JWT segment 2 - young people who are in a JWT and were 'at risk of becoming NEET'

Summary

Young people who are '**at risk of becoming NEET'** tend to have lower levels of attainment and negative experiences at school. Moreover, their lack of skills to plan for their future, their lack of optimism, and recognition that they do not have sufficient qualifications to progress into the job or course that they would like, all emphasise the risk of this group becoming NEET in future.

	The sub-group of young people who are 'at risk of becoming NEET':
Size of segment	• were the second largest sub-group - **35 per cent** of those who were in a JWT
Future activity	• were **most likely** of the three groups **to have become NEET in future** sweeps of the survey • were least likely to say that they were interested in doing more education or training in future - although this was still the case for the majority of young people in this group (67 per cent) • were noticeably the **most likely to have no instances of participation in education or training** in any sweeps of the survey (51 per cent) - those who did engage in education or training in future, were more likely than those in the other two groups to enter employment with training (50 per cent of those who were in education or training at sweep 2 of the survey) and least likely to enter full-time education (18 per cent)
Educational attainment	• **were most likely** to have **attained below Level 1** (37 per cent) and was least likely to have gained qualifications at Level 2 or above (four per cent) by the end of Year 11
Educational experience	• **were most likely to have been excluded** permanently (seven per cent) or for a fixed term (35 per cent) • were least likely to report that they never truanted (21 per cent) • were most likely of the three groups to say that they left full-time education as soon as it was possible (56 per cent) • were most likely to **describe their experience of school as poor** (15 per cent) or very poor (14 per cent)
Post-16 experience	• were generally likely to think that the **job, courses or training** that they had participated in had **worked out well** (52 per cent) • were more likely than those who were 'sustained in JWT' to report that they had gained the place they wanted on a job, course or training (24 per cent) • were **less likely to have found the transition at 16 very or fairly easy** (28 per cent and 42 per cent respectively) than those who were 'sustained in a JWT' but more likely to indicate this than those who were 'transitional in a JWT'

	• were least likely to have gained any qualifications between sweeps 1 and 2 of the survey (six per cent)
	• were noticeably less likely than those who were 'transitional in a JWT', to report that they had started and stopped taking a qualification (26 per cent)
Support and planning	• were the **least able to plan for the future** - they were the least likely of the three groups to know how to go about finding out about future employment, training and education opportunities (77 per cent) and were least likely to consider that they received enough support in planning for the future (56 per cent).
	• were aware of the impact of their lower attainment on their options as they were least likely of the three groups to believe that they had enough qualifications to gain the job or course they wanted (18 per cent)
	• were least likely to be optimistic about the future (72 per cent) and were most likely to think that making plans for the future is a waste of time (23 per cent)
Characteristics	• were more likely to have **parents employed in semi-routine and routine and other occupations** and less likely to have parents who were in professional or higher technical professions
	• were more likely to be **male** (59 per cent)
	• were unlikely to have a **disability or health problem** (96 per cent)
	• were generally not looking after home or family (96 per cent).

2.5.3   JWT segment 3 - young people who are 'transitional in a JWT'

Summary

Young people in the '**transitional in a JWT'** segment had made a transition at Year 11 that had not worked out of them and had, therefore, got a JWT. However, they had not been dissuaded from education or training entirely and were likely to re-engage in the short-term. Many of them had attained Level 2 at the end of Year 11, although they had some history of truancy and exclusion at school, albeit to a lesser extent than those who were in a JWT but 'at risk of becoming NEET'. Young people in this group also expressed some concerns about the support they had received to assist them in planning for the future.

	The sub-group of young people who are 'transitional in a JWT'
Size of segment	• were the smallest sub-group - **17 per cent** of those who were in a JWT
Future activity	• were most likely to have had a short-duration of involvement in a JWT • were the **least likely** of the three sub-groups to have **experienced no instances of education or training** across the sweeps of the survey (two per cent) • were most likely of the three sub-groups to say that they **would like to do more training or education in future** (87 per cent) and those young people in this sub-group who did engage with education or training in the future were most likely of the three sub-groups to **engage with full-time education** (44 per cent of those who were in education and training by sweep 2 of the survey) and **were least likely to be employed with training** (32 per cent) **or in Government Supported Training** (12 per cent)
Educational attainment	• were most likely to have **gained Level 2 or above** at the end of Year 11 (60 per cent) and least likely to have achieved less than Level 1 (no young people in this group achieved below Level 1)
Educational experience	• were **not the most positive about their experience of school**, although had the highest attainment levels of the three groups • were similar to those who were 'sustained in a JWT' in their experience of exclusion, as 90 per cent had **never been excluded** • were more likely than the sustained group to have truanted (42 per cent had never done so) • were less likely than those who were 'sustained in a JWT' to say that their experience of school was very good (17 per cent) or good (47 per cent) although they were more positive than those who were 'at risk of becoming NEET'
Post-16 experience	• were most likely to have started qualifications since Year 11 which they had stopped before the final assessment (96 per cent) • were the **least likely** of the three sub-groups to report that they **found the transition after Year 11 very easy** (17 per cent) or fairly easy (45 per cent) and a minority (25 per cent) considered that they had gained the place they wanted in work, education or training • were as likely as those who were 'at risk of becoming NEET' to report that the jobs, courses or training programme that they had done since Year 11 had generally worked out well for them (54 per cent)
Support and planning	• were similar to those who were 'sustained in a JWT', and different from those 'at risk of becoming NEET', in their **optimism about the future** (93 per cent) and their rejection of their view that making plans for the future was a waste of time (six per cent) • were similar to those 'at risk of becoming NEET' in the extent to which they felt that they received enough support in planning their future (57 per cent) and more negative than those 'sustained in a JWT' in this regard

	• were likely to believe that they **knew how to find out about education, employment and training opportunities** (84 per cent) and they were more positive than those 'at risk of becoming NEET' in this respect, although they were less certain than those 'sustained in a JWT' that they had all the qualifications that they needed to gain the course or job they wanted (40 per cent)
Characteristics	• were more likely to have **both parents in employment** and less likely both to be unemployed
	• were likely to have parents employed in **professional, technical and intermediate occupations** and less likely to be in lower supervisory, semi-routine and routine occupations
	• were more likely to be **female** (53 per cent)
	• were generally unlikely to have a **disability or health problem** (96 per cent)
	• were generally not looking after home or family (97 per cent).

2.5.4 Policy implications relating to young people in JWT

The segmentation analysis reveals that while some young people are in JWT as a 'stop-gap', or may move between being NEET and in a JWT, there is a notable proportion who are more content and settled in a JWT. This suggests that:

• the Raising the Participation Age policy needs to ensure that the needs of this group of young people, who are motivated to go into employment and sustain this, are met. This requires provision of viable work-based routes and effective guidance pre-16 that identifies young people who have a preference for employment and directs them to these opportunities. This needs to be supplemented by the involvement of employers who are supported to provide a positive learning experience for young people

• there is a need to have a system that proactively maintains contact with young people who enter a JWT at 16 in order to ensure that when they choose to, or have to, leave their job, an informed adult is available to them to guide them into appropriate alternatives. Such a system should include a mechanism for contacting young people who are in a JWT as they approach 18 which it appears may be a key point at which they reflect and consider re-engaging with learning.

2.6   Professionals' reflections on the segments

The statistical analysis revealed that there were indeed distinct sub-groups of young people among those who were classified as NEET or in JWT who had different trajectories, histories and likely support needs if they were to re-engage in education or training. In order to explore the extent to which these sub-groups identified through the analysis reflected the situation in reality, the research team discussed this typology of sub-groups with professionals who work with, or are in contact with, young people who are NEET or in JWT. Their reflections enhance our understanding of these groups and provide further insights into the relationship between them and the movement of young people between these sub-groups.

2.6.1   Professionals' reflections on the segments of young people who are NEET

Overall, the professionals who were interviewed agreed with the categorisation of young people who were NEET and acknowledged that there were similarities between the young people they met and differences which were common to some groups of young people. Where they felt able to comment, they generally agreed with the size of each sub-group.

Professionals recognised the '**sustained NEET'** sub-group as those with whom they had most contact. They agreed that these young people often had experiences of school that were not positive but explained that, while for some this may be because they disliked school, for others it was related to their inability to engage with it due to poor basic literacy skills or learning difficulties. In addition, they noted that the learning style in school did not always suit young people who subsequently became 'sustained NEET'. Professionals often considered that the size of this sub-group was larger than the analysis estimated (38 per cent). However, their assessment of the size of this sub-group would be influenced by the fact that they were more likely to be in contact with young people who were 'sustained NEET' than those in the other sub-groups.

Professionals also recognised that a proportion of young people were '**open to learning NEET'**. Where they commented, they characterised these young people as easy to re-engage. Young people in this sub-group had generally found that the course that they had started post-16 did not meet their expectations and, for example, was not delivered in a way that they wanted to learn. Consequently they had stopped participating and were waiting until courses started again in September before re-engaging in education or training. The lack of availability of appropriate provision in the interim may constrain the extent to which such young people can remain engaged as illustrated by the comment of one interviewee who said that this sub-group '*would not be challenged by E2E*' in the interim.

The sub-group of young people who were '**undecided and NEET'** were also familiar to the professionals and their reflections of the characteristics of young people who could be described as 'undecided' revealed some variation within the sub-group. For example, professionals noted the relationship between young people's **expectations and the availability of opportunities** to meet these expectations. Professionals' comments reflected the wider literature (as will be discussed in Section 3.2.3) when they observed that provision may not be sufficient, as illustrated by an interviewee who explained '*I think that they are dissatisfied with what's available but that is a genuine feeling - as not enough is available for them*'. However, it was also said to be the case that young people's expectations may not be realistic, that they have a '*narrow vision*' and that they require more support with career planning to assist them in refining their ideas. Moreover, the extent to which young people were aware of all the opportunities that were available was a further concern. It was clear that a combination of appropriate provision and effective information was required to support this sub-group of young people. However, it was also important to acknowledge that this sub-group of young people may be aware of the options and were just '*not at a point where they want to make a decision*'.

In addition to the relationship between expectations and provision, some interviewees reflected on the key **role of parents** for this sub-group of young people who were 'undecided NEET'. Parents could function as a limiting factor, by supporting young people financially and not '*pushing them*'. As one interviewee expressed it '*if there's benefits or money from parents there, they are, like "I can take my time to find the perfect job" and it never happens*'. In contrast, parents could '*pressure*' their children into making a choice but this could also be negative as the choice proved to be inappropriate and resulted in them dropping out.

Where interviewees felt that the sub-groups identified through the analysis did not fully reflect the nature of the young people who were NEET whom they knew, this related to specific characteristics which did not emerge as significant in the statistical analysis possibly due to the small numbers of young people with such characteristics in the dataset. More specifically:

- Five interviewees felt that **young people who were parents** were not reflected in the sub-groups and, where they commented, they felt that they might be represented among the 'sustained' or 'undecided NEET' sub-groups

- **Young people who were Young Offenders** were not felt to be represented in the segments by five interviewees

- **Young people who had learning difficulties** were felt to be unrepresented by three interviewees. Such young people were considered to be distinct because they were often keen and motivated to gain employment or further training but that provision was lacking for them. As one personal adviser explained '*for people who have missed a lot of school plus have learning difficulties, I don't think there is great provision*'. Describing one young person with learning difficulties, the interviewee explained '*he's very "I want a job" but … he falls into no man's land*'.

Overall, therefore, the views of professionals who work with young people who are NEET indicate that the segments identified through the statistical analysis are indeed reflected in reality. However, interviewees also noted that there was some overlap and movement between the sub-groups. In particular, they perceived movement of young people between the 'sustained' and 'undecided' sub-groups and between the 'open to learning NEET' and 'undecided' sub-groups.

2.6.2 Professionals' reflections on the segments of young people who were in a JWT

Interviewees often felt less able to comment on the sub-groups within the group of young people who were in JWT because they had less direct contact with such young people. Nevertheless, they generally recognised and agreed with the sub-groups of young people identified through the analysis and broadly agreed with the estimated size of each sub-group. Where they disagreed with the size of the segments, they felt that the 'sustained JWT' sub-group would be smaller than 48 per cent and that the 'at risk of becoming NEET' sub-group would be larger than 35 per cent. Again, this may reflect the greater likelihood of professionals in these roles to be in contact with young people in the 'at risk of becoming NEET' sub-group.

Reflecting on the '**sustained in JWT**' sub-group, interviewees observed that some were content with being in a JWT. When followed up at the age of 20 (in one area) '*they are still in the same job and enjoying it*'. In addition, some were said to have made a conscious decision to avoid training. Other young people, however, were found to be dissatisfied at the age of 18 and it was at this stage that the sustained sub-group re-engaged with the Connexions Service to seek advice. The views of two Personal Advisers sum up a more widely expressed perception that '*it's a bit of a maturity thing*' and '*it takes them when they are in that job to realise that actually they want training within the job, and I think a lot do. But I don't think it's at 16. I think it may be older like at 18*'. This highlights the challenge for policy in ensuring young people remain engaged while they mature.

Young people who were in a JWT but '**at risk of becoming NEET**' were also familiar to professionals, who would come into contact with them when they became NEET. Such young people were sometimes said to be affected by economic changes making their jobs transitory. More often, interviewees reported that young people in this sub-group rejected their job because they found, for example, that they wanted '*more variety and challenge …*

they don't mind it for a bit and then they become downhearted and frustrated'. Related to this, some young people were felt to leave work because the job did not meet their expectations and they '*don't like starting at the bottom*'. One interviewee observed that there was a need to engage with young people in this sub-group before they left their JWT, in order that they could be supported to find an alternative. This interviewee felt it would be preferable to '*make them see they would be better hanging on until they find something better*'. It appears, therefore, that any compulsory work-based provision for 16 and 17 year olds would need to ensure that it provided the right level of challenge and interest in order to sustain young people's engagement.

The third sub-group of young people, those who were '**transitional in a JWT**', were also familiar to interviewees. They were said to have a financial imperative to work, influenced by their family, but to have other aspirations. In addition, they were described as getting bored with their job and to have entered further education and to have found it '*a big jump*' from '*scraping Level 2 to A levels or a BTEC*' and consequently had entered a JWT.

In summary, the interviews with professionals supported the sub-groups of young people identified through the statistical analysis. Where they identified any further categories whom they felt were missing from the analysis, they noted those who were choosing to take a 'gap year', including those whose parents felt that they needed a break from learning. This view was also reflected in the literature (see Section 3.3.2).

2.7   Summary and conclusion

The analysis presented in this chapter has provided further evidence and insights into the extent and nature of sub-groups within the groups of young people aged 16 and 17 who were categorised as NEET or in a JWT. It has illustrated that, within these two large categories, there were young people whose trajectories, experiences and opportunities were different. This indicates, therefore, that different responses from policy-makers and practitioners may be required in order to ensure that they are appropriately supported and assisted to fulfil their potential. It is evident that, while there were differences between the sub-groups in the proportions of young people who wished to participate in further education or training in future, this was the case for the majority of young people in every sub-group. This finding supports the evidence from the literature, discussed in the next chapter, which suggests that young people who were NEET or in a JWT have similar aspirations to those who have remained engaged in education and training at 16. There appears, therefore, to be potential to re-engage many young people who are currently NEET or in a JWT.

3 Review of the literature

3.1 Overview

The review presented here is based around a select number of items (approximately 40) encompassing research reports, journal articles, web articles, government reports, press and statistical releases and literature reviews. In order to maintain the focus of the review, the research team at NFER set strict parameters for the conduct of the literature review in order to ensure that the most relevant items of literature were covered. (For full details of the literature review strategy adopted, see Appendix B). In prioritising literature for the review, we focused upon items that:

- were produced or published within the last ten years

- related to young people in Britain (and normally England)

- related to young people aged 16 and above

- focused on young people's characteristics, and the barriers and enablers to their participation in education and training

- focused on those who were not in education, employment or training (NEET), or who were in jobs without training (JWT).

3.1.1 Background to the literature

It is important to note that this review can be only as robust as the research and other reports upon which it is based, and that we can comment only on research that has actually been undertaken and published. Inevitably, therefore, there are gaps in the information that we can glean from the literature relating to young people who are NET. The literature reviewed for this study was:

- **most commonly qualitative in nature** - therefore, whilst it can help us to understand the underlying reasons for young people's NET status, it is generally less reliable in terms of providing grounds for quantification or segmentation

- **often small scale or specific in detail** - many of the studies adopt a case-study focus on one particular geographical area (for example, Archer, *et al.,* 2005; Fergusson, 2004; MacDonald and Marsh., 2005), or on young people who are in the most disadvantaged of circumstances (examples include Stone, *et al.,* 2000; Sims, *et al.,* 2001; Golden, *et al.,* 2002*,* MacDonald and Marsh*,* 2005 and Quinn, *et al.,* 2008). The samples selected for such research studies are not necessarily chosen to be representative of the wider population of young people, but to enable the researchers to explore the issues facing particularly disadvantaged young people, or to evaluate the strategies that have been employed to meet their needs. Whilst such studies provide an interesting insight into the issues facing specific groups of young people, it is important that caution is adopted in extrapolating from their findings to make judgements or reach conclusions about all young people who are NEET or in JWT.

- **varying in its robustness** - varying research methodologies have been used by the authors of different studies, which adopt very different levels of rigour. Whilst most of the items reviewed were robust in their design, caution is exercised in the reporting of 'evidence' that is weak or poorly substantiated.

The review indentified many more items concentrating on the characteristics, barriers and needs of young people who are **NEET** than on those in **JWT**. Although a select number of qualitative studies (IFF, 1998; Anderson, *et al.*, 2006; Maguire, *et al.*, 2008; Quinn, *et al.*, 2008) have been conducted exploring the characteristics of young people in JWT, very little published statistical evidence is available detailing their qualifications, ethnicity or socio-economic backgrounds, for example.

In addition, a number of the studies concerning NEET young people make the point that such young people do not constitute a homogeneous group (Sims, *et al.,* 2001; Archer, *et al.,* 2005; Spielhofer, *et al.,* 2007; DCSF, 2008). However, very few of these studies provide suggestions for how this heterogeneity might be described in terms of a more sophisticated segmentation of NEET young people.

3.1.2   Implications for this study

The tendency of the literature to make generalised statements about young people who are NEET or in JWT means that we cannot rely on this source alone to estimate the size of different 'sub-groups' of young people and, in turn, to deduce how best to engage them in learning, both of which are key objectives for this study. As this study aims to fill this gap in understanding, we have undertaken a detailed analysis of statistical datasets (already discussed) as well as in-depth case-study interviews with young people and practitioners, the outcomes of which are covered in Chapters 4, 5 and 6. The literature review should be seen as supplementary to these analyses, and of particular value in helping to address the following research objectives:

- exploring the main reasons why the different sub-groups do not participate in learning and what strategies and support would be most likely to persuade or enable them to do so

- examining whether young people in JWT do not engage in training out of choice or because of lack of opportunity, and whether they are more likely or willing to engage in training related to their current employment or in alternative education or training settings.

3.1.3   Key themes emerging through the literature

In the following sections, we consider what the literature tells us about the issues raised in Section 3.1.2 above, and the study's objectives, as follows:

- characteristics and motivations of young people who are NEET

- characteristics and motivations of young people who are in JWT

- similarities and difference between NEET and JWT young people

- what prevents NET young people from participating in learning (opportunity versus choice factors).

3.2 Characteristics and motivations of young people who are NEET

A number of research studies and reviews (Rennison, et al., 2005; Spielhofer, et al., 2007; EdComs, 2007) make the point that young people who are NEET do not constitute a homogeneous group. Such studies highlight the heterogeneity of young people who 'drop in and out' of post-16 education and training. Spielhofer, *et al.* (2007), for example, illustrate that those young people officially categorised as 'NEET' for statistical purposes do not form a coherent group with commonly shared characteristics. Instead, they are said to include:

> *individuals engaged in activities as diverse as: caring for an elderly relative, parenthood, engaging in criminal activity, coping with a serious physical or psychological illness, searching for suitable education and training provision, travelling or being on a 'gap' year.*

As stated previously, most studies look for similarities amongst NEET young people, rather than seeking to deconstruct this 'group'. As a result, much of the research indicates a number of common characteristics or factors explaining young people's non-participation in education, employment or training post-16. Most of these factors paint a picture of **disadvantage,** and can be condensed into the following categories:

- education / learning disadvantage

- personal issues

- structural factors.

However, other authors (for example, Bivand, 2004) describe how alternative factors, including family or cultural expectations, young people's belief systems, peer pressure and the attractiveness of certain lifestyles outside the mainstream (including not liking the prospect of work or attending a course), can explain young people's NEET status. The message here is that, although very often the case, young people do not always become NEET as a result of disadvantage. In some cases there may be an element of active 'choice'. This assertion is discussed in Section 3.2.4. For now we turn to a discussion of various forms of disadvantage, which are often reported as underpinning certain young people's NEET status.

3.2.1 Education / learning disadvantage

One theme emerging strongly through the literature is that there is a link between poor performance in national qualifications and a young person's propensity to become NEET (Brookes, 1998; EdComs, 2007; Steer, 2000). A recent DCSF statistical release (DCSF, 2008) notes, for example that, of those young people who failed to gain any GCSE passes, 39 per cent were recorded as being NEET subsequently. This compares to only two per cent of those who attained five or more GCSEs at grades A* to C. Furthermore, Fergusson (2004), in a survey of over 800 16 to 18 year olds, discovered that young people with the lowest levels of educational achievement were far less likely than those with the highest levels of achievement to move into one sustained post-16 destination. A tendency to have multiple post-16 destinations - frequent movement from one provider to another, and periods of being NEET - was more common amongst those with low levels of educational achievement than amongst those who achieved more highly. Whilst Fergusson's argument stands at the general level, it is clear that there are also exceptions within this picture. According to Payne (2001), young people from certain ethnic minority backgrounds had higher post-16 staying on rates than white young people, even though their performance at GCSE was lower (see Section 3.2.2).

Having multiple post-16 destinations was concerning, according to Fergusson, because the most commonly occurring trajectory amongst young people who moved frequently was to begin with a period in full-time education, then to move to an employment position, and then to become unemployed. Similarly, Cartmel (2000) notes that young people aged 16-17 who failed to make the transition to education, training or employment immediately on leaving school were more likely than young people who made a positive transition to remain unemployed in the future.

Although there would appear to be a link between low academic achievement and the propensity of a young person to become NEET, it should also be recognised that the majority (61 per cent) of young people who failed to achieve any GCSE passes at the age of 16 did **not** subsequently become NEET (DCSF, 2008). Additionally, our analysis of datasets demonstrates that non achievement of Level 1 qualifications was common only amongst those described as the 'Sustained NEET' group (approximately one third of all NEET young people). Hence, it should not be assumed that all NEET young people have failed to achieve at school, or indeed that low educational achievement alone, explains sufficiently the reasons for young people becoming NEET. Research by Cassen and Kingdon (2007) into low educational achievement found that, whilst there would appear to be a link between failure to participate and various forms of disadvantage, '*many students from the same backgrounds succeed*'. This report suggests that a deeper understanding of the reasons for low achievement or failure to participate is needed, commenting: '*As with so many other social issues, low achievement … is complex and multifaceted*'.

Achievement is, of course, only one element of a young person's educational experience. The literature revealed a number of other factors related to education and learning, which had an impact upon the likelihood of young people becoming NEET. These included the following.

- **Poor relationships with school / teachers** - a number of research studies (Sims, *et al.,* 2001; Golden, *et al.,* 2002 and Barnado's, 2007) note that young people who felt they had been 'failed' by their teachers or schools sometimes struggled to make a transition into learning post-16 because of negative associations. Young people cited not being treated with respect, not being treated as an individual or being treated like a child by teachers, as factors explaining their disaffection with school. Many such young people described an initial relief on leaving school, followed by an anxious and uncertain 'limbo' period (Barnado's, 2007).

- **Negative views of school / the curriculum** - EdComs (2007), in a review of other research literature, Coles, *et al.* (2002), and Steer (2000), note that some young people reported having experienced a difficult transition from primary to secondary school, or said that they found the curriculum too 'academic' or irrelevant to their interests or needs. Archer, *et al.* (2005) and Steer (2000) note that some young people cited a feeling of 'vulnerability' - being looked down on in school because of coming from a poor neighbourhood - as a factor that led to disengagement from learning. The young people sensed a 'lack of fit' between their 'working-class' identities and a predominance of what they saw as middle-class language, school ethos and staff. Furlong (2005) notes the importance of young people developing a positive orientation towards school from a young age in order to appreciate the value of learning to their futures. Schools have an important part to play in fostering such a positive relationship if a culture of 'self-fulfilling prophecy' and low expectations amongst certain young people is to be avoided.

- **Poor school attendance / incidences of bullying** - according to a DCSF report, persistent absentees are seven times more likely to be recorded as NEET at the age of 16 than other young people (DCSF, 2008). Stone, *et al.* (2000) also comment that educational disadvantage in the form of having been bullied, having been a truant or being disaffected with school, is a key determinant in young people becoming NEET.

Whilst the likelihood of becoming NEET would appear to grow where young people have experienced various forms of educational disadvantage or disruption, it should be borne in mind, as with the issue of educational achievement, that not all NEET young people report having had negative experiences of school. Our analysis of datasets has shown that it is, again, the 'Sustained NEET' group that is more likely to report such disengagement from school. So, whilst the literature gives us an interesting insight into the issues affecting very disadvantaged young people who tend to remain NEET in the longer term, it tells us less about the factors influencing young people who move in and out of the NEET group, or who are NEET for a short period only. This is partly because much of the research was commissioned to explore the characteristics and needs of young people in very difficult circumstances, or to evaluate strategies to re-engage the most disadvantaged, such as the former government programme the Learning Gateway (Sims, *et al.,* 2001) for example, or the Neighbourhood Support Fund, a government-funded programme managed within the voluntary sector to support young people not participating in education, employment or training (Golden, *et al.,* 2002). For this reason, it is important that we do not generalise on the basis of 'common characteristics of disadvantage' and that we exercise caution when relying on the literature to help us understand **all young people** who are NEET.

3.2.2   Personal issues

The literature identifies a range of personal issues facing young people with NEET status. There would appear to be a cyclical effect for some young people, so that a series of personal problems culminates in a failure, or inability, to participate in education or training post-16, and subsequently, that same failure to participate gives rise to a host of additional personal problems. The types of issues facing young people are many and varied, but can be categorised broadly under the following headings.

- **Personal characteristics** (for example, sex or ethnicity). Payne (2001), in her analysis of the Youth Cohort Study, found that girls were consistently more likely to stay on in full-time education post-16 than boys. This is reflected in the fact that boys are twice as likely as girls to be recorded as NEET (EdComs, 2007). Additionally, students from certain ethnic backgrounds tended to have higher staying on rates than others. Payne found that students of Black, and Pakistani and Bangladeshi origin had higher staying-on rates (84 per cent and 81 per cent respectively) than white young people (69 per cent), even though their performance at GCSE was lower, on average than white young people. This illustrates further the point made in Section 3.2.1 above, that academic achievement is not necessarily the sole factor determining a young person's propensity to become NEET, or to engage in education, employment or training post-16. The issue, in terms of minimising the numbers of young people who become NEET, would seem to be about finding ways to support key groups of young people from a young age in order to maximise the likelihood of their future participation.

- **Personal circumstances**. Many authors (for example, Stone, *et al.,* 2000; Sims, *et al.,* 2001; Rennison, *et al.,* 2005; Sachdev, *et al.,* 2006; and Spielhofer, *et al.,* 2007), identify a range of circumstantial factors which are, in effect, hurdles that need to be overcome by some NEET young people in order for them to contemplate moving into education, employment or training. Such factors include: being disabled; having mental health needs; being pregnant; having caring responsibilities; being homeless; or being drug or alcohol dependent. Due to the complex histories and needs of many of these young people, these are often factors over which they have little control. Hence it is important that a range of measures is put in place to enable them to move to a position where participation is a viable option. Our analysis of statistical datasets is not able to elucidate on the extent to which young people who are NEET face these and similar issues due to such details not being available, or the small numbers of young people with these characteristics, in the data so quantification is difficult. However, it is important to be

aware that the literature emphasises that for some young people, becoming NEET appears to result from being in acute personal circumstances.

- **Attitudes and behaviours**. References to attitudinal or behavioural factors are widely cited through the literature. Sims, *et al.* (2001) and Golden, *et al.* (2002), for example, report that young people involved in the former government programme, The Learning Gateway, and those involved in the Neighbourhood Support Fund, often had a range of personal issues. Examples included having: low confidence or self esteem; anger management issues; poor motivation or timekeeping; difficulty dealing with those in positions of authority; or having been an offender. In some cases, young people simply lacked the confidence or personal skills to make the transition to post-16 learning. In other incidences, there may have been an element of active 'choice' – a wish not to comply or conform. Archer, *et al.* (2005), for example, found that boys sometimes reported peer pressure to 'act hard', and to display an overt dislike of school or learning in order to achieve kudos. This issue is discussed further in Section 3.2.4 below.

The points made above reflect different 'types' of personal disadvantage, which can help to explain the reasons for some young people becoming NEET and the characteristics of others who are NEET. Stone, *et al.* (2000) report that there is often a situation of 'multiple disadvantage'. In other words, young people may suffer from a combination of factors including low educational achievement, complicated family backgrounds, being in difficult personal circumstances and, perhaps as a result, displaying challenging attitudes or behaviours. Stone describes this as a *'downward spiral effect'* and Archer, *et al.* (2005) conclude:

> *Disengagement, non attendance and underachievement were underpinned by a complex interplay of multiple factors, which spanned social, cultural, educational and other fields.*

It would be inaccurate to suggest that all young people who are NEET face similar disadvantage, however. The issues related to attitude and behaviour, in particular, are most frequently cited in studies that focus on young people in very difficult circumstances or on the most socially excluded. They should not be taken to be representative of the attitudes and behaviours of all young people who are NEET.

3.2.3 Structural factors

Most of the literature that discusses the characteristics of NEET young people in terms of 'disadvantage' concerns itself with what we might term 'structural factors' - elements of life that are external to the young person, and may be related to the socio-economic or political climate for example, or to the supply of opportunity. This is a complex and diverse area. Therefore, we have 'grouped' the literature under the following headings:

- labour market factors

- financial / poverty issues

- quality of pre-16 information, advice and guidance (IAG) and of post-16 provision.

These issues are dealt with in turn below.

3.2.3.1 Labour market factors

It is well recognised that NEET figures tend to be highest in areas of the country where the decline of traditional manufacturing industry has had a marked impact upon local employment prospects (Bivand, 2004; DfES, 2007a). For example, the North East of England has the highest proportion of young people recorded as NEET, followed by Yorkshire and the Humber and the North West of England. The issue, at least in part, is related to a historic decline of manufacturing industry in former British industrial centres and a reduction in the number of related manual occupations. In the past, such occupations and industries provided a clear post-16 destination for many school leavers. A DCSF report of 2008 argues, in response to this issue:

> *This changing economic situation means that it is more important than ever for young people to **stay in learning and achieve** in order to be able to achieve in the labour market.*

One recognised problem with this assessment is that, in some of the most deprived areas of the country, former manufacturing occupations have not necessarily been **replaced** by more skilled occupations, or indeed by levels of employment opportunity that are comparable with those available in the past. Brookes (1998) and Furlong (2006) note that in some areas of Britain there simply are not enough suitable employment opportunities to support high levels of post-16 participation. It is no coincidence, Brookes argues, that post-16 staying-on rates tend to be higher in areas with high levels of service industry, where there is a greater need for qualifications. Furlong comments that NEET status should not be regarded simply as a consequence of personal deficits, but rather as an indication that the economy is failing to provide the opportunities for the long-term security of young people in some areas. MacDonald and Marsh, (2005) also note that the casualisation of employment – a move towards short-term contracts, temporary and seasonal work – mean that it can be difficult for young people to 'sustain' a job, even if they wish to.

Reducing the numbers of NEET young people in former manufacturing areas raises a particular set of challenges therefore, as it may be as much to do with tackling demand issues as it is about encouraging young people to continue in learning. A gradual decline of employment opportunity in such areas over the past 50 to 60 years has also created an environment in which there is a higher than average proportion of third generation unemployment, and the recognised social issues that are often associated with this, such as a high proportion of parents with low educational qualifications and a high proportion of single-parent households (Cassen and Kingdon, 2007). Such issues only serve to compound the challenge of increasing post-16 participation in education or training in these areas.

3.2.3.2   Financial / poverty issues

A study of young people engaged in the former government programme, the Learning Gateway (Sims, *et al.,* 2001), found that many of the young people engaged in this programme (normally those with very low levels of achievement and poorly developed social and inter-personal skills) were struggling to cope financially. Many referred to not having enough money to live on in terms of affording 'the basics' (such as housing rents, utility bills and food), and additionally, a common theme was that of homelessness. Such young people often found it very difficult to progress into a recognised post-16 learning route because of an overwhelming sense of having a number of 'issues' to sort out first.

Whilst the issues facing the above young people were not necessarily representative of all those who are NEET, some young people felt pressure to begin contributing to family finances or to leave home and become financially self-sufficient at the age of 16. It is interesting that Simm*, et al.* (2007), in a study of reasons for early leaving from further education and work-based learning programmes, noted that early leavers were more likely

than completers to say that they were finding it **difficult to cope financially** while studying, and that this was one of the reasons for their early leaving. For such young people, who often came from relatively poor backgrounds, finding an opportunity to earn money, by whatever means, often became a priority over continuing in education or training. Some such young people found opportunities in JWT, and the characteristics and motivations of these young people are discussed further in Section 3.3 below.

It would seem that, if young people are to be encouraged to continue participating in learning post-16, greater attention may need to be paid to the issue of poverty or lack of financial support. Clearly this is not an issue for all NEET young people, but where young people find themselves with little in the way of family financial support from the age of 16 or 17, they may need **significant incentives** and higher levels of **practical and emotional support** from key professionals in order to progress. Recent evaluations of the Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA), which provides such a financial incentive, show that financial benefits can have a positive impact upon staying on rates, particularly where young people are in the most disadvantaged of situations. Legard, *et al.* (2001) show that receipt of EMA has had the greatest impact upon motivation and commitment to study where EMA forms a substantial part of personal or family income. Where potential participants in EMA calculated that the amount they would be likely to receive was low, the **financial** motivation to participate was lessened.

More recently, Middleton*, et al.* (2005) discovered an increased rate of participation in post-compulsory education in EMA pilot areas compared to non-EMA receiving control areas. They conclude that some young people have, indeed, been drawn into education, who would otherwise have entered work or become NEET. Allen, *et al.* (2003), evaluating the extension of EMA to vulnerable young people, note that the financial incentive has made a substantial difference to the following groups.

- Homeless young people - especially those living in hostels, whose weekly income was almost doubled.

- Teenage parents - particularly those living independently rather than those living with partners. For those living independently, the EMA played a pivotal role in funding the cost of living. For those with some support from a partner or family, it enabled them to afford more than just necessities, and hence improved their quality of life.

Essentially, the EMA acted as a 'safety net' for young people in very disadvantaged economic circumstances, and was sufficient to act as a motivator to continue in full-time education in a number of cases.

3.2.3.3   IAG and quality of provision

In addition to the structural issues already mentioned, a good deal of the literature discusses the quality of both the IAG received by young people pre-16, and the education and training provision available to them post-16, in terms of understanding their subsequent NEET status.

- **Quality of provision**. Bivand (2004), citing a Connexions report of 2003, notes that some (mainly work-based learning) providers have less success in retaining learners than others, and that NEET status is often an outcome of their provision. Bivand questions whether this is necessarily an issue about quality, or whether it is a reflection of intake. He stresses that some providers are prepared to take on young people with multiple disadvantages, in very deprived areas, which other providers may not be so willing to do. There is a certain inevitability therefore to their lower than average 'success rates' in terms of traditional progression measures.

- **Poor information and guidance**. A number of points are raised through the literature regarding the accessibility, availability, appropriateness and timeliness of the IAG received by young people and how this impacts upon their post-16 progression:

  ➢ **Insufficient information.** Maguire and Rennison. (2005) comment that NEET young people were less likely than young people who had entered post-16 learning to report having received formal advice or support, or to have attended a careers interview whilst at school. Similarly, only just under one quarter (24 per cent) of early leavers from NVQ programmes recalled having received any pre-entry IAG (Thornhill, 2001).

  ➢ **Inappropriate guidance**. Thornhill (2001), reports that early leavers from NVQ programmes had often received only very generalised careers education and guidance (CEG) before embarking upon their chosen occupations. This often meant that they had little, or no, understanding of what their training position might entail. Similarly, Simm, *et al.* (2007) reported that early leavers from FE and work-based learning cited one of the main reasons for leaving as being that the course was not what they had expected. MacDonald and Marsh (2005) believe that a generic approach to careers guidance, and a failure to listen to and consider the needs of individuals can explain why some young people fail to make sustained transitions.

  ➢ **Lack of awareness of post-16 pathways**. EdComs (2007), in a review of recent literature, note that moderate achievers who had planned to go on to FE, sometimes ended up in JWT or became NEET because they were unaware of alternative options when they failed to achieve the grades they had hoped for. For example, of those that ended up in JWT, 40 per cent were found to have achieved between one and four GCSE grades A* to C, whilst 13 per cent of those who became NEET had achieved five or more GCSEs at grade A* to C. This is a key group of young people who, with appropriate and timely IAG, may have been helped to move into a post-16 education or training destination.

Methods for addressing such an IAG deficit are outlined in a recent report by Blenkinsop, *et al.* (2006). The research found that schools have the capacity to make a real difference in terms of the ways in which young people make decisions. Schools with good curriculum management, good student support and strong leadership seemed to produce the young people who made the most rational decisions and who remained happy with their choices six months later. Where students were well supported (as above), they were more likely to be influenced by CEG providers and teachers than by parents and friends.

Although the literature highlights a number of issues that 'disadvantage' certain young people, and can lead to increased likelihood of become NEET, some studies also identify that non-participation in education, employment or training can result from choice or desire for an alternative lifestyle. This issue is discussed below.

3.2.4   Cultural / choice factors

As outlined previously, Bivand (2004) describes how family or cultural expectations, young people's belief systems, peer pressure and the attractiveness of certain lifestyles outside the mainstream can help to explain why some young people become NEET. Authors such as Bivand, and Archer, *et al.* (2005) note that young people's belief systems can have a profound impact upon the choices they make post-16. Where young people had difficulty connecting with school and teachers and had a poor school attendance or achievement record, they sometimes slipped into an 'anti learning culture' as a means of gaining respect amongst peers and restoring confidence and self-esteem (EdComs, 2007). Such young people sometimes acted aggressively with teachers, or chose to absent themselves from

school. Young men, particularly, were said to feel the peer pressure of a need to 'act hard', even if this meant entering into illegal activity. As a result, such young people become **very difficult to engage** in education or training post-16, partly because they lack skills and qualifications, but also because they have a suspicion of education, which needs to be overcome, along with a lack of desire to participate in mainstream society.

It was reported that anti-learning cultures were stronger amongst lower socio-economic groups and that there was greater pressure in some deprived areas to conform to anti-learning cultures where it was regarded as 'not cool to be clever.' Furlong (2005) notes that schools in such areas often develop a 'culture of truancy', to which young people feel compelled to subscribe in order to be accepted by their peers. It is suggested by Payne (2001) that this may indicate a cultural effect. Young people with parents in semi or unskilled work, or the children of unemployed parents, were often less inclined to progress into education or training than young people with parents in skilled or professional occupations, even where they had comparable GCSE grades. Payne's findings reflect the conclusions of our segmentation analysis reported in Chapter 2 above. This suggests that parental support (or the lack of it) can have a marked impact on a young person's decision about what to do post-16. Furlong (2005) illustrates that young people who were positively encouraged by their families tended not to contemplate leaving education early, or stated that their parents would not have allowed them to do so. In contrast, those who lacked strong parental backing were less likely to stay in learning post-16, unless they happened to excel academically and received strong support from their schools.

Other young people were said to be lured away from education or training options by other alternatives (either unskilled jobs or the grey economy) which provided the appeal of instant financial reward (Archer, *et al.*, 2005). In some cases, as mentioned in Section 3.2.3 above, this reflected a need to be financially independent or to contribute to family finances as soon as possible after leaving school, which EdComs (2007) refer to as a *'legitimate route to adulthood'*. However, in others it reflected a desire on the part of young people for an immediate 'fun' lifestyle including *'fashionable clothes, trainers and accessories …the lure of popular bling bling and Nike identities'* (Archer, *et al.,* 2005). It is no great surprise to learn that teenagers sometimes have a short-term approach to planning. The issue would appear to be in ensuring that **all** young people gain sufficient advice, support and guidance from an early age, in order that they understand the longer-term implications of the decisions they make on leaving school.

In conclusion, Stone, *et al.* (2000), note that understanding young people who are NEET is not as simple as considering disadvantage versus choice factors. The authors state that many of the young people they interviewed had experienced a diverse range of challenges to participation, which were often compounded by major events or factors (such as a family death, or becoming cut off from their families), culminating in a downward spiral effect. Unpicking the 'reason' for their non-participation is thus complex, and it is likely that a range of measures will be needed to support and encourage young people to continue in learning post-16.

3.3   Characteristics and motivations of young people who are in JWT

Not all young people who do not participate in education or training are necessarily NEET. Indeed, a large number of young people aged 16 and 17 are occupied in paid employment. However, if that employment does not offer training opportunities that lead to a nationally recognised qualification at Level 2 (even if company-specific training is offered), then the young person is classified as being in JWT and hence not in education or training (NET). Young people in JWT share some similarities and some differences with those who are NEET. We explore what is currently known about their characteristics below, but note that far less has been written about this group than about young people who are NEET. As Quinn, *et al.* (2008) state:

Although there is an emerging body of research considering young people in the NEET category … little has yet been written about the lives and work patterns of young people who are in jobs without training, particularly from the perspectives of the young people themselves.

Until recently there were two main research studies into young people in JWT - IFF (1999) and Anderson, *et al.* (2006). However, two reports published in 2008 (Quinn, *et al.,* 2008 and Maguire, *et al.,* 2008) have moved the debate surrounding young people in JWT forward.

A theme emerging through all the research studies into young people in JWT is that, similarly to young people who are NEET, such young people should not be judged as a homogeneous 'group'. There are, for example, variations in previous achievement levels, attitudes towards learning, reasons for wanting to earn money, and aspirations for the future. Quinn, *et al.* (2008) note that JWT is not a fixed category, and that many of the young people in their study (114 in initial interviews, and 68 in follow-up interviews) moved in and out of jobs without training. Movements within the 'group' ranged from young people who frequently became NEET to young people who had built up a strong work profile and were about to embark upon Level 3 training. For these reasons, the authors are keen not to 'homogenise' young people in JWT but rather to illustrate a 'nuanced' picture. Anderson, *et al.* (2006) comment:

Young people in jobs without training are very diverse in background and character … a 'one size fit all' approach will not be effective.

3.3.1 Qualifications

Anderson, *et al.* (2006) estimate that approximately half of all young people in JWT have achieved Level 2 qualifications, whilst three quarters have qualifications at Level 1 or above. This differs slightly from our segmentation analysis (see Chapter 2 above), which indicates that the majority of young people in JWT have achieved at Level 1. Other research studies also give a mixed picture, which is reflective of the varying nature of young people in JWT and, crucially, of the **different ways in which samples are drawn** for research studies. For example, the Quinn study (Quinn, *et al.,* 2008) found that most of the young people they interviewed had not had a successful experience at school and had left school with qualifications far below the government target of five GCSEs at grades A*-C. In contrast, Maguire, *et al.* (2008) state: *'The majority of young people in* [our] *sample had completed Year 11 and had taken and passed GCSEs.'* The authors of the Quinn study explain this apparent discrepancy. Seemingly, the Maguire study contained a number of young people who were taking a gap year, or saving money to travel. The Quinn study, in contrast, was deliberately set up to consider the most socially and economically disadvantaged young people in JWT by 'factoring out' those on a gap year. Quinn, *et al.* (2008) conclude:

This has left us with a sample who are generally less qualified than those in the Maguire study and often from families with fewer resources and less financial security.

In spite of this difference in research focus, it is clear that, as for young people who are NEET, there is a considerable range of educational achievement among young people in JWT. However, it is also clear that poor educational achievement is a common factor. Even in the Maguire study, the young people interviewed were not particularly confident about their abilities. Indeed, the authors state:

Despite the higher than expected levels of academic attainment that existed within the sample, young people themselves felt that they were not high achievers. This manifested itself in a lack of confidence about their academic abilities. Some young

> *people described themselves as being 'practical' rather than 'academic' to overcome their perceptions about themselves.*

3.3.2 Views of training

According to Anderson, *et al.* (2006), most young people in JWT had a positive view of training, and almost two thirds reported a desire to return to education or training at some point in the future. However, the authors also note that a '*significant minority'* had no such interest. The Maguire study also paints a positive picture of young people in JWT's attitudes towards training, noting that the young people in their study could be divided into three groups:

- those taking a year out ('*marking time'* until they were able to access learning provision in the new academic year)

- those making a career (working for what they perceived to be '*good'* companies which offered training, interesting work and financial independence)

- those doing odd jobs (fulfilling a more stereotypical image of young people in JWT with turbulent trajectories and, usually, low skilled, low paid work).

It is interesting that, in the Maguire study (Maguire, *et al.,* 2008), the majority of young people interviewed fell into the first two categories. This supports Anderson's findings that the majority of young people in JWT had a positive view of training. Maguire, *et al.* found that young people in the 'taking a year out' and 'making a career' sub-groups were much more likely to have received in-house training than young people doing odd jobs. They also note that:

> *there was no evidence to suggest that young people or their employers felt that their training was 'second rate' to that which was offered within government-supported training provision or within full-time vocational learning.*

However, the report by Quinn, *et al.* (2008) shows a smaller proportion of young people demonstrating an interest in learning opportunities. Only 28 per cent stated that they would consider undertaking some form of training **if offered by their current employer** with a very small number (only four per cent) indicating that they would consider a further education (FE) course. The reasons for this lack of interest were that FE courses were regarded as *'unresponsive, inflexible and out of touch with reality'.* The young people interviewed were also said to '*value good work-related training, even if unaccredited, more than a certificate'.*

The very different impressions gained through the Anderson, Maguire and Quinn studies highlight the impact that different sampling criteria can have upon our understanding of young people in JWT. They also serve to illustrate the importance of recognising that, as for young people who are NEET, young people in JWT fall into many different sub categories and should not be considered as a 'group' with shared characteristics.

The available evidence suggests that some of the issues facing young people who are NEET may also apply to some young people in JWT, although often in slightly different ways. Examples include:

- Education / learning disadvantage;

- Personal issues; and

- Structural factors.

These issues are discussed in greater detail below.

3.3.3 Education / learning disadvantage

Whilst most young people in the Anderson and IFF samples reported having had relatively 'normal' school experiences, few could be described as 'motivated learners' and a substantial minority (around one quarter) had received fixed or permanent exclusions, or reported having been in trouble with the police. In the Quinn sample, most of those interviewed also gave poor accounts of their experience of, and achievements at, secondary school (Quinn, *et* al., 2008). This draws a possible link, in terms of similarity, between the 'Sustained NEET' and 'At Risk in JWT' groups identified in our segmentation analysis.

3.3.4 Personal issues

In terms of personal characteristics, boys were said to be more likely to be in JWT at the age of 16 than girls, a trend that is also true for young people who are NEET. Interestingly, our segmentation analysis shows that, whilst this is true of young people who are 'Sustained in JWT' or 'At Risk in JWT', girls are considerably more likely to be 'Transitional in JWT' than boys, a level of detail that we do not glean from the literature.

There is less evidence in the JWT literature of some of the attitudinal or behavioural characteristics identified among young people who are NEET, such as low confidence or self-esteem, anger management issues or having difficulty dealing with those in positions of authority, which is probably reflected in the fact that these young people are capable of sustaining employment positions. However, young people in the Quinn study reportedly lacked the confidence or skills to broaden their horizons or travel further afield to find education or training opportunities (Quinn, *et al.*, 2008). Additionally, young people in the Anderson study reported concern about approaching their employers to request training, for fear of jeopardising a 'good' relationship (Anderson, *et al.,* 2006).

3.3.5 Structural factors

The literature on young people in JWT does not offer the same level of detail about young people's socio-economic backgrounds or family circumstances as the literature on NEET young people, which means that it is difficult to comment on differences and similarities in terms of barriers to participation. References to structural issues affecting young people in JWT, broadly speaking, cover the following two points – financial issues and IAG.

3.3.5.1　　　　Financial issues

Most young people in the Anderson study (Anderson, *et al.*, 2006) tended to have high levels of awareness of apprenticeships, but were deterred from such work-based learning due to a perceived lack of supply and low wages. The same view was held in relation to taking up college courses. The young people were also concerned about incurring travel costs, preferring to work as locally to home as possible. These findings were confirmed in the Quinn study (Quinn, *et al.,* 2008). Whilst a large number of young people in the Anderson study said they would consider entering training in the future (as long as they could supplement this with part-time work), others were totally unwilling to sacrifice their current wages in order to do so. Young people in the IFF and Quinn studies (IFF, 1999; Quinn, *et al.*, 2008) were even less willing to consider training options. They viewed that such training would have to lead to markedly better career opportunities than their current jobs in order to be worth the financial sacrifice. Generally, young people in JWT favoured their existing jobs because they were **close to home** and offered **immediate financial reward**. As Quinn, *et al.* (2008) comment:

> *Many respondents emphasised financial imperatives and whilst they recognised the value of training that would enhance their earning power in the long run, they preferred to be earning whilst training. Very few expressed interest in taking up training in FE, stressing the need to continue to earn money.*

Interestingly, Maguire, *et al.* (2008) present a rather different analysis of the financial imperative. They state:

> *Our findings do not support those of other studies, which have asserted that young people in JWT are working solely for financial returns …. Money was rarely the prime motivator for moving into employment, although earning money was recognised to have brought with it increased independence, which many were now reluctant to give up …. Money enabled many young people … to further their independence in terms of supporting the costs of driving lessons and buying a car.*

Unlike the findings of other studies, the Maguire study found no evidence that young people were under pressure from their parents to earn money and to contribute to household income. This would seem to support Quinn, *et al.* (2008)'s assertion that the Maguire study focuses on a more 'privileged' group of young people in JWT than other similar studies. This is not to suggest that any of the studies on young people in JWT are more or less valuable than others. Rather it highlights the heterogeneity of these young people and their diverse range of backgrounds, experiences and motivations.

3.3.5.2 IAG

Anderson, *et al.* (2006) report that few of the young people in their study cited a lack of, or poor quality, IAG as a barrier to participation in education or training. However, in our segmentation analysis, it was only the 'Sustained in JWT' group (around 50 per cent of all JWT young people) who tended to say that they had received enough support and knew how to find out about education and training options. Maguire, *et al.* (2008) comment that *'placement into employment by Connexions, Job Centres or employment agencies was not commonplace.'* Rather, young people tended to secure work through family contacts, 'door knocking' or dropping off their CVs with potential employers. Young people in the Quinn study (Quinn, *et al.,* 2008) had mixed views about any IAG they had received. Whilst some valued the support received from Connexions Personal Advisers (PAs), others believed that Connexions was: *'Simply pushing a government agenda and failed to listen to the young people themselves.'*

This suggests that there may be a need for better tailored IAG for young people who have an interest in employment. Such IAG should present a range of options, including viable work-based learning programmes, which meet young people's interests rather than attempting to 'steer' them onto a particular pathway.

From the above summary we can deduce the following points about young people in JWT.

- Their primary motivation is **financial reward**. Whilst many of the young people (more in the Anderson and Maguire studies than the IFF and Quinn studies) had a desire to improve their prospects in the future and possibly consider training, very few were willing to consider sacrificing their current earnings in order to do so. However, as IFF note, with the right support package, such young people might be encouraged back into learning: *'Half the sample agreed that they would like a different job, but that they needed more qualifications to get it. In this environment, the prospects for take-up of any training appear good.'* (IFF, 1999).

- They generally face **fewer barriers to participation** than young people who are NEET (Anderson, *et al.*, 2006; Spielhofer, *et al.*, 2007). For example, from the little research that has been carried out, it would appear that young people in JWT are less likely than those who are NEET to have acute personal issues, to come from unstable family backgrounds or to have very low levels of educational achievement. However, the study by Quinn, *et al.* (2008), due to its consciously skewed sample, focuses on young people in JWT who are in disadvantaged circumstances. It would appear that these young people do share a number of characteristics with those who fall into the 'Sustained NEET' group.

- They have **slightly different motivations**, on average, than those who are NEET. For example, the need or desire for immediate financial gratification was generally stronger amongst young people in JWT than amongst those who were NEET. (Anderson, *et al.*, 2006; EdComs, 2007; Archer, *et al.*, 2005; IFF, 1999; Quinn, *et al.*, 2008). There would also appear to be something in the personal makeup of young people from disadvantaged backgrounds who move into JWT which distinguishes them from young people from similar backgrounds who become NEET. For some reason, such young people are motivated to take up employment, albeit without recognised training, rather than becoming economically inactive. This suggests that structural inequality is only one element of the explanation for JWT or NEET status. The power of personal agency is also clearly influential.

The implications of these apparent similarities and differences between young people who are NEET or in JWT is discussed in more detail in the following section.

3.4 Similarities and differences between NEET and JWT young people

The above discussion and the segmentation analysis indicate that, whilst there are key differences between young people in the 'NEET group' and young people in the 'JWT group', there are sometimes greater differences between young people in the various NEET sub-groups and between young people in the different JWT sub-groups, respectively, than there are **between** the different NEET and JWT sub-groups. The literature tends to be fairly distinct in focusing on **either** young people who are NEET **or** young people who are in JWT. The problem with this is that these become viewed as two separate groups, for whom different strategies should be employed or interventions used. It may be more helpful to cut across the various NEET and JWT sub-groups in order to understand more about the characteristics of different young people and what motivates them (see Figure 2.10 in Chapter 2).

Some young people in JWT (those in the Quinn study, for example, who are described as being '*at the bottom of the pile*') share similar characteristics to those in the 'Sustained NEET' group. They generally have low levels of achievement and a lack of interest in formal education or training. However, Quinn, *et al.* (2008) also demonstrate a **clear distinction** between those they interviewed and young people with NEET status. They argue that young people in JWT have made a conscious choice to 'better themselves'. For many of the young people in their study, jobs that are popularly seen as 'dead end' actually provided a route out of a life of potential depression, drug addiction or poverty. They note that the young people interviewed were: *'largely positive about their experiences, pleased to be in work rather than sitting around at home not working and/or engaging in illegal and criminal activities.'*

The authors are keen to portray young people in JWT as 'survivors' rather than 'losers', given how easily their life experiences and limited opportunities and expectations could have put them on a path to social exclusion. Crucially, and hence marking a distinction between young people in JWT and young people who are NEET they note: *'The young people resisted victim status and differentiated themselves from those who they saw as beyond hope.'* As one Connexions Service Personal Advisor in their study reported: *'Many had a*

happier more independent view of life and all had aspirations. This is not always the case for NEET clients.' Concluding this point they comment:

> *The term 'jobs without training' is needlessly pejorative: these young people are being defined entirely in terms of what they 'lack' and thus the skills and knowledge they possess are overlooked … Whilst being in a job without training is seen negatively by policy makers, for young people themselves, such jobs can be a lifeline, providing an upward trajectory.*

So, whilst it seems that some young people in JWT share many common characteristics with young people who are NEET, it is also clear that there is something different in their personal levels of motivation, aspiration or outlook, which make a difference in terms of enabling them to become economically independent rather than NEET. These NEET and JWT sub-groups may show greater similarity, however, in terms of their propensity to move into a recognised post-16 learning route, as illustrated in Figure 2.10 in the previous chapter. These key overlaps between the NEET and JWT sub-groups, may be helpful in deciding upon the interventions that can most usefully be applied to encourage different 'groups' of young people to participate in learning post-16. This point is discussed in greater detail in Chapter 7.

3.5   Summary and conclusion

In summary, the literature concurs with the findings of the segmentation analysis presented in Chapter 2, that young people who are categorised as NEET or in JWT are not homogenous groups. The literature revealed that young people who are NEET experienced varying degrees of education or learning disadvantages and difficult personal circumstances such as having a disability, being a young carer, being homeless or displaying challenging behaviours. Further constraints were the external structural factors including living in areas of high unemployment, experiencing poverty, or having received poor or inadequate information, advice and guidance as they approached leaving school. Nevertheless, some authors argued that some young people made a conscious choice to participate and, for example, adopted an 'anti-learning culture' in order to gain credibility and status with their peers. While these issues emerged particularly in relation to young people who were NEET, those who were in JWT were generally said to be affected to a lesser extent by such issues. Rather, the primary motivation for some was said to be often related to the financial reward of being in employment and that they had some willingness to re-engage with learning, but not at the expense of earning.

4   The experiences of young people who are NEET

Key findings

- The analysis of 40 interviews with young people who were NEET found that the group was not homogenous and that it was possible to identify segments of young people with distinct experiences, motivations and probabilities of re-engaging.

- Many interviewees had negative experiences of school and faced issues such as bullying, exclusion, behavioural difficulties, learning difficulties and stress. However those who were categorised as 'sustained NEET' were most likely to have experienced more than one of these issues whilst at school compared to any other group.

- Young people in the 'sustained NEET' group were most likely to have no qualifications or to have achieved below Level 1, while most of those 'open to learning NEET' had attained Level 2 at the end of Year 11.

- Young people classified as 'sustained NEET' tended not to have had any thoughts about what to do post-16 when leaving school and were least likely to have spoken to anyone other than their parents about their choices. In comparison, young people in the other two groups had much more definite plans. However, those categorised 'undecided NEET' often did not stay on their chosen pathway for very long.

- Several young people thought that they had received incomplete or biased advice and guidance. Those who were classified as 'undecided NEET' or 'sustained NEET' were more likely to feel they lacked knowledge about the range of options open to them compared to those who were 'open to learning NEET'.

- Overall, young people who were 'open to learning NEET' were likely to have proactively explored the options available to them, whereas those categorised as 'sustained NEET' and 'undecided NEET' were more likely to feel they lacked knowledge about their options particularly in relation to receiving financial support.

- Young people classified as 'open to learning NEET' believed qualifications were important. Whilst they felt GCSEs were generally important, they also rated work-related qualifications very highly. Others did not rate qualifications so highly.

- The majority of young people wanted to work in order to earn money. However, one of the main barriers young people came across when looking for work was their lack of experience. They were unable to get a job until they had experience, but could not get a job to get that experience in the first place.

- In general, the majority of young people who were NEET were not averse to the idea of finding a job with training. However for those classified as 'sustained NEET' and 'undecided NEET' their main priority was to find employment and they would not actively seek out jobs with training.

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4 The experiences of young people who are NEET

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the findings from 40 interviews undertaken with young people who were NEET as well as the views of 39 professionals. It explores:

- the main characteristics of the interviewees and how this compares with the segmentation analysis presented in Chapter 2

- interviewees' experiences of school and learning, their experience of transition from compulsory education and the barriers and challenges they have faced to participation

- the young people's attitudes to learning, qualifications and employment

- why these young people were NEET and highlights what it is that motivates or prevents them from engaging in education or training.

4.2 What were the characteristics of young people who were NEET?

In total, 37 of the 40 young people interviewed were aged 16 or 17 with three young people recently having turned 18. Seventeen were female, 23 were male. In terms of pre-16 qualifications, most of the interviewees (32) had achieved less than 5 GCSEs A*-C. When this is looked at in more detail it can be seen that:

- seven young people achieved five GCSEs at grades A*-C or more

- eight young people achieved at least one GCSE at grades A*-C but less than five GCSEs A*-C

- 12 young people had achieved no GCSEs at grades A*-C but at least one GCSE at grades D-G

- two young people had achieved no GCSEs but had a Level 2 equivalent qualification

- 11 young people had no previous qualifications.

Thirty two young people were of White British origin whilst three were Asian Pakistani and two were Mixed White and Black Caribbean. The ethnicities of the other young people were Asian Indian, Seychellois and White Irish. Five young people said they had a learning disability.

4.2.1 Segmentation - did these young people fit the identified segments?

The segments that were identified in Chapter 2 were relevant to the interviewees. Overall, 16 young people had characteristics associated with the 'sustained NEET' group, 13 fitted the 'open to learning NEET' segment and 11 were regarded as 'undecided NEET'. The interviews with young people in each of these segments provided further insights into the motivations and journeys of the individuals than were possible through the statistical analysis alone. This section presents some examples of young people in each segment.

4 The experiences of young people who are NEET

Young people who were sustained in NEET

Among the young people who were 'sustained NEET', some were notably positive about engaging in education or training despite negative experiences of school and experiencing the complex multiple structural and personal barriers associated with this sub-group (as shown in Box 1).

> **Box 1: Young person who was 'sustained NEET' but open to engaging in learning**
>
> Lucy left compulsory education in Year 8 in order to move away from an unsuitable home environment due to her mother's dependence on alcohol. After spending two weeks at a new school near her father's home she asked to be home schooled as she was being bullied. At the age of 15 Lucy was sent to a secure unit because it was felt she continued to put herself at risk by running away from home and substance abuse. Since she was released from the secure unit Lucy has been primarily looking for employment. She has had two cleaning jobs, one lasted four months whilst the other lasted two weeks. However she had found it difficult to find employment because '*most of them ask for GCSEs'*. Because of her experience she was keen to undertake further training to achieve some qualifications. She would like to go on an E2E course and then take some GCSEs before going to college and studying either childcare or care for the elderly. However her priority was to gain employment as she lived on her own and therefore had financial responsibilities.

Other young people, who had encountered similar barriers, were less positive about education and, consequently, were **harder to re-engage** in learning (see case study, Box 2). This sub-group are more closely associated with the common understanding of the NEET group.

> **Box 2: Young person who was 'sustained NEET' and disinterested in further education, employment or training**
>
> Ben found school difficult and the work stressful. He stated he used to get angry with other students and teachers and was asked to leave school two months before he sat his GCSEs. He did not think he had achieved any GCSE qualifications. Since he left school, Ben has not undertaken any employment or training. He was not interested in any form of learning and had refused a place on an E2E course as his friends had told him it involved a great deal of writing. He also did not want to go to college as he assumed it would be the same as school. He did not *'feel ready'* to work and spent most of his time with his unemployed friends and family members. Although he stated qualifications were important he believed young people needed more encouragement at school. He thought that if his school experience had been more positive, he would have been more willing to continue with some form of education or training.

Young people who were 'open to learning NEET'

Interviewees in this sub-group had noticeably **higher levels of attainment**, compared with the other young people, and **more positive attitudes towards undertaking learning in the future**. This sub-group contained a number of young people who started a course or apprenticeship post-16 and subsequently dropped out and now had concrete plans to re-

engage with some form of education or training at the beginning of the next academic year (see case study, Box 3).

Box 3: Example of young person who was 'open to learning NEET'

Abbie finished school in 2007 with seven GCSEs at grades A*–C. In Year 11, Abbie had a number of different options available to her and found it difficult to decide what she wanted to do. She had thought about becoming a primary school teacher, but said that she was given conflicting advice from teachers about whether she would be able to do this due to her maths and science grades. She decided to stay on at school to undertake a BTEC National Diploma in childcare because one of her teachers recommended the course. After being on the course for five months, Abbie left as she realised it was not right for her. She realised this through the work experience component of the course and she also stated that she had found out childcare was not well paid. However, at this point it was too late to start another course and she, therefore, ended up being NEET. She wanted to go to college to undertake a one-year legal secretary course the following September. She decided on this course because she could see herself doing this in the future and thought the course would help her career.

Young people who were 'undecided NEET'

The young people who were classified as 'undecided NEET' tended to have negative experiences of school and generally low levels of attainment. They sometimes had quite clear career objectives, but often lacked clarity about how to achieve their goals or seemed to lack resilience to sustain their involvement in a course when faced by unexpected circumstances.

Within this group, some young people had been in a job, or number of jobs, but had not sustained their involvement. They tended to **stay in a job for a few days or weeks before moving on**. They felt they did not like what was on offer to them and were not willing to compromise in order to gain employment. They were not interested in training and tended not to plan for the future (see case study, Box 4). They also lacked financial independence as they mainly lived with their parents who supported them.

Box 4: Young person who was 'undecided NEET' and did not sustain employment

Stacey lived at home and stated that her family supported her financially. She left school in May 2007 with two GCSEs at grades A*-C and six at grades D-G. She had poor attendance at school and only paid attention to the lessons she enjoyed, but said that, initially, she did not want to leave school because she felt *'too scared about having to grow up, having to pay your own way.'* In the end, despite an interest in childcare and encouragement from her teachers to go to college, Stacey decided to leave school and get a job. She said this was because she was not entitled to receive an EMA. Since then, Stacey has had a number of jobs in the retail industry, on market stalls and at a high street shop; however she tended to get bored, wanted to be out with friends or got fired for poor punctuality. She wanted to work in retail because she had an interest in fashion and wanted to earn money to support her social life; however she explained *'I don't like what's they're offering'.* She could not see the relevance of education or training to the type of work she wanted to do.

Other young people who were 'undecided NEET' were more willing to sustain employment but were not clear about what to do or were **dissatisfied with what was offered** and were not positive in their attitude towards formal learning (see case study, Box 5).

Box 5: Young person who was 'undecided NEET' and dissatisfied with training opportunities

Jack left school in 2007 with six GCSEs at grades D-G. He described his school as *'bad'* and felt they let him down. After leaving school, he started an apprenticeship in motor vehicle maintenance, but dropped out after a few months because he thought it was badly organised and never got sent to college. He thought that there were not many job opportunities to work as a mechanic where he lived and that he did not enjoy being *'just a helper'*. He said he was now thinking about finding a job in retail, but was not as part of an apprenticeship because he felt he could earn more than £80 a week with a normal job. Jack did not value qualifications and described college as being for *'dossers'*. He believed experience was more important than qualifications and explained that once his *'friends come out of college I'll be ahead of them'* because *'once you have a few years' experience under your belt I don't think they'll* [employers] *be bothered about what GCSEs you've got'* .

4.3 What is the experience of young people who are NEET of education and employment?

4.3.1 What was their experience of school and learning pre-16?

Key messages

Most of the interviewees who were NEET had negative feelings about school and learning pre-16 and this was associated with their resistance to engage in learning post-16. In addition, this had often resulted in low attainment which was one of the significant limiting factors on their opportunities and choices post-16. The experience of school articulated by these young people who subsequently become NEET endorses the need, reflected in some recent policy developments, for pre-16 education to:

- provide more opportunities for applied teaching and learning
- engender a different, mutually respectful relationship between teachers and learners
- ensure that better classroom management and anti-bullying strategies minimise the impact of disruptive pupils on their peers' learning opportunities.

Reflecting on their experience of school pre-16, **two thirds of the interviewees had largely negative feelings about school.** This was particularly true for those who were classified as 'sustained NEET'. Interviewees who had experienced difficulties at school noted issues with anger management, behaviour, stress, learning difficulties and bullying. Young people belonging to the 'sustained NEET' group often reported experiencing more than one of these issues. For some, issues at home had impacted on their experience of school along with upheaval before and during examinations.

The difficulties that young people who were NEET had experienced with school can be summarised as relating to the following.

- **Frustration with teaching and learning methods** - the need to develop more applied learning opportunities is evident as young people reported that they had been bored at school and particularly noted that the learning and teaching approaches had not been practical enough. This is illustrated by one young man, who contrasted the teaching and learning approaches that he had experienced in different subjects and said:

    The proper, important stuff is crap and boring, but resistant materials was great. The way it's taught is better, they just seem to make much more effort to make it interesting - it's not just big chunks of information to write down, it's split up more into sections with more detail and they show you how to do it.

- **Problems and disruption caused by other students** - the importance of addressing bullying and disruptive students pre-16, in order to minimise the likelihood of disengagement with learning post-16 is evident from the interviews with NEET young people. Almost a quarter of those with negative experiences of school reported **being bullied** whilst at school, and were often people who already had other issues to deal with, such as struggling with their school work, family issues at home or movement to a new institution. Others blamed their fellow students for causing disruption in classes, or explained how they had got into '*a bad crowd'*.

- **Relationships with teachers** - young people's experience of teachers, and the perceived lack of respect from teaching staff, impacted on their attitudes towards engaging in further learning. For example, one interviewee said that '*the teachers - they irritated me. They treated you like you were below them and little kids. I don't want to go back to that*'. Another felt it was possible for teachers to relate differently to students. As she explained:

    Some of the teachers were ok, they respected us so we respected them, we were with them not against them. More teachers should have been interested in us as people, instead of shouting at us as soon as we walked in the room. For me, it shouldn't be about teacher to student, it should be human to human. Why should they talk to us the way they do?

Another issue faced by young people who were NEET was **disruption to their education**. Reflecting the segmentation analysis, many young people classified as 'sustained NEET' were removed from their school through either permanent or temporary exclusion, self-exclusion or truancy. Young people classified as 'undecided NEET' were more likely to talk about truancy compared with other disruptions, again reflecting the segmentation analysis and indicating that their dissatisfaction with provision that was evident post-16 was apparent before they left school.

This differing experience of schooling is also reflected in the **attainment** of the respective sub-groups:

- young people who were categorised as 'sustained NEET' were most likely to have no qualifications or have achieved below Level 1

- those categorised as 'open to learning NEET' were most likely to have achieved Level 1 and a quarter had achieved Level 2

- the majority of those who are described as 'undecided NEET' achieved Level 1, with only one interviewee having achieved a Level 2 qualification at 16.

While young people who were NEET were generally negative about their school experience, there were **aspects about which they were positive**. For example, they observed that they had had fun with their friends, and had enjoyed, and were good at, some of their lessons. In addition to this, a quarter of all young people who were NEET concluded that overall, their experience of schooling had been a positive one. It is worth noting that the majority of these were in the 'open to learning NEET' sub-group, reflecting the findings from the segmentation analysis reported in Chapter 2. This may partly explain why many of those who were 'open to learning NEET' continued to further education (and often in their own sixth form) and to some extent why they planned to return to education and training in the near future.

Some young people were able to reflect on their pre-16 experience and see more positive elements than they had at the time, as in the case of one young man, who was a 'open to learning NEET' and said:

> *When you're there you don't enjoy it, but since I've left you know it was good … just seeing my mates every day … it is the easy life isn't it? You don't realise it when you're there. Your mum isn't getting on your back that you haven't got a job - five hours a day just of learning - simple isn't it? But when you're there you hate it. But it was good - I enjoyed school.*

Nevertheless, he was in the minority among the interviewees. Instead, most spoke of negative, demotivating experiences, which suggests a need for intervention at an earlier stage in young people's education to prevent them from becoming NEET after they leave school. Interviewees' attitudes to learning and qualifications, and the factors that appear to influence these attitudes are explored further in Section 4.5.

How did the young people perceive college?

Young people's perceptions of post-16 locations of study can be influential in informing their decision to participate in education or training after leaving compulsory education. While some interviewees based their perception of college on real experience pre-16 either through a taster course, or through attending a college for a pre-16 course, others had no direct experience to inform their judgement. Where interviewees anticipated that it would be different from school, they expected that there would be more freedom, less '*chasing*' for them to complete work and an approach to teaching that tended to '*liven things up*'.

Nevertheless, the extent to which experience was direct appeared to be less important than the relationship between young people's perceptions and their expectations. Most of the young people who were interviewed, and reported that they imagined that college would be like school, said that this had discouraged them from participating. This was the case for one young person whose comment below highlights the challenge for post-16 providers to be adaptable in terms of how 'like school', or 'not like school', they are if they are to gain the participation of different types of young people.

> *I think some of my friends have gone there* [to college] *because they do want to get an education but some have gone here because they think it's going to be like school and they just want to be with their friends…and I don't want to be a follower … I did [think college would be like school] but other people told me that college is not like school because they don't chase after you, you've got to do it off your own back basically … it really is* [a positive thing] *because when you go to college you don't really want it to be like school*

This illustrates one of the challenges in promoting attendance at college as an option worthy of consideration by a range of young people, as it appears that different young people may seek different experiences and those who become NEET appear to be more inclined to seek an opportunity that is different from school. As one young person who was sustained NEET expressed it: *'I have thought about it* [going to college] *but it would be like going back to school, people telling you what to do'.*

The experience of this transition among the young people who were NEET is discussed next.

4.3.2 What was their experience of the transition at 16?

> **Key messages**
>
> Young people's experience of the transition at 16 highlights the importance of access to:
>
> * appropriate, timely information advice and guidance that allows, prompts and encourages them to explore a range of options
> * provision that is relevant and engaging.

Interviewees had considered a range of post-16 options but it emerged that the majority of the young people who were NEET were more interested in **practical opportunities**. While this theme was in common across the identified sub-groups of young people, some differences between the sub-groups emerged which illustrate the need for **differentiated guidance.**

* **Sustained NEET** - this group **need to have their horizons broadened** and to explore a wide range of options. The majority commented that they had no thoughts before leaving school about what to do next. While some had considered college courses, others had just wanted to gain employment but did not have any specific job in mind.

* **Open to learning NEET** - these young people want to participate but **need to be supported in exploring their ideas in detail and examining the range of locations to study**. While they generally reported that they had an idea of what they would like to do post-16, and this was commonly either a vocational course or apprenticeship, the fact that they did not sustain this destination indicates that it did not meet their expectations. They were more likely than the other interviewees to say that staff from their school had encouraged them to stay on into sixth form and it may be that this was not always the most appropriate location.

* Undecided and NEET - these young people need to be supported in ensuring they have explored a wide range of options and in developing their understanding and resilience to address challenges. They generally had thought about doing a particular course, apprenticeship or career when leaving school. However barriers or challenges, such as not getting an EMA or not being able to afford the bus fare, tended to knock them off course or they became easily distracted. A minority had considered a number of different options but were unable to commit to one.

Across the sub-groups of young people who were NEET, young people who had considered and rejected attending a college post-16 provided a range of reasons for this decision which appeared to relate to different factors as follows.

- **Structural factors** - the course they wished to undertake was not available, or not available locally

- **Employment alternative** - they had chosen to pursue employment because, for example, they felt they would learn better in the workplace.

- **Decision-making** - they had been unable to decide between different courses.

- **Educational factors** - lack of appropriate qualifications for their chosen course.

- **Personal factors** - they had responsibilities at home, or were prevented by their family due to cultural considerations. Their lack of motivation or organisational skills had hindered them from submitting an application.

It is notable that the reasons mentioned by the interviewees were more often related to reasons which could be said to be outside of their control, and less often a proactive decision or choice to reject the option of college in favour of an alternative. While these factors may be outside of the control of the individual, they could be addressed by policy-makers and practitioners. For example, improvements in the availability of provision, including increased work-based opportunities, could help reduce the 'structural' and 'employment alternative' barriers while improved information advice and guidance, and strategies to address underachievement, as discussed earlier in this chapter could reduce the 'decision-making' and 'educational' barriers.

What information, advice and guidance did the interviewees receive?

Most young people reported that they had discussed their post-16 choices with an adult but their experience of this, and the value that they attached to any discussion, varied between the sub-groups.

- **Sustained NEET** - young people in this group were **least likely to have spoken with an adult about their choices post-16,** this was particularly the case among those who were open to learning. As noted previously, this group were **least likely to have ideas of what to do next** and could benefit particularly from some support. However, it seemed that, in some cases, they had not received support because of their absence from mainstream schooling and there may be value in proactively targeting such young people. In addition, as some of those who had discussed their options with an adult had not found it useful, and some acknowledged that they had not paid full attention to the discussion, there is scope for finding creative approaches to engaging these young people.

- **Open to learning NEET** - while around half of the young people in this group had spoken to a professional about their choices at 16, most of those who had done so said that it had **not been useful**, as will be discussed later in this section.

- **Undecided and NEET** - young people in this group were most likely to have spoken to an adult at 16 about their options although they reported mixed views about the advice that they had received.

Where young people did seek advice, they did not always choose to access an advice and guidance professional and chose another adult, often a teacher, instead. Their observations revealed that their reasons were related to their relationship with advisers and logistical factors. In some cases, **logistical barriers** such as difficulty in getting an appointment with a Connexions adviser had prevented interviewees from accessing advice and guidance. Alternatively, some interviewees preferred to seek advice from someone with whom they

had a **relationship and trusted**, such as a teacher. This is illustrated by the comment of one young person that:

> *I liked the advice of the teachers, not Connexions … when you know someone better you're going to listen to them more and understand them more aren't you … when the Connexions woman told me to do it* [go to college] *I thought 'oh, whatever, I'm not doing it just to rebel against you' … and then my teacher said about it and I actually considered it.*

This tendency for young people to seek advice from a range of individuals highlights the **need for all adults to be well-informed about the range of available options** or to be able to locate such information and share it with the young person. Where young people had accessed advice and guidance, some observed that it had not been helpful and a number of reasons for this emerged.

- **They did not feel that they had been prompted to discuss all of the available options** - this was associated by some interviewees with having made the wrong choice and subsequently discontinuing. For example, a young person who was 'undecided and NEET' reflected on the advice she received and felt that she had not been guided to consider all options when she said '*I never knew about apprenticeships - that you could do them in care homes. If I'd have known I'd have gone for that. It would have been better than just going to college full time*'. Similarly, one young man who was 'sustained NEET' and did not intend to re-engage in learning explained:

  > *I went to them* [Connexions] *and said I wanted to do Uniformed Services. They didn't ask why. It was because my friend was doing it and it was all I knew about. So they helped me to apply for that. But when I went to the college for the interview they told me about the Construction course and I realised this is what I should do because I got a distinction when I did it at school, I didn't pass any other exams. But they said it was full now and to come back next year. I was too late.*

- **They received 'biased' information** - in particular, some of the interviewees who were 'open to learning NEET' reported being encouraged by their school to stay on at the sixth form due to their abilities. However, they had discontinued and become NEET.

- **IAG professionals and teachers lacked understanding of the '***real world***'** - interviewees explained that advisers could have provided more information about being in employment, including providing opportunities for visits from speakers currently employed in specific occupations. Overall, they felt that this would have '*broadened your horizons a bit more … they just told you about college*'.

These reflections from young people who are NEET illustrate the need for information and guidance to be wide ranging, unbiased and to incorporate creative ways of allowing them insights into the actual experience of employment in occupations that they are considering.

Friends and family members emerged as being influential on young people's decisions. Young people referred to choosing the route they did because '*one of my cousins did it*' and '*my sister … said go to college, make something of your life*'. While young people for whom this was the case could benefit from the encouragement and real experience of someone whom they trusted, as these young people were all now NEET, it appears that the advice that they received through this mechanism may not always have been appropriate. This is illustrated in the comment of one young person who said '*My mum used to be a hairdresser and so I thought I'd love it but I realised it's not as easy as you think, it was a bit of a struggle for me*'.

What these young people chose or tried to do next was clearly a result of a range of influences. The next section examines those post-16 routes and the challenges and barriers faced by young people who, at the time of their interview were NEET.

4.3.3 What was their experience post-16 and what barriers and challenges to participation had they encountered?

> **Key messages**
>
> This section shows that, where young people did embark on education, employment or training post-16, they had dropped out due to:
>
> - financial reasons
>
> - the job or course not meeting their expectations
>
> - difficulties in relationships with others
>
> - personal and behaviour reasons.
>
> The implications for policy emerging from this is the need to ensure that young people received adequate financial support where required to participate in education or training, and that they are helped to make an informed decision about post-16 participation. This includes ensuring that they are aware of the requirements they can expect if an employer offers them an apprenticeship and, equally, that all employers receive support in providing an apprenticeship.

While all interviewees were currently NEET at the time of the interview, their journeys to this point varied. Those who were 'open to learning NEET' or 'undecided NEET' were more likely to have started a course and left, while the 'sustained NEET' group were less likely to have done so. There were differences between these groups in the nature of their post-16 destinations.

- **Sustained NEET** - young people who were categorised in this group were **least likely to have chosen to enter education, training or employment post-16** and were more likely than young people in the other two sub-groups to have participated in some sort of personal development course such as Prince's Trust and E2E. Where they had worked, they were most likely to have had short-term jobs (of less than three months duration) and were also most likely to have worked for cash in hand or in the grey economy.

- **Open to learning NEET** - reflecting the findings of the segmentation analysis, this group were the **most likely of the three sub-groups to have progressed onto Further Education or training** straight after school and, although they left, they sustained their involvement for six months or more. In addition, young people in this group were the only interviewees who reported that they had gained any qualifications post-16. Many of the young people in this sub-group had been in employment since leaving school, including working at the same time as pursuing an education or training course.

- **Undecided NEET** - reflecting the findings of the segmentation analysis presented in Chapter 2, around half of the interviewees in this group had started an education or training course post-16 but **none of these had completed the course. They were unlikely to have sustained their involvement for up to six months.** Nearly all of the young people in this sub-group had been in employment of some kind since leaving school, which included employment at the same time as participating in a course.

What were their reasons for leaving education and training?

Across the groups, young people cited a range of personal, financial and teaching and learning-related issues as reasons for discontinuing.

- **Financial reasons** - including being unable to fund their travel and being under pressure to earn a wage, such as the young woman who said '*I was like really pressured to get a job so I couldn't do a full-time course as well as get a full-time job, so I had to quit*'.

- **Teaching and learning-related issues** - including not liking the location of study and finding that '*none of the course was practical, it was all writing stuff down*' contrary to expectations. In addition, some young people left when they felt that they had '*got behind*' with the course.

- **Changing their mind** - including discovering that they had made the wrong choice, when they had just chosen the same as a friend or had not known what to choose, or finding that the occupational area was no longer appealing.

- **Personal reasons** - including housing issues, problems at home and poor relationships with other learners or with staff and behaviour issues

It is clear from these experiences of young people that not completing a programme of study, and becoming NEET, was a result of both a decision-making process that did not support them in making an informed decision and also the impact of practical and personal factors.

What was their experience of looking for work?

Interviewees who had been seeking employment emphasised that they had applied for '*loads of jobs*'. They had encountered a range of barriers when job seeking including:

- Lack of their own motivation and organisational skills

- Lack of opportunities or the jobs on offer not appealing to them

- Drop in confidence when they did not receive responses from employers to their applications

- Lack of job searching skills such as knowing where to look for job opportunities.

There were also a number of factors that young people considered hindered their chance of gaining employment. These included:

- Lack of experience

- Lack of qualifications - especially those who were 'sustained NEET'

- Age - they could not get employment until they were 17

- Lack of confidence - consequently they did not present themselves well in interviews.

What were their reasons for leaving employment?

A minority of interviewees had been dismissed for various reasons or had been made redundant when the work had '*dried up*' or a short-term contract ended. This was particularly the case among some of those who were 'undecided NEET' which suggests that this sub-group tended to cease employment due to factors outside their control. The majority of young people who had been employed had chosen to leave their job or jobs and their reasons for doing so can be summarised as follows:

- **Financial reasons** - young people reported that the work was low paid or that they had not been paid

- **Relationships with others** - some young people had difficulties in their relationships with their managers or with co-workers, including where these were from immigrant communities and communication was challenging with others for whom English was not their first language

- **Llack of interest** - some young people reported that the work had been '*boring*' or '*monotonous*' and in other cases it was unreliable

- **Impact on their wider life** - one young person chose to stop work because of the impact on her social life when she said '*I don't like the hours … I want to work but I want to carry on with my social life*'

- **Not meeting expectations of an apprenticeship** - three young people had ceased their employment because they had been led to expect that they would be engaged in an 'apprenticeship' but, when they started work, their employers did not provide formal training. In some cases, it appeared that these 'apprenticeships' were often not a formal arrangement but were instead based on a promise or a possibility of training as illustrated by the experience of one interviewee:

    He said it was an apprenticeship, but when I asked him if he'd send me to college to get me fully qualified, he turned around and said "I haven't got the money for that", so that said it all.

4.4 What did professionals perceive as the barriers associated with non-participation among young people who were NEET?

Key messages

The perspectives of professionals who work with young people who are NEET revealed barriers to engagement which have implications for policy. These include the need to:

- develop young people's awareness and understanding of the world of work, their employability and social skills before they leave school at 16

- provide appropriate, flexible, post-16 provision for young people with varied start dates and alternative learning environments

- find creative solutions to ensure that all parents and carers are better informed about employment and learning opportunities as they are a significant influence on young people's attitudes and decisions

- gain the involvement of employers through solutions that incentivise and encourage them to provide opportunities for young people from their communities

4 The experiences of young people who are NEET

Professionals who were working with young people who were NEET, and those that had re-engaged, provided further insights into some of the personal and structural barriers associated with non-participation in education, employment and training post-16. They identified individual, cultural and structural barriers.

4.4.1   Individual and cultural barriers

The majority of key professionals indicated that there were some young people who became NEET as a result of the influence of their **family, friends and culture**.

- Young people **mirrored the behaviour, aspirations and lifestyle of their family or friends** and repeated patterns that they experienced such as being less inclined to work or participate in education or training where this was not the norm for their household or the surrounding community.

- Young people were **inhibited by their parents' lack of understanding** of current labour or education opportunities. This led to them having an unrealistic or misguided understanding of entry requirements for jobs or courses, the range or type of work and course opportunities available and even the types of people who can or should follow a certain career path as the following comments illustrate:

  I don't think education has been particularly valued because in the past we've had lots of heavy industry where you didn't necessarily need good qualifications because there were always jobs. But that's changed over the last ten years and I don't think the cultural thinking has caught up with that.

  [they] *think they can just walk onto a construction site and get a job. They don't realise you need qualifications to mix cement.*

- Where parents were more aware of the current labour market, this could also lead to **misinforming their children**. For example, more young people wanted to become plumbers than the market could support because '*they think there is loads of money to be made*'.

- The nature of **work undertaken historically in their culture was no longer available**, leading young people to be disillusioned, as the following quote illustrates:

  They actually do want to work and some of these lads would probably work 15 hours a day if the jobs were there, it's not that they are skivers. They would have pride in their work like their granddad did down the pit … the fact they can't go into these jobs anymore makes them angry.

As over half of professionals credited parents as one of the main influences on young peoples' choices post-16, a number of interviewees were keen to stress the importance of working with parents to ensure they are better informed about the opportunities available to young people. They felt that this would have a '*knock on affect*' on the aspirations and choices of their children in order to avoid disillusion.

Young people's **skills and abilities** were said to be a barrier to engagement by professionals. Interviewees reported that:

- some young people lacked necessary **basic skills** (which they classed as literacy, numeracy, and IT), and **social skills** on leaving school

- some young people lacked '***readiness*' for the working world.** This included a lack of knowledge about the workplace and what employers were looking for, and difficulties coping with the change from the school environment.

Interviewees also identified the issue of **travel** as having a direct effect on extent to which young people were able to engage in education, employment and training. Two elements to this emerged.

- Where courses were not available locally, travel was considered a problem in relation to its **cost, the availability of public transport and journey times**.

- Young people were **reluctant to travel** even very short distances if this meant venturing into areas with which they were not familiar. The reasons given related to certain communities '*remaining insular*', a lack of confidence (particularly in relation to a lack of basic geographical knowledge and uncertainty about how to use public transport), visiting new and often much bigger institutions, and rivalries between groups .

Young people's **attitudes and experiences** were a further factor that inhibited their engagement in the view of many interviewees. They particularly highlighted the following.

- **Level of disengagement** - over half of interviewees mentioned young people's disengagement or disenchantment from the 'system' as a reason for being NEET.

- **Experience of school** - reflecting the interviews with young people themselves, many interviewees felt that young people were inhibited by their negative experience of school. As a result of this, they were said to have a dislike of certain learning environments, and programmes such as a personal development programme run at a football ground and staffed by professionals able to deal with behavioural issues, were considered to be more successful.

- **Lack of self esteem associated with academic failure** - some interviewees felt that many young people '*have only experienced failure*' as a result, as they saw it, of the priorities, content and structure of the current curriculum. Such young people were less likely to apply for courses or jobs, and risk failure once more and may require closer mentoring to ensure that they were not put off when some of their tentative first steps in the wider world do not meet their expectations.

- **Over-confidence** - some professionals felt that there were young people whose confidence levels were too high which was reflected in their rejection of certain courses or jobs despite their low levels of attainment.

- **Reluctance to seek help** - a number of professionals were concerned that young people who had a poor relationship previously with school staff, coupled with low self esteem, were less likely to seek help with any personal issues that affected them throughout their further education course such as bullying or poor relationships with a tutor, and would simply drop out.

4.4.2   Structural barriers

Other barriers to participation that were identified by professionals were structural. Young people were said to be inhibited by the availability of appropriate **local education, employment and training opportunities**. This was felt to have a major impact on the decisions and actions of young people due to a number of factors as outlined below.

The level and type of education and training provision

- **Lack of appropriate provision** - a lack of provision and gaps in provision was identified particularly in relation to practical courses, and courses appropriate for students with either entry or Level 1 qualifications who were not yet ready to start a Level 2 course. Some reported variation in the quality of E2E provision, in terms of the delivery methods adopted and extent of flexibility in provision.

- **Lack of places on some courses** - for example, research conducted in one area found that the majority of those who left a course had not been able to pursue their first choice of course due to oversubscription.

- **Lack of flexibility in course structure, timetables and delivery**. Interviewees made reference to the fact that there was little in the way of part-time courses or staggered start dates.

Employment opportunities

- **Lack of appropriate employment opportunities, including apprenticeships -** this was felt to be a particular issue in three of the four case study areas, with retail, warehouse work and call centres replacing manufacturing and heavy industry. This work was felt by many professionals to be less reliable, often short-term and not in line with the aspirations of many young people.

- **Changes in entry requirements** - entry requirements for many occupations had increased and therefore excluded those who were less academic and had traditionally taken up careers in some trades.

- **Increased competition** - there was increased competition for some jobs as a result of greater mobility of workers within the widened European Union.

- **Reluctance among employers** - some employers were said to be reluctant to employ young people who would need some form of training. This was often related to the capacity of the employer due to size and resources, and employers in occupations that were appealing to some young people, such as skilled trades, were said to often be '*one man bands*'. In addition, employers were said to be reluctant because they did not know how to deal with young people, the amount of paperwork involved, and a lack of financial support or incentive. Others felt that employers were not aware of the value of nationally recognised qualifications and '*it's difficult in terms of getting them* [employers] *to accept that training is a big thing … some say we offer in-house training and that's how they would perceive it*'.

One impact of a lack of appropriate employment opportunities for young people who were currently NEET was the risk of undermining the work that had been done to re-engage some young people through courses that prepared them for employment. While some could see the personal development benefits of re-engagement for young people, there was also a need for this to lead to some tangible outcome, as one advisor noted:

The main problem is that all the programmes that are in place are great, but at the end of it it's a bit like the Emperor's New Clothes: 'Hey kids, sorry there aren't the jobs!' And you've got them all engaged. Now what must be more depressing than that? So, then the next time Connexions call, they don't pick up.

4.4.3 Choosing not to participate

Interviewees reported that some people made an **active choice** to not participate in education or training. Indeed, some were said to be seeking to have a break from education and training. While for some young people this would mean a complete period of inactivity, others embarked on a JWT. Such young people could be those who feature in the 'sustained in JWT', 'transitional JWT' and 'open to learning NEET' groups. Participation in a JWT was said to have the benefit of enabling them to gain some perspective of the working world and recognise what they want to do and what they will need to get there. Experiencing the often low paid, menial and repetitive nature of low skilled work was said to act as a '*reality check*' for some young people and they would re-enter the education system with renewed enthusiasm. Nevertheless, there was a risk that inactivity for some resulted in losing the habit of getting up early and going somewhere everyday. Indeed, some interviewees observed that even the break between finishing school and starting a course in September had a big effect on momentum and the motivation levels of young people.

4.4.4 What were the main influences on young people's decision-making?

As might be expected, young people, were said to be influenced by a wide range of factors when making decisions about their post-16 activity. The main influences were identified by professionals as follows.

- **Family / parental advice and influence** - in addition to the family history of employment, family expectations and pressure included some parents who pressured their children to gain employment at 16 and to begin to earn, while others were keen for young people to become qualified in a trade. Parents were also described in some cases as encouraging young people to study for A-levels despite this being inappropriate.

- **Influence of the choices made by peers** - friends' perceptions of courses and occupations could affect others' decisions. Young people with friends who appeared to be financially independent were considered to be greatly influenced to enter employment, regardless of whether training was provided. Others were keen to go on courses in order to stay with their friends.

- **The relative importance of money to the individual** - this was reported to be influenced by the circumstances of an individual's family, and also the value they gave to earning money. Many professionals doubted the ability of some young people to defer gratification, as illustrated in the comment of one interviewee who said '*They don't see that being poor at 16 or 17 is easier than being poor at 25*'.

- **Access to the EMA** - while the EMA was viewed by many as an important enabler, professionals pointed out that it was not enough incentive alone. Just under a quarter of interviewees, however, knew young people who had not continued into further education because they had not received an EMA. Professionals felt that it was particularly hard for those whose parents were just over the earnings threshold.

- **The advice and influence of schools and teachers** - reflecting the comments of young people, professionals felt that young people could often be misguided into taking an inappropriate A-level or staying on at sixth form route by their school. Colleges were also said to put young people onto courses they had not chosen in order to meet target numbers for recruitment.

- **Access to and the relationship with a careers advisor pre-16** - some college staff expressed concern that schools were not allowing them access to advise their students as they were seen as competitors, mirroring the views of some young people who felt that they were not fully informed about the range of available courses. In addition, the limited access to young people constrained the extent to which guidance professionals could build relationships and develop the knowledge, understanding and skills necessary for successful decision making.

    My role as Connexions Advisor exists in all schools. What doesn't is careers education, which is sitting down maybe in classrooms once a week and talking about what you like doing, what you are good at and the opportunities available - the lead up education side ... I think this is really important … it doesn't happen … it's difficult for advisors to then come in and work coldly with Year 11s.

- **The influence of the media** - the way occupations are portrayed in the media was mentioned as influential by a minority of interviewees. Some were concerned that the media's focus on celebrities had led young people to demand '*large rewards for little work*' and some considered the media to be overly concerned with appearance and image, fuelling the demand for courses in subjects such as hairdressing.

4.5 What are the attitudes of young people who are NEET to education, employment and training?

4.5.1 What were their views of learning and qualifications?

> **Key messages**
>
> It was evident that the attitudes towards qualifications and learning differed among the sub-groups of young people who were NEET and were influenced by their perceptions of the experience of friends and family members. This implies that there is a need to:
>
> - provide examples from real people of the limitations on their choices as a result of leaving school with few or no qualifications to students at Key Stage 4 or before
> - demonstrate to young people who are NEET, that examples of individuals who appear to have been successful without achieving qualifications may not reflect the broader picture.

As highlighted in Section 4.3, experiences of school can influence a young person's **attitude towards learning**. Young people in the 'sustained NEET' or 'undecided NEET' groups tended to assume that all learning experiences would be the same as school and therefore did not want to return to education or training. Similarly, those who had a negative college experience post-16 also wanted to avoid further education or training as in the example of one young person who had left a college course early who said:

> *One of my friends is talking about doing vehicle maintenance at college when he leaves school and I've told him 'don't do it - I promise you you're gonna get bored.' But he won't listen to me; he's going to do it.*

There were instances of young people in the 'sustained NEET' and 'undecided NEET' groups who were more positive about learning as they perceived their current lack of qualifications as a barrier to employment. However, it was notable that those categorised as 'open to learning NEET' were all positive about learning and the majority were planning to re-engage in full time courses in September or enter work with training. This is discussed in more detail later in this section.

Interviewees' **attitudes towards qualifications** were generally more positive than their broader attitude towards learning. However, there were distinct differences between the sub-groups.

- **Sustained NEET** - these young people typically believed qualifications were important. Some acknowledged that qualifications were relevant to the jobs they wanted to apply for, but were not prepared to undertake any further training to gain qualifications themselves. However, others in this group felt qualifications were important to gain employment at all or specific jobs, such as the interviewees who said:

  What's made the difference is me finding out for myself what the stakes of losing GCSEs are and stuff, like not staying in school; I didn't know back then that it mattered as much as it does.

  They get you better jobs - I ain't got any and I only get any chance in jobs that don't need them like cafes and stuff. You can't even get a job at MacDonald's now without some GCSEs in English and something like Home Economics or food hygiene.

There is **potential to re-engage such young people in learning** as a number of them were keen to re-sit or take GCSEs such as the young person who commented '*I want to do GCSEs so I can actually say that I have my qualifications. That's one of my aims*'. However this tended to be a long-term goal while their current priority was gaining employment.

- **Undecided NEET** - the majority of young people in this group felt that qualifications were fairly unimportant. They believed that qualifications held no relevance to the types of jobs they were applying for and that having few or no qualifications would not stop them gaining employment, because '*To be honest with you I don't think you need history or science just to work in a shop to sell shoes*'. These respondents frequently commented that it was more important to gain experience than have qualifications and felt *'once you got a job you can work your way up.'* **Re-engaging this group of young people in education and training would require a demonstrable relationship between learning and employment.**

- **Open to learning NEET** - reflecting their more positive attitude towards learning, these young people believed qualifications were very important. They explained that qualifications helped when there was '*strong competition for jobs*' and gave you '*more chance of getting somewhere*'. These interviewees felt that GCSEs were generally important however they tended to rate work-related qualifications very highly. One respondent commented '*I think they are* [important] *but whereas a GCSE in science I wouldn't say is as important as, and this is just me, but I would prefer to get a more specific qualification and go into a specific job*'. As a result of this attitude, **this group of young people are most easily re-engaged with education and training.**

The interviewees' attitude to qualifications appeared to be influenced by their **experiences of the successes of friends and family members** with and without qualifications. Those who were 'undecided NEET' had experienced:

- family members without qualifications work their way up in a company and therefore they had not seen monetary or career benefits of qualifications

- friends without qualifications employed in the areas of work they were interested in, which further embedded a view that qualifications were unimportant or irrelevant to their employment chances. For example '*my brother's girlfriend has gone into a care home and she has not got any qualification whatsoever and they took her on*'

- friends or family members gaining a degree and subsequently struggling to find a job in contrast to others with no qualifications becoming successful in business.

In contrast, those who were 'open to learning NEET' tended to perceive:

- friends and family members with qualifications to be more successful than those without. Young people mentioned siblings who had undertaken further or higher education and were seen as successful. One young person stated *'She's a teacher now so it's done her well'*

- that qualifications were related to earning *'more money'* and *'having better jobs'*.

Consequently, there is a need to address these influential perceptions to help young people to see the value of qualifications.

4.5.2 What is the likelihood of young people who were NEET re-engaging in learning?

> **Key messages**
>
> Although there is some willingness among most young people who are NEET to engage in learning in future, the evidence from the interviews shows that, in order to achieve this, it is necessary to:
>
> - ensure that suitable provision is available - at an appropriate level (particularly for the 'sustained NEET' group who have low levels of achievement) and largely vocational
>
> - improve awareness proactively among young people of the possibilities available to them (especially among the 'sustained NEET' and 'undecided NEET' groups)
>
> - address complex barriers and low attainment for the 'sustained NEET' group
>
> - enable young people to participate and meet their financial needs.

As noted above, the likelihood of these young people who are NEET re-engaging in education and training varied across the sub-groups and, while those who were 'open to learning NEET' were most likely to re-engage and some of those who were 'sustained NEET' were motivated to gain qualifications, those who were 'undecided NEET' were least likely of the three groups to perceive any value in participating in education or training. Inhibiting factors included the following.

- **Financial priorities and awareness of support available** - there was a particular lack of knowledge surrounding financial support in the 'sustained NEET' and 'undecided NEET' groups. These young people were unsure of the impact that participating in education and training would have on the benefits they currently claimed and unaware of

the benefits they would be entitled to such as EMA. Even with the financial support of an EMA, some young people considered that they could not afford to participate in education or training and commented, for example, that '*there's no way I could live on £30 a week*' and '*I'd think about it* [education and training] *if they increased the EMA*'.

- **Complex backgrounds and specific needs** - some young people who were 'sustained NEET' had a reduced likelihood of re-engaging as a result of learning difficulties which had prevented acceptance on a course. They also had complex personal barriers such as an unstable home environment or homelessness and issues with drink and drugs which inhibited them from embarking or sustaining involvement in a course.

The young people who were 'open to learning NEET' were most likely to re-engage and planned to do so. Indeed, in some cases, had already secured places on courses. These young people tended to believe they had more opportunities open to them, or **were more aware of the opportunities available** to them, compared with the other young people. Some of these respondents had applied for a range of different courses or areas. Two of these young people had already secured a place at sixth form and were using this as a 'back-up plan' in case they were not successful in securing the apprenticeship or college course they wanted. One young person commented:

> *I'm interested in joining the Police. But if I do an apprenticeship* [in mechanical engineering] *I'll still be doing that. In fact I could be at sixth form. But I'll probably be at college doing more courses.*

These interviewees had proactively explored the options available to them. This is in contrast to the young people categorised as 'sustained NEET' and 'undecided NEET' who showed less knowledge of education and training opportunities including being unaware that they were able to re-sit examinations.

One similarity which transcended all groups of young people who were NEET was their **tendency to favour vocational courses** if they were to re-enter education or training. For those who were classified as 'sustained NEET' or 'undecided NEET' this was often because they had not enjoyed classroom-based education and had a preference for more practical learning. Young people who were 'open to learning NEET' were also more likely to prefer vocational courses but in these cases it was because they believed they provided them with more employment potential and opportunities. One interviewee commented on the perceived difference between a PE A-Level and a personal training course at college: 'Say PE A-Level, the only thing you can really do is do it at University, but say personal training you get more opportunities'.

4.5.3 What was the likelihood of young people who were NEET re-engaging in employment?

Key messages

The majority of young people's attitude towards employment was largely positive and, for most, the possibility of re-engagement with employment was positive but requires some issues to be addressed including:

- supporting those in the 'sustained NEET' group to improve their attainment levels as low attainment was inhibiting them from gaining employment

- clearly identifying the benefits of employment with training to those who were 'sustained NEET' and 'undecided NEET' and demonstrating that they would not be financially disadvantaged in the long-term by doing a job with training

- supporting those who are 'open to learning NEET' in making the right choices of education or training to contribute to their longer-term career plans.

A minority of young people were not interested in finding employment. Where this was the case, it was related its incompatibility with their lifestyle. Two interviewees who were 'sustained NEET' were uninterested in finding employment in any form because of child care responsibilities, in one case, and using the black market as a source of income in the other. Some young people who were 'undecided NEET' had gained employment but did not stay in a job very long because they *'don't like what's on offer'*. These interviewees generally lived at home and were being supported by their families. One young person commented:

> *It's just me. I don't want to work. I want to be with my friends all the time. And I want to be able to do what I want to do. I'm dead fussy when it comes to jobs. I don't want to wear a uniform, that's why I chose retail. I don't want to work in coffee shops because I don't want to wear a uniform. I don't want to work the hours they give me, I want to work until three.*

The majority of interviewees were interested in gaining employment for the following reasons:

- to earn money - to fund their social life, to gain independence from parents, for stability and to fund accommodation and in order not to '*Live off other people's taxes*'

- to meet new people

- to relieve boredom

- to gain some stability and '*be settled*'.

Over half of all the interviewees had already been looking for, and applying for, jobs but had not been successful, for the reasons outlined in Section 4.3.3.

Overall, it appears that these young people would be willing to re-engage in employment but they were more circumspect about engaging in **employment with training**. As might be expected, young people categorised as 'open to learning NEET' were more likely to be positive about work with training. Many of these young people were interested in, and were applying for, Apprenticeships including in joinery, engineering and childcare.

In contrast, while many of those belonging to the 'sustained NEET' or 'undecided NEET' groups were open to training , and willing to do day-release at college, they felt that **training was secondary to the job** - rather than something they would actively seek out. These young people said they were looking for *'anything'* and were typically applying for jobs which did not need qualifications. One young person stated: '*I just want a job, I'll take anything*'. The reasons for this were a desire to *'be earning'* immediately or, in some cases, to relieve the boredom they felt being NEET. It was also apparent that many of these young people had not thought in depth about careers or appeared to lack career aspirations and were more motivated by earning immediately. Jobs they had applied for included factory work, retail, catering and cleaning jobs.

Some young people who were 'undecided NEET' believed that **training within a job was not relevant** to them. This may have related to the kind of work these young people wanted to do, including retail or cafe work. These young people felt that they would either need no training or were only willing to do on-the-job informal training. One young person commented '*but I don't really see what you need training for because I know retail anyway, you've just got to look smart and be confident and polite*'. Where they were interested in occupations that would require them to undertake some education or training whilst working, or to re-sit their GCSEs before they could apply for such work, such as construction, IT or motor mechanics, they were put off pursuing this by the need to engage in further learning.

In terms of **future planning**, it was evident that those who were 'open to learning NEET' were distinct from other interviewees as they talked about their future in terms of careers and further education. In one year's time the majority of those belonging to this group planned to be in college working towards a career in areas such as the Police or running their own business. A minority of these young people were hoping to go to university eventually, whilst others were hoping to *'be as successful as I can'*. In contrast, those who were 'undecided NEET' or 'sustained NEET' included some young people who had not thought about their future, and others who were seeking the stability provided by immediate permanent employment.

4.6   Conclusions

The findings from 40 interviews with young people who were NEET confirmed the segmentation analysis in Chapter 2 that the NEET group is not homogenous but provided further insight into the sub-groups. In particular, they revealed differences between the experiences, motivations and attitudes of young people that lead them to become NEET and ultimately impact on their likelihood of re-engaging in education or training.

Young people classified as **'sustained NEET'** appeared to have a disrupted and negative educational history, with many removed from school before the compulsory leaving age of 16. Because of this, the respondents generally did not receive any form of careers advice and many of these young people had not thought about what they wanted to do with regards to education or employment when they reached the age of 16. Due to other priorities in their lives they often looked for employment and had a desire for stability. However, as a result of their post-16 experiences some of these interviewees had come to realise the importance of qualifications to finding employment and were keen to re-engage with education or training in the future. Others, however, continued to have negative perceptions of learning as a result of their pre-16 experience. This suggests that these young people may need more support in overcoming barriers in the first instance, followed by support accessing courses or training. Such courses may need to be through informal learning pathways, which do not threaten these young people, but may raise their self-confidence and allow them to start to appreciate the value of learning. Subsequently, further support may be required to help them make the transition from informal learning to more structured courses.

Those belonging to the **'open to learning NEET'** sub-group were motivated and likely to engage in learning in the near future. However it is important to understand why these young people became NEET in the first instance. For many, it was due to choosing the wrong course or apprenticeship either because they were encouraged to go down a certain route or because they perhaps lacked support when making such decisions. Therefore, it is important these young people receive enough support and impartial advice at 16 or when leaving courses to ensure they make informed decisions about their future.

Young people classified as **'undecided NEET'** tended to lack clear direction and future career aspirations and were motivated by earning money. They generally could not see the value of formal qualifications, were disillusioned with formal learning and often drifted between jobs. They tended to lack commitment or were easily knocked off track by barriers or challenges they encountered. Therefore, whilst these young people often found it fairly easy to find employment and did not face some of the structural barriers others faced, their attitudes, perceptions and dissatisfaction made them unwilling to re-engage in learning. Intensive support may be needed to help such young people understand the importance of qualifications and how to make positive, realistic decisions about their future. This group may also need to be supported by engaging them in suitable work-based learning opportunities, given their negative perceptions of formal education.

5   The experiences of young people who are in JWT

Key findings

- The research has confirmed the findings of previous research that young people in JWT are not a homogenous group. It includes those who have chosen this route as a stop-gap before moving onto further learning, those who are likely to remain in a JWT in the long-term and others at risk of becoming NEET.

- Most of those 41 interviewed in JWT had achieved fewer than five GCSEs at grades A*-C. They were most likely to be working in retail, hospitality and catering or in cleaning occupations and most were earning above the minimum wage for their age group. Almost two-thirds of those interviewed said they liked their work.

- Young people and professionals identified a variety of 'push' and 'pull' factors which led some school-leavers to choose a JWT at 16. The main push factors were negative experiences of schooling, low self-confidence and lack of opportunities for work-based learning. Earning money was seen to be the main pull factor for starting a JWT.

- Interviewees who were judged to be at risk of becoming NEET and those sustained in a JWT who were averse to any education or training were the ones most likely to have reported negative experiences of schooling. These experiences had put them off participating in further learning.

- Overall, those young people sustained in a JWT were most likely to cite financial reasons for not engaging in learning. Some of them had considered education or training options, particularly apprenticeships, but were put off by lack of placement opportunities or lower financial rewards.

- Most of the young people interviewed were happy with the information, advice and guidance received before leaving school. However, some young people said they had ignored this advice after leaving school in favour of finding a job. Interviewees who had achieved more than five GCSEs at grades A*-C were also likely to complain about not having received information on all the options open to them.

- Almost all the 41 young people interviewed said that they were at least considering engaging in education or training in the future. Some interviewees said they were planning to do so via their current jobs, while others said that the experience of working had persuaded them to achieve more qualifications. Professionals argued that such jobs could be seen as facilitating such a process.

- There was a sub-group of some young people who, even though open to education or training, could not decide what to do. Many of them had drifted into a JWT, often via family networks, which offered them easy access to such jobs. Even though they were considering various training options, there was a danger that the financial rewards of working could prevent them from engaging in education or training in the future.

5 The experiences of young people who are in JWT

5.1   Introduction

This chapter presents the findings from interviews with 41 young people in jobs without training (JWT) as well as the views of 39 professionals. It examines:

- the characteristics of the interviewees and how their experiences compared with the typology developed as a result of the segmentation analysis reported in Chapter 2

- interviewees' experiences of school, the transition at 16 and their post-16 destinations. the attitudes of these young people towards education and training and the likelihood of them engaging in learning in the future

- the main challenges faced by the different types of young people in JWT and what support they need to help them re-engage in education or training.

5.2   What were the characteristics of young people in JWT?

Most of the young people interviewed were aged 16 or 17 (31 interviewees), while ten respondents had recently turned 18. Fifteen interviewees were male and 26 were female. As regards their previous qualifications, the majority of interviewees (29) had achieved fewer than five GCSEs at grades A*-C. More specifically:

- 12 had achieved five GCSEs at grades A*-C or more

- 18 at least one GCSE at grades A*-C but less than five GCSEs at grades A*-C

- Nine had achieved no GCSE at grades A*-C, but at least one GCSE at grades D-G

- Two had no previous qualifications.

This means that almost three-quarters of the young people interviewed had left school with qualifications below the government target of five GCSEs at grades A*-C, which resembles the sample chosen by Quinn, *et al.* (2008).

All except one of the 41 interviewees said they were of White British origin.

The 41 interviewees in JWT were working in a great variety of **occupations**, although the majority were employed in:

- Retail (11 interviewees)

- Hospitality and catering (eight interviewees)

- Cleaning occupations (five interviewees)

- Administrative jobs (five interviewees).

The remaining interviewees worked in warehousing (two), telemarketing in a call-centre, as a floor layer, a trainee butcher (not receiving any formal training), an amusement arcade assistant, a lifeguard, a tour guide and a corporate entertainment assistant. Three interviewees undertook various jobs via a recruitment agency.

Just over half of those interviewed worked **full-time** (21), while the remaining were employed **part-time**, ranging from just a few hours up to four days per week. Of the 37 young people willing to share information on their earnings:

- almost half (18) reported earning more than £160 per week

- eight said they earned between £81 and £160

- 11 reported earning £80 or less.

The reported salaries of respondents ranged from as little as £15 per week for just a few hours work up to £400 per week for a full-time position as a corporate entertainment assistant. Overall though, most of the young people interviewed appeared to be earning well **above the minimum wage** for their age group (£3.40 per hour), which confirms that most of these young people were in fairly well-paid jobs. Furthermore, most of those interviewed (27 out of 41) said that they liked or enjoyed their work and eight were particularly appreciative of their employment. Only five interviewees said that they did not like their jobs at all and were only doing it for the money.

5.2.1 Segmentation - did these young people fit the identified segments?

Interviews with young people confirmed the findings of the segmentation analysis and previous studies that young people in JWT are not a homogenous group. They showed that they had chosen to work rather than engage in learning for a variety of reasons and that while some seemed to be very likely to re-enter education or training in the future, others were unlikely or more reluctant to do so.

Overall, it was possible to group them into the three groupings identified in Chapter 2 - those sustained in JWT, those at risk of becoming NEET, and those in transition/on the verge of re-engaging in some form of education or training. However, analysis of interviews with 41 young people in JWT and 39 professionals suggested that these groups included young people with very different motivations and experiences. As illustrated below these differences appeared to influence both:

- the likelihood of them re-engaging in education or training

- the types of education or training they were willing or likely to engage in.

Young people sustained in a JWT

The 16 interviewees who seemed to be sustained in a JWT included some who were generally averse to education or training mainly due to their pre-16 experiences of schooling (see Section 5.3.1), but also others who were more open to it. An example of one young person sustained in a JWT who showed **no interest in engaging in learning in the future** is shown in Box 6.

Box 6: Young person sustained in a JWT and averse to education or training

Leroy is 17 years old and left school just under a year ago with three GCSEs D–G. He did not enjoy school at all: *'I didn't like it at all - I was just trying to get out all the time'* and went to a Pupil Referral Unit (PRU) for the last two years of his schooling. Once he completed his exams, he '*wanted to get out as quick as possible and find a job. I wanted to bring in money for a car and stuff like that'*. Leroy started work in September in a hospital kitchen as a catering assistant. His main motivation for doing the job was the money. Leroy had done some basic training in food hygiene and hazards at work, but was not at all interested in doing any further training leading to a qualification. He was hoping to get a more highly paid job in the future, but was afraid of risking his currently secure job: '*if you go somewhere else, they might get rid of you and I could be out of a job for god knows how long. And this one is secure for however long I want to be there'*
.

However, other respondents who could equally be described as being sustained in a JWT appeared to be **more open to further learning**, although they were not actively seeking such an option. This included some that would consider engaging in training in their current jobs if it was offered to them and those who said they might leave in the future to re-engage in some form of education or training but had no definite plans to do so. The case study in Box 7 illustrates the experiences of one interviewee who appeared to be sustained in a JWT, but was, in theory, open to engaging in education or training.

Box 7: Young person sustained in a JWT but open to education or training

Markus is 16 and left school with seven GCSEs, although only one was above a grade D. He also achieved an NVQ Level 1 in Motor Vehicle Maintenance through a college course he did while still at school. He subsequently got a place at the same college to continue his training, which would have lasted three years to become '*a fully qualified mechanic'*. However, '*I got chucked out by my mum for being naughty and moved in with my dad'* who lived some distance from the college. So, he looked for a job instead and eventually found one with a furniture retailer: *'I do a bit of everything, mainly dispatch - wrap the furniture up and unload the vans'*. His job is full time, and he earns £180 per week. He still wanted to work as a mechanic and might consider doing an apprenticeship. However, he thought he'd probably still be working for his current employer in one or even two year's time '*because I'm earning good money. If I did an apprenticeship I'd only be on, like, 100 quid a week'*.

Young people at risk of being NEET

Only three of the 41 interviewees were regarded as being at risk of becoming NEET in the future. There are various possible reasons why the research only managed to identify such a small number of these individuals. The two most likely explanations are that, first, the contact information supplied to us by Connexions Services was usually collected several months prior to the research team contacting the young people - this means that many of those in the 'at risk' group would have left employment by the time they were contacted and become NEET instead. Indeed, some of those young people interviewed for this study who were NEET were recruited in this way (see Chapter 4). Second, it is possible that the personal characteristics and issues faced by such individuals could have prevented them from turning up for interviews. Thus, a large proportion of those contacted by the research team did not attend an interview after agreeing to do so over the phone. As regards the characteristics of

this group, it is worth noting that the three young people categorised in this way were not all averse to engaging in education or training. However, their personal issues and previous experiences of schooling suggested that they were unlikely to do so or to achieve a sustained involvement. The case study in Box 8 provides an example of one such young person.

Box 8: Young person in a JWT at risk of being NEET in the future

Kevin is 17 and was always good at school until his father died just before starting Year 11. After that he had a lot of problems at school, '*I didn't want to go, but I used to make myself go'.* He received help from a counsellor and managed to achieve '*three C-grade GCSEs and a few Ds*'. Since then he has had '*a hard time'* and has no permanent residence: '*I've lived at my mate's, then my mum's, then she kicked me out, then my nan's, then my mate's, then my auntie's, then she kicked me out, then somewhere else, and now I'm back to my auntie's'.* After leaving school, he received Job Seeker's Allowance for around five months, but has since then signed up with a recruitment agency which has managed to get him various short-term jobs including warehousing and factory jobs. He had no fixed hours of work, but said that he usually got about ten hours per week at a rate of £6.50 per hour. Kevin said he would consider doing an apprenticeship, but is more likely just to try and find a more permanent job.

Young people in transition to education or training

The remaining 22 interviewees could all be classified as broadly fitting into the 'transition group', although the young people in this group had quite different experiences and motivations and were likely to follow **different routes back into learning**. This group included, for example, some young people most closely resembling the description of this segment in Chapter 2 - having achieved Level 2 at GCSE and started, but dropped out of a post-16 course. They saw their current job only as a **short-term 'stop-gap'** to enable them to earn some money or get some experience before commencing their courses. The experiences of one such young person are illustrated in Box 9.

Box 9: Young person using a JWT as a stop gap before re-engaging in education or training

Jennifer is 17 and went onto sixth-form to study A-levels after her GCSEs, having achieved nine GCSEs at grades A*-C. She said that she had not considered any other options as her school had '*just assumed everyone with the grades would stay on'.* However, she had not liked '*the atmosphere in the sixth-form'* and not enjoyed the subjects she was studying. She had, therefore, left after a few months and started working in a clothes shop instead, while considering what course to start the following September. She had really enjoyed her experience of working and it had made her realise that she wanted a career in retail. Jennifer had, therefore, enrolled on a Business BTEC National Diploma, which she hoped would help her to become an area manager in the future.

This group of interviewees also included some young people with slightly different experiences - they still seemed very likely to engage in education or training in the future, but had arrived at this situation in different ways. This included seven interviewees who spoke about re-engaging in education or training either in their current workplaces or as a result of their employment experiences. Some had left school, got a job and then realised they had made the wrong choice and were subsequently looking at going back into learning in the near future. Others had been offered to engage in training as part of their job and were hoping to do so in the near future. What is distinctive about these young people, therefore, is that it is the **experience of working** that appears to have **re-engaged them into work-related learning**, as illustrated in Box 10.

Box 10:   Young person in a JWT likely to re-engage into work-related learning

Robert started sixth-form after having achieved three B and two C grades at GCSE. However, he said he struggled with the course and left after three months: '*I wasn't doing homework, my grades kept slipping and I just wasn't paying attention - so it was best all around that I left*'. He got a job as a catering assistant with the help of his mother, who worked for the same organisation, and had really enjoyed the experience. He had since then been promoted to catering supervisor. Recently, his employer had asked him whether he was interested in doing an NVQ Level 2 in Catering and Hospitality and Robert had jumped at the possibility once he had realised he could do it '*on the job, without going to college. Someone comes out and watches me work and talks to me afterwards, so I won't lose out any days*'.

Finally, there were some young people which shared the characteristics of those in the 'transition group', but which were much less sure about whether they would achieve that transition back into education or training and often admitted themselves that they might just remain in their JWT. In this sense, they were quite similar to some of those young people classified as 'sustained in a JWT' who were open to education or training, but what made them different was that they had much more definite plans. Also, most of them had achieved Level 2 at the end of Year 11. Box 11 provides an example of one such young person who **remained undecided about exactly what route** he would take back into education or training.

Box 11:   Young person in a JWT undecided

Graeme is 16 and left school having achieved eight GCSEs, four at grades A*-C. He initially applied to do BTEC National Diploma in IT at college. Graeme said he chose IT '*because my mates were and it just seemed the safe option*'. However, he changed his mind a few weeks before the course started because '*I'd had enough of the classroom and I just wanted a break. So I took a year out*'. He tried to apply for a few apprenticeships, but was unsuccessful. So, he sent out his CV and got a job as a waiter in a hotel restaurant. Graeme is considering going back to college or starting an apprenticeship, but still does not know what he really wants to do. He is even considering going back to school to do A-levels.

5.3 What is the experience of young people who are in JWT of education and employment?

5.3.1 What was their experience of school and learning pre-16?

> **Key messages**
>
> The research indicates that having a negative experience of pre-16 education can lead some young people to:
>
> - choose a JWT as a long-term option in order to avoid any form of learning
> - be averse to formal education, but more open to work-based/work-related learning.
>
> This suggests a need both for more engaging pre-16 learning options for such young people as well as sufficient work-based or work-related learning opportunities to re-engage them in learning.

Of the 41 interviewees, 11 could be regarded as having found school a positive experience, 12 found it a negative experience, while 18 could identify both positive and negative aspects. The overall trend was that those with more negative experiences were generally less likely to be willing to re-engage in learning in the future.

All four of the young people classified as being **at risk of becoming NEET** spoke about their pre-16 learning experiences in a negative way. One girl, for example, commented on negative relationships with teachers and that she had left school with no desire to engage in any further learning in the future. She had not considered college, as she was afraid it would be the same as school. Another young man said that he was '*bullied all through my schooling, so in the end I didn't go much.*' This had influenced his post-16 decision: '*I was hardly going to go to college after all that - especially as most of the people who'd given me a hard time were going to go to college'*. Some of these young people said they were interested in participating in learning in the future - however, due to their negative experiences of schooling, they were usually **most interested in work-based options**.

Even though the majority of those **sustained in a JWT** had positive or mixed experiences of school, the small subset of young people who were averse to education or training stood out for having had considerably more negative experiences. Their negative experiences of schooling, combined with generally low levels of achievement at GCSE, had led them to choose a JWT and made them very **reluctant to engage in learning in the future**.

Interviewees in the **transition** group, on the verge of re-engaging in some form of **education or training**, generally spoke **most positively about their school experiences**. As discussed in Section 5.2.1, their reasons for choosing a JWT were very rarely linked to their pre-16 experiences. One of them, for example, had considered going to college but had subsequently moved out of home to live with her boyfriend. She had found that she could not afford to study despite being eligible to receive the EMA. The others had moved on to either sixth-form or college, but had dropped out and got a job instead. However, there were three young people in this group with no GCSEs at grades A*–C, including one with no qualifications, who all spoke very negatively of their schooling experience and had initially chosen not to participate in education or training post-16. However, these young people were generally more open to engaging in **work-related learning**, although they were reluctant to engage in more formal education as a result of their negative school experiences.

5.3.2 What was their experience of the transition at 16?

Key messages

Interviews with young people in JWT showed that lack of adequate pre-16 advice is rarely the main reason for these young people choosing not to engage in education or training, with the exception of those who had gone into a JWT after dropping out of post-16 education or training. Instead, the most common reasons are:

- the financial incentive of working

- aspiring to a more adult identity

- lack of apprenticeship placement opportunities

- disengagement from learning.

This suggests that policies aimed at re-engaging young people in JWT need to consider how to provide more opportunities and financial incentives to encourage such young people to choose apprenticeships and other work-based learning opportunities.

Interviews with young people in JWT revealed that the **post-16 decision making process** was frequently fairly **haphazard** and **based on impulse rather than clear planning**. The large majority of interviewees (32 of the 41 in JWT) said that they had spoken to a Connexions advisor while still at school and were generally positive about the advice received. However, many young people said that they had subsequently ignored this advice or changed their minds after leaving school. One young woman, for example, who had had a series of jobs since leaving school said:

> *Connexions was easy to talk to. But I don't think anything they could have said to me would have changed what I did. I know now that they were 100 per cent right and I should have listened to them and stayed on to do A-levels and got my grades and knuckled down. But at the time, I just wanted to get out there and make some money.*

Such a view was most likely to be expressed by young people **sustained in a JWT** - both by those open and averse to education or training. Of the 16 interviewees in this group, 11 young people said that they had not really considered any other options other than getting a job after leaving school. Some of them had thought about, for example, going to college while still at school and even discussed it with a Connexions advisor, but had changed their minds once they had left school. For many of them, the period of time after completing their exams seemed to function almost like a 'cooling off period' in which any advice previously received was rejected in favour of pursuing a job.

Those young people who had moved into a post-16 learning option, but had subsequently dropped out, were generally the least satisfied about the pre-16 advice they had received. Even though almost all of them said that they had spoken to a Connexions advisor, several of them said they had not been informed about all the options available to them. One girl, for example, who had achieved nine GCSEs at grades A*-C complained that:

> *Most schools in Year 11 suggest that you should go and look round the colleges, but at [my school], it was more: "Come to our sixth form". They didn't let any colleges come in to talk to us, they just expected us to go onto their sixth form, which wasn't for me. ... College is meant to be like a step between secondary school and uni, whereas sixth form was just like school, it wasn't any different. If I'd have had the knowledge about going to college, I wouldn't have had a year out.*

Similarly, another boy who had stayed on at school to study A-levels said that '*I told Connexions I was staying on, so I got very little advice really'*. Both interviewees felt that they would have benefited from more information on all the options available to them.

Those who had not received any advice from Connexions, or were dissatisfied with the help received, appeared to be more likely to say that they had been influenced by their **parents' advice**. Thus, several interviewees said that they had been encouraged by their parents to apply for a job rather than to continue in education or training. One interviewee who felt that Connexions staff had not helped him to make up his mind said that he had, therefore, simply followed his mother and father's advice:

> *My Mum and Dad had quite a lot to say about my choices. They were quite keen on me getting out to work; they didn't want me to go to college. My Dad was like: 'Oh go out and earn some money, you will like it'.*

It is also worth noting that some interviewees appeared to have drifted into taking up a JWT. Several interviewees said that they had not been able to choose what to do on leaving school and had started working with **no clear objective**. One young man, for example, felt that he had too many options available to him. He had initially followed his friends and applied for a college course, but had changed his mind shortly before the course started. He had, therefore, started working as a catering assistant in a hotel as a short-term solution because he could not make up his mind:

> *Connexions were quite good. It was just that for me, I just didn't know what I wanted to do. It was like when they were asking what sort of things I'd like to do, I was like 'I don't know'. We had various open days, and stuff like that. So that was fine. But maybe it was a bit too much even.*

This young man was considering going back to college, but still was not sure whether it was the right option for him. He was also considering starting an apprenticeship, or just staying in current job '*and working my way up'*.

However, for most respondents, starting a JWT was an **active choice** that, in most cases, set them apart from their peers. Asked what the main options were to young people in their area when they leave school, most interviewees said that their friends had stayed on at school or gone to college. Those going straight into a job said they were in a minority, sometimes because very few jobs were available in the locality or just because most of their peers decided to continue in education. As one interviewee commented:

> *To be honest, from what I know I was the only one that went straight out of school straight into work. Most stayed on to sixth form or college. A mate of mine left school and went to college and works part-time on weekends. But I don't know anyone who is just working like me.*

Interviews with young people also showed that most had got their jobs via **an informal network of friends and relatives**. Many of those interviewed said that there were very few jobs locally for young people aged 16 or 17 and that they had been lucky to find work. Overall, of the 41 interviewees, 14 said they had got their job because a member of their family already worked there, while six said a friend had either helped them or, at least, told them about the job opportunity. Two young people were working within a family business. Otherwise, six respondents said that they had got the job with the help of Connexions staff, while 13 had found work using their own initiative.

The **main reasons** for choosing a JWT included:

- the attraction of earning money

- aspiring to a more adult identity

- lack of apprenticeship placement opportunities

- disengagement from learning.

The **financial incentive** associated with working was the most commonly mentioned reason for choosing a JWT. One respondent, who seemed very aware of the options available to her, explained her reasons for choosing a JWT rather than engaging in an apprenticeship:

> I spoke to Connexions a few times at school. They gave me quite a few printouts and kept emailing about the jobs they thought I might like, and even apprenticeships - but apprenticeships didn't really do it for me. One was at a travel agent, which I quite fancied, but it was only £80 a week and I thought I could be earning a lot more by going to work.

Several interviewees commented on how their decision had helped to finance a life-style which they would not have been able to afford if they had remained in education or training. For some it had enabled them to leave home and '*live with my boyfriend'*, while others said it had, for example, allowed them to buy a car: '*I probably wouldn't be where I am now if I had gone to college because I drive and I wouldn't really be able to afford to do that'*. One girl, for example, compared her experience with some of her friends who had remained in learning: '*A couple of friends have gone to college but most have stayed in sixth form. They are enjoying it but they've got no money'*.

Another reason for choosing the JWT route rather than participating in learning included aspiring to more of an **adult identity** than could be achieved through staying on at school or in college. One young man, for example, who had achieved six GCSEs at grades A*–C, explained his reason for seeking employment on leaving school:

> I don't know why, but I just don't fancy college. That's why I also didn't go to sixth form. I don't really like education like that. I prefer it when they talk to you like an adult rather than just as a pupil. Some teachers are ok, but you're just treated like any other pupil. But at work it's different somehow.

Some young people had tried to get an apprenticeship to enable them to work in a more adult environment and earn at the same time. However, several interviewees said that **lack of placement opportunities** had prevented them from going down this route. They had, therefore, chosen a JWT as the only genuine alternative available to them. In the words of one interviewee:

> *I came to this office* [Connexions] *and looked at the vacancy board and applied for two or three apprenticeships in engineering, computer work and something else I can't remember. But they were all unsuccessful. So I decided to send out my CV to some companies and got lucky with* [current job]. *It's a hotel - just doing some 'waiting on' in the restaurant. I was just a casual staff when I started but after that they offered me a permanent contract, so now I'm full-time doing that.*

Finally, as already discussed in Section 5.3.1, another common reason for choosing a JWT related to interviewees' **negative experiences of schooling**.

5.3.3 What was their experience post-16?

> **Key messages**
>
> Young people's differing reasons for being in a JWT can be seen as presenting different policy challenges:
>
> - those sustained in a JWT need to be shown how further learning, possibly within their current jobs, could benefit them in the future
>
> - those choosing a JWT as a stop-gap need to receive the necessary guidance to make the right choices about their future education or training and the support to help sustain their involvement
>
> - those in a JWT still undecided about their future might need to be given more opportunities to try out different types of learning options.

The research showed that young people had entered a JWT via different post-16 routes and for very different reasons, including:

- **moving straight into a JWT after leaving school** - most of these young people enjoyed their jobs and hoped to progress with their current employers

- **getting a JWT after dropping out of post-16 learning** - for most of these young people, the JWT was seen as just a stop-gap before moving onto some form of education or training

- **getting a JWT following a variety of other activities**, including staying on at school, going to college, starting an apprenticeship, having another JWT, engaging in informal learning opportunities, travelling, claiming job seekers' allowance or just staying at home – many of these young people remained undecided about their future direction; in some cases, the JWT had helped to clarify their career objectives, but other young people seemed still unsure about what to do next.

Those young people categorised as being **sustained in JWT** were, perhaps unsurprisingly, most likely to have moved into a JWT straight after school and had retained these jobs or, in some cases, moved between different jobs without training. Most of them were happy with their jobs. The challenge associated with this group of young people is to show them how further learning could benefit them and to motivate them to seek opportunities related to their current work roles.

Those categorised as being **in transition** had often got a job after dropping out of some form of post-16 learning which they had left because it had not served their needs or for other personal reasons. However, as highlighted in Section 5.2.1, this job was often only regarded as a 'stop-gap' before moving onto other education or training. Others in this group, however, had also moved on to college or sixth form, but their negative experiences had initially put them off and they had got a JWT with no clear intention of returning to

education or training. The experience of working had, though, helped to re-engage them – either by opening up the possibility of completing a work-based qualification or completing a college course relevant to their employment. One young man, for example, had left school with five GCSEs A*-C and started a college course in food manufacturing, but he had found the course not practical enough and been dissatisfied with the teaching: '*the teachers were not explaining anything and we didn't cook enough'.* He had dropped out and started a job working as a trainee chef - he had recently been offered the opportunity to complete *'an NVQ course in catering that I can do while still work, with one day day-release to college'.*

Other interviewees, notably those **at risk of being NEET** and other in the transition group, spoke of much more disjointed and non-linear post-16 transitions, changing routes on several occasions and remaining undecided about the future. This included one 18-year-old who had left school with seven GCSEs at levels D-G and done nothing for the first few weeks. After that she had started an E2E course and moved onto an apprenticeship in administration, but had left after three months. Subsequently she had worked in a coffee shop with her mother for a few months, had a job as a tele-canvasser for six months, a job selling hair products on the street, and had recently found employment in a warehouse. She was now considering starting a course in childcare or administration at college, but said that she might stay in her current warehousing job as it was quite well-paid.

5.4　What did professionals perceive as the main reasons for young people choosing a JWT?

> **Key messages**
>
> - Professionals identified a variety of '**push' and 'pull' factors** which led some young people to choose a JWT at 16 or 17. The main push factors were negative experiences of schooling, low self-confidence and lack of opportunities for work-based learning. The lure of earning money was seen to be the main pull factor for starting a JWT.
>
> - In order to engage more young people in work-based learning, more needs to be done to:
>   - ➢ Raise employers' awareness of apprenticeships
>   - ➢ Persuade more employers to offer apprenticeship placements
>   - ➢ Provide more financial incentives to small employers or raise awareness of existing support such as Train2Gain among small employers
>   - ➢ Encourage more opportunities for work-based learning at Level 1 or below for those young people not ready to start an apprenticeship.

Professionals differentiated between different '**push' and 'pull' factors**, which led some young people to choose a JWT. Interviewees said that at 16, it was often such push factors as an aversion to education or training, negative views of college, and low self-confidence in their own academic abilities that pushed young people away from learning and into employment. A Connexions personal advisor, for example, said:

> *I suppose with the 16-year-olds I come across, there is a push-pull factor - and as they get older there is more of a pull towards things. For some Year 11s who will be leaving, it's more of a push factor away from school and getting away from the full-time education system.*

Several respondents said that a **negative experience of schooling** and **low achievement at GCSEs** often combined to put young people off further learning even in an alternative setting such as college. It was said that some of these young people could be motivated to engage in work-based learning via an apprenticeship. However, a **lack of apprenticeship**

placement opportunities, particularly for low achievers, prevented many of them from engaging. One Connexions PA, for example, commented:

> *When I have a young person coming in who wants plumbing, my heart sinks because I know how difficult it is going to be for that young person. The only apprenticeships I have known young people to get is when they know the person - a family friend - or if they're working in the family business. It's incredibly tough for them.*

Many respondents agreed that the lack of apprenticeship placements was an important factor for many young people choosing employment without training. In some cases, this was said to be due to **employer resistance** to offering such opportunities, sometimes as a result of negative previous experiences, but also due to **lack of awareness**. One Connexions PA, for example, said that he had '*contacted employers about training and it's all been a bit alien to them. I think there's often a bit of a lack of awareness there'*. Others said that particularly small organisations did not have the **resources** to take on apprentices. One respondent in a college reported her experiences of trying to engage such employers:

> *I'm friends with a plumber, who is run off his feet and so is not able to take on an apprentice even though he would like to. He's willing to commit, but he doesn't have the time at the moment. This is happening quite a lot in the trades - there are a lot of one-man shows.*

Another PA, who worked mainly with young people with learning difficulties and low achievers, also commented on the **limited options to complete NVQs at Level 1** in the work-place:

> *For my particular caseload, it is often the only option, because the training is generally Level 2. There is no training up to Level 1 we can get for young people - they can get it full-time in college, but they can't actually get it in the workplace. All the trainers that used to offer the Level 1 training don't do it anymore.*

The main **pull factor** for young people going into a JWT was said to be the **desire to earn money** as soon as possible after leaving school. In some cases, young people were said to be under pressure from their parents or due to their personal circumstances '*to get money into the household as quickly as they can'*. Even though some young people were, in theory, willing to consider work-based learning, the lack of placement opportunities and the **pay differential** between jobs without and those with training meant that Connexions staff found it difficult to persuade many young people to choose this route. One interviewee, for example, related her experiences of trying to persuade one of her clients to start an apprenticeship:

> *With his part-time job … he is perhaps earning £200 a week selling on the phone. So you tell him about an apprenticeship and it's all I can do to stop him laughing: "Why would I do that for £80 per week?" So that's the conversation we keep having.*

Easy access to jobs without training was also said to be a pull factor for many young people. In some cases, they were said to be able to access such jobs via family networks or via employment agencies, which offered fairly well paid, low skills jobs with no employment security or training opportunities. The importance of family contacts in enabling young people to access such jobs echoes the experiences of those interviewed as part of this study (see Section 5.3.2). As one Connexions PA explained, for some young people such links provided relatively easy access to good wages:

> *They've slipped into it, either through family or friends of the family and the networks around them. And they're being paid and they that they're probably quite rich for their age, and so they feel that it's not necessary to train.*

Professionals said it was a particular challenge to persuade such young people to take a more long-term view, when the financial rewards of working seemed so attractive in the short-term. As one interviewee put it:

> *Like the lad I'm seeing this afternoon, he's said 'I just want money'. And you say, well that money isn't going to improve any unless you get some training. And he's like: 'Well, I don't care, I just want the money'.*

It is worth noting, that many of the professionals interviewed often regarded being in a JWT as a **fairly positive activity**, especially for those young people leaving school with no or very few qualifications. This was seen to be particularly the case, for example, for those who '*don't feel that they've got the intelligence to carry on in any sort of education'*. Doing a JWT offered them the chance to '*set their sights at a certain level and know that they can accomplish that'*. It was hoped that this positive experience of achievement could lead some to further learning in the future.

Several interviewees also thought that it was preferable for school-leavers who did not want to continue in learning, or who could not decide what route to pursue, to get a JWT at 16. Respondents observed that many of these re-engaged in education or training at later stage when they had matured somewhat or come to realise the value of qualifications. This view was expressed by a Connexions senior manager in the following way:

> *Some young people just want to get in there and learn the job on a day-to-day basis and just earn some money. And at 16, I would have said that was OK. So at the time they just want to get out of school because they hate it and get into a job; and they work really hard and they don't do training - that comes at a later date when they are more mature and there are more options available to them.*

5.5   What were young people's attitudes towards future participation?

Key messages

Even though most young people were open to engaging in education or training in the future, and saw the value of qualifications, support and guidance need to be provided to young people to ensure that:

- they clearly understand the likely benefits of achieving particular types of qualifications on future job prospects or earnings
- those in JWT are made aware of the work-based or work-related training options available to them
- they are aware that they have the right to ask employers for time off work to complete such training.

Most interviewees saw the importance of acquiring qualifications and were at least thinking about further learning in the future. Those young people in the **transition** group, who did not see their current jobs just as a stop-gap, stood out for being most interested in engaging in training in their current work-places. Several had been offered to do NVQs or other work-related qualifications by their current employers and they had all *'jumped at the offer'* and were planning to start the training in the near future. Several of those **sustained in a JWT** but open to education or training also said that they would be interested in engaging in training leading to a qualification as part of their current jobs. However, unlike those interviewees in the transition group, they had so far **not been offered or asked their employers** for the opportunity to do so. Indeed, several interviewees said that even though they were interested to do a work-related qualification, they thought they could only do it if it was offered to them. One girl, for example, said:

> *I wouldn't mind doing some training, but I wouldn't want to go to college. I'd want to be trained in my workspace. But I'm not sure how I'd go about doing that.*

The only interviewees that stood out for not wanting to engage in further learning, as could be expected, were those seen as being **sustained in a JWT** and averse to education or training, who just wanted to work. All four of them said that they were not interested in doing any training leading to a qualification as part of their current jobs. They were also the group least likely to **rate qualifications** as important, often referring to their own or relatives' experience of being able to find work with no or very few qualifications. One interviewee, for example, said:

> *I know a lot of people that have got jobs without qualifications. My Dad left school without qualifications and has been in a quarry for 30-odd years. I left without qualifications and have got a job.*

Other young people said that even though they were considering re-engaging in education or training, they were not sure whether achieving more qualifications would really help them in the future. Several respondents referred to the experiences of relatives or friends to support their view. In the words of one interviewee:

> *I've spoken to loads of adults who've got loads of qualifications and I think my mum has as well, and they just say it's got them nowhere and they're happy doing what they're doing not using their qualifications. My brother did PE A-level and Spanish and he wanted to go over to Spain and teach English but he never did and he's just working in Tesco.*

Finally, all three of the young people in the **'at risk of becoming NEET'** sub-group thought that they might engage in education or training in the future. Given the transient nature of the current work they were involved in, none of them expected this to be linked with their current employment. They were also aware that they needed to overcome other challenges such as *'finding a place for me to live, I can't keep moving every few weeks'* before they could seriously consider engaging in education or training.

5.6   Conclusions

These interviews have confirmed the findings of the segmentation analysis and of previous research that the young people in JWT do not form a homogenous group. Instead, they have chosen this route often for very different reasons, have very different previous experiences, and also differ in their attitudes towards qualifications and future engagement in education or training. The analysis in this chapter has highlighted particular characteristics of young people according to the three JWT segments identified in Chapter 2.

The young people categorised as **sustained in a JWT** included some who were averse to education or training and others who were more open to it. The main policy challenges of engaging the former include:

- convincing them of the benefits of achieving qualifications

- overcoming their negative perceptions of learning

- encouraging them to seek opportunities to engage in training while working.

Those interviewees sustained in a JWT but more open to further learning, were often reluctant to do so because of lack of information about the options available to them and financial concerns. This suggests that these types of young people need:

- more help from either Connexions or providers on how to engage in training while working

- support to enable them to choose qualifications that will support their career development.

Young people in the **'at risk of becoming NEET'** group faced many, often personal barriers to sustained participation in learning. They also often had negative experiences of schooling and achieved very few qualifications. Even though some of them were, in theory, open to engaging in work-based learning, their personal issues and previous experiences of education suggested it was quite unlikely they would do so. These young people would, therefore, need:

- support in overcoming any personal barriers as a first step towards engaging them in learning

- help in developing the personal and social skills needed to keep engaged in and complete relevant qualifications

- offers of work-based or work-related learning options at entry level or Level 1, to re-engage them in learning and provide opportunities for progression to higher levels.

Most of those in the **transition group**, who either saw the JWT as a stop-gap or had re-engaged in learning as a result of working, were usually very motivated and likely to engage in training in the near future and do not, therefore, appear to present so much of a policy challenge. It is important though to ensure that they:

- receive enough guidance and support to ensure that they sustain and complete their chosen education or training options.

Finally, those categorised as in the transition group who had plans to participate in further learning but were still fairly undecided about what to do next, presented more of a policy challenge. These young people often lacked direction, were not sure of the value of formal qualifications and had drifted into a JWT. Even though they were all considering various education or training options, many of them still felt undecided about their future and there was a risk that they might stay in their current employment. It seems that such young people, therefore, need:

- to receive intensive support and guidance to help them make positive decisions about their future

- to be given the opportunities to explore different learning options to help them choose what suits them best

- to be shown how specific qualifications can help them achieve different career objectives.

6 Re-engaging young people who are NEET or in JWT in education and training

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Key findings

- Young people who had re-engaged had previously been NEET or in a JWT because they were waiting for a course to start, were taking some time out or wanted to earn money when they left school. They were also NEET or in a JWT because they had complex lives, were disillusioned with learning, or had experienced bullying and social isolation.

- Some young people had re-engaged in learning because they had always intended to do so and were NEET or in a JWT while they waited for a course to start. Others had realised that learning was worthwhile, or wanted to improve their circumstances. Some continued to be undecided and were engaged in learning to explore options.

- The time that young people had spent NEET or in a JWT had provided them with the space to reflect, the opportunity to explore possibilities and to experience employment.

- The evidence from the journeys of these young people shows that, in order for young people to re-engage and for the policy of raising the participation age to be a success, there is a need for provision to be appropriate in terms of content, delivery and timing and for young people to receive good quality guidance and support from the Connexions Service. In addition, awareness of, and access to, financial support is necessary for some young people.

- Most of the 120 young people interviewed as part of this study responded positively to the notion of raising the participation age to 18. While they recognised that they might have resented it when they were 16, they appreciated the value of continued engagement in learning post-16. They also thought it would encourage providers to give them 'a second chance'.

- Where interviewees did not welcome the policy of raising the participation age to 18 this was because they did not like being compelled to participate. In addition, some did not appreciate the value of education and training in terms of longer-term financial and employment gains and considered that the opportunity to learn by experience would be lost.

6.1 Introduction

This chapter focuses on those young people who had experienced periods of being NEET and/or in JWT but who were currently re-engaged in education, employment or training. The chapter examines:

- the characteristics of young people who re-engaged

- the nature of the barriers to re-engaging

- what motivates young people to re-engage in education or training and what facilitates or supports this.

6.2   What were the characteristics of interviewees who were previously NEET or in JWT and were now participating in education, employment and training?

A total of 39 young people who had re-engaged in either education or training following a period of being NEET, in JWT, or a combination of both were interviewed. Seven interviewees were aged 16, 25 were aged 17 years, six were aged 18 years and one interviewee had just turned 19 years old. Seventeen of the interviewees were female and 22 were male. The qualifications profile of the interviewees was:

- four had achieved 5 GCSEs at grades A*-C or more

- 12 had at least one GCSE at grade A*-C but less than five GCSEs at grades A*-C

- 16 had achieved no GCSEs at grade A*-C, but at least one GCSE at grade D-G

- seven had no previous qualifications.

Many of the young people shared characteristics associated with the 'open to learning NEET' and 'undecided NEET' segments, or the 'transitional JWT' groups, identified in the segmentation analysis. It is more likely that they will reflect these segments as young people who were categorised as such were more likely to have re-engaged, as these young people had done. However, some had characteristics associated with being 'sustained NEET' or 'sustained in JWT' previously, such as complex lives and less positive experiences of school. Overall, it appears that, by the end of compulsory schooling, although this group of young people had different experiences of the education system what they had in common, was varying degrees of disillusionment, or apathy in terms of continuing with education at that particular point in time, or they were not adequately prepared for the decisions they were being expected to make.

A variety of factors had led these young people to be NEET or in a JWT when they left school at 16 before they subsequently re-engaged. To some extent these reflected the issues for the interviewees who were currently NEET or in JWT, outlined in Chapters 4 and 5, and can be summarised as follows.

- **Taking some 'time-out'** - some young people had taken time after completing compulsory education to have some 'breathing space' either out of choice or out of necessity such as where they had some caring responsibilities for parents or siblings.

- **Having a financial imperative** - some young people were keen to start to earn money after leaving school. While this was often as a result of a desire for financial independence, it was occasionally necessary due to financial pressures at home.

- **Disillusionment with education and learning** - reflecting the experience of their peers who were currently NEET or in a JWT, discussed in Chapters 4 and 5, some young people were disillusioned with school and, when they had completed compulsory schooling, could see no value in further learning or qualifications.

- **Social problems and bullying pre-16** - some interviewees reported that they had found it difficult to make friends and/or had experienced bullying at school and consequently had a negative experience of learning environments.

- **Waiting for a course to start** - as noted in previous chapters, some interviewees who had re-engaged had been NEET or in a JWT for a period while they waited for a course to start. In general, they had been unhappy with their original choice after leaving school and had left early. Nevertheless, there were instances of young people who had not

been accepted on a course, and of those who were too late applying for a course that started in the term after leaving school. Some of these young people felt that they had limited their choices at 16 and advised others to '*keep your options open, apply for a few courses…*'.

- **Complex lives** - some interviewees had complex issues, such as learning needs, problems at home, mental health issues and homelessness which had prevented them from continuing into learning post-16.

In summary, these interviewees were similar to their peers who were currently NEET or in a JWT in the factors that had led to them not engaging in further education or training post-16. However, they differed from those who were NEET or in a JWT because they had chosen to re-engage in learning by the time they were interviewed. The factors that had led them to do so are discussed next.

6.3   What re-engages young people who are NEET or in JWT in education and training?

Young people who were waiting for a course to start tended to be fairly high achievers, with long-term career aspirations and ambitions to achieve in the future. They had **re-engaged in learning because they had always intended to do so and simply had to wait for an opportunity**. Most of the young people in this group had re-engaged as a result of being able to undertake short-term taster courses or being accepted on courses with a later starting date. For example, three of the seven young people in this group had started a course in January and a further young person had started a course in April. Another young person, who had applied unsuccessfully to do a mechanics course at 16 was subsequently invited to a taster day at his local college which provided an alternative option for him and had '*never looked back since'.*

Young people also reported that they had re-engaged as a result of reflecting on their school experience, and the value of qualifications, and **realised that learning was worthwhile** and regretted not engaging previously. For example, one young person who had re-engaged explained that:

> *at the beginning people just mess about thinking that them years don't matter when they actually do. When I was younger, I was like, 'yeah, stuff those years, they don't matter'. And you get in to Year 10 and you're stuck, you don't know anything. You come to GCSEs and you're like 'God, what's that, I've never seen that before'.*

Similarly, the experience of working was instrumental in some young people recognising the limitations to their futures and choices unless they undertook some further learning and gained qualifications. However, it is worth noting that the time they spent in a job also provided an opportunity for them to gain knowledge and understanding which contributed to their learning once they re-engaged, illustrated in the example of one interviewee shown in Box 12 below.

Box 12: Young person who re-engaged after time spent in a JWT

Neil had been working in a JWT for a year since leaving school aged 16 years. Despite achieving four GCSEs at grades A*-C he had decided to find employment after leaving school primarily because he had recently found himself homeless and needed money to support himself. He also felt that he had very little support from his family. A year after leaving school he began a two-year course in construction and civil engineering. He found out about the course himself because he decided, '*with this course I can build myself a career'*. Neil has struggled financially and he works part-time in order to fund himself through his college course. He feels that '*without having that year off to work then I wouldn't have the knowledge to come here and do what I'm doing now. So that year helped me come here.*'

While some young people had re-engaged in education or training at the time of the interview, it was apparent that they were still **exploring a range of options** and continued to lack a clear direction. Their re-engagement was motivated by trial and error as in the case of one who said '*hairdressing is not always something I wanted to do, but Connexions said give it a go*'. In this respect, they were similar to the 'undecided NEET' and there was a risk that their apparent re-engagement was not self-motivated and could be short-term. This undecided, exploratory approach is illustrated in Box 13.

Box 13: Young person who was continuing to explore a range of options

Tim left school at 16 years with eight GCSEs at grades D-G. He is currently studying ICT (Level 2) and adult numeracy on a six month course that had a January start. He explained, '*I've wanted to do 100s of different things. My life's too short do all the things I want to do.*' In the past Tim had completed a plastering course and plumbing and was now considering doing a course in Critical Thinking. He also explained, '*Eventually, I want to fly helicopters'.* Tim had not had a particularly positive experience of school but he had ambitions to start up his own web-based business and this ambition was a key factor in driving him forward. His dilemma was establishing the most effective route towards achieving this ambition and his solution was to try as many avenues as possible until he reached his goal.

In contrast, some young people were motivated to re-engage in learning in order **to improve their circumstances** and were often driven to overcome complex barriers to achieve this. They expressed a desire to '*do something with my life*' and '*get back on the road*' to a career and were determined not to '*give up*'. An example of one young woman is shown in Box 14.

Box 14: Young person motivated by a desire to change her circumstances

Anne left school half-way through Year 9. She had experienced episodes of bullying at school and had a period of ill health. She did not achieve any GCSEs but feels that having qualifications is important. Anne is currently studying for an NVQ Customer Service and Beauty Level 1 which she heard about through a course of home visits by Connexions. She has a very supportive family and, despite problems at school, explained, '*I wanted an education, I wanted to do something with my life.*' She is positive about finishing the course and feels she has made the right choice.

It appears from the journeys and motivations articulated by these young people that, for some, there was some value in the time that they spent NEET or in a JWT which is worthy of consideration. It is evident that this time:

- provided a **space** for some young people **to reflect** on the value of learning and to consequently make the decision themselves to participate in learning, as distinct from being compelled to do so pre-16

- gave them the **opportunity to explore** a range of possibilities

- gave them **experience of employment** and awareness of the limitations of having few or no qualifications

- enabled some young people to **address some other commitments that were barriers to engaging** when leaving school, such as care commitments or lack of finance.

While the time spent NEET or in a JWT could serve a useful purpose in young people's subsequent engagement, it was evident that, when they had reached a point of wishing to re-engage in learning, it was important that someone was available to build on this self-motivation and to guide and support the young person into an appropriate education or training destination. It was evident that one of the key factors that was instrumental in supporting the re-engagement of the interviewees was the support of Connexions Personal Advisers. Their role, and other factors that facilitated re-engagement, are presented in the next section.

6.4   What support is required to facilitate re-engagement?

The evidence emerging from the interviews with young people who had re-engaged in learning, in addition to the reflections of professionals who support young people who are NEET or in a JWT, indicated that a number of strategies and factors facilitate re-engagement in education and training.

6.4.1   Support from Connexions

Many interviewees identified the importance of the support they had received from Connexions in helping them re-engage in education or training. For example, one young person explained:

> *Basically they [Connexions] were advising me what's good and that I could go to college and [they advised] what they thought was best for me because I wanted to learn something. If I hadn't gone to college and been given that advice I would have just sat at home.*

Connexions was important in re-engaging young people because Personal Advisers often signposted learning opportunities which the young people previously may not have considered both in terms of a particular area of learning or a career, or a type of course such as a taster course. The Connexions service was particularly important in supporting those young people who had left school with few or no qualifications by signposting E2E courses and helping them achieve the first steps back to education or training. Many young people also valued Connexions for their impartial advice.

In addition to their role in guiding young people to appropriate courses, the support provided by Connexions Personal Advisers was important in bringing about a more positive attitude among young people towards themselves and what they felt they were capable of achieving.

Although the support provided by the Connexions Service was largely well-received and appreciated by young people, some interviewees felt that they could have received more support. In particular, some had felt pushed in a direction they did not want to go, or had not received enough encouragement to follow their desired career pathway.

6.4.2 Appropriate provision

In order for young people to re-engage, it was essential that appropriate provision that met their needs was available. In summary, provision was considered to be appropriate where it offered the following:

- **course content** which was relevant, appealing and engaging

- a **delivery approach** which was as unlike school as possible, including in alternative learning environments and work-based provision, and courses that were not solely lecture based but incorporated a combination of delivery methods

- **part-time** - in order to 'enable them to broach that gap a bit more. So they are still able to work but also able to better their education'

- **varied start dates** - including '*roll-on, roll-off*' courses

- local availability

- minimal assessment by examination.

Interim provision which supported young people to move from being NEET or in a JWT into further learning, such as E2E, was seen as important by many of the key professional interviewees. Indeed, it may be that short 'taster' courses may help some young people to achieve short-term goals that may motivate them to continue and to explore a variety of different options to help those young people who are undecided to refine their choices.

6.4.3 Funding and financial support

Funding and financial issues are key barriers to engagement for some interviewees and, while financial support helped some young people to re-engage, there was also a need for some to change their attitude and financial expectations. The value of the EMA was evident for some young people who had received it, such as one interviewee who indicated that she could not have coped with re-engagement without it and said '*I wouldn't be able to get here for a start and I also need to pay for some equipment*'. However, whilst many young people had heard of EMA, some were unaware of how to access financial support, what different types of support were available to them and how to go about finding information about the support that was available to them. Therefore, strategies such as EMA that aim to address the financial barriers to engagement faced by some young people, need to be supplemented by ensuring that information about financial support is accessible and easy to understand.

6.4.4 Support from family and friends

In order to support young people to engage in education and training, there may be value in mobilising and building on the support that family and friends evidently provided. These individuals provided:

- financial support

- emotional support which helped improve a young person's self-confidence and self-belief which led to a change in attitude and subsequent re-engagement

- practical support, such as transport.

The support of families and friends was important in providing reassurance when, for example, job applications were unsuccessful. It also helped to motivate some who wanted to earn the respect of their family and make them proud of them. For example, one young person spoke of the impact his family had on him in inspiring him to go to college:

> *I've learnt that qualifications are important through my dad because he goes on a course every month … I'm used to my dad going away for a couple of days every month and coming back with a certificate and saying 'let's have a party'. And that's what I want. I want to say to my dad - 'right, it's my party now'*

Two implications emerge from this. First, a need to explore whether there is value in providing support for the family and friends who are supporting young people to engage in learning through ensuring that they have the skills and knowledge to guide their child or friend. Second, to explore how best to provide such support to young people who do not have this support from their own family and friends which, as noted in previous chapters, can be a feature of young people who are NEET or in a JWT.

6.5 What do young people and professionals think about raising the participation age?

Key messages

Almost half of the 120 young people interviewed were largely positive about the policy of raising the participation age because they thought it would:

- encourage young people to make more positive choices at 16
- require schools and colleges to give young people who had failed at school a second chance
- force providers to develop and offer courses suitable to all young people's needs, levels of learning and preferred learning styles.

Just over a quarter of the young people and most professionals expressed more negative views about the policy.

Young people and professionals thought that the success of the policy depended on:

- employers being encouraged to provide sufficient placement opportunities to allow more young people to engage in work-based learning
- schools, colleges and providers providing more practical and non-classroom based learning provision
- better financial incentives for those staying in education or training, including universal provision of EMA regardless of parental income and raising the level of EMA.

All young people were asked a question seeking their views on the proposed policy of raising the participation age - they were asked: 'If all 16 and 17 year olds *had* to do some form of education or training either full-time or part-time while working, what would you think about this?'. Their responses were then followed up with questions asking them what their friends who think about it and what would encourage young people to comply with this legislation. Professionals were also asked a similar set of questions.

Almost **half of the young people** interviewed (58 out of 120) were **largely positive** about the policy of raising the participation age (RPA). The proportion who were positive was quite surprising given all the negative press coverage and previous research findings on this subject. However, it is worth noting that several of those who thought it was *'a good thing'* or *'brilliant idea'* also said that although **they now recognised it to be so**, they would probably have resented it when they left school at 16. This was expressed in the following way by one girl who had left school to get a job without training and was now NEET and considering her options:

> *I would have been a mess - I would have been like: 'I'm not doing that!' But I do think it would be a good idea. Because when I left school, I was like 'Yes! I've done Primary School, I've done High School and that's it now. I don't want to do anymore of it'. But now I can see, I'd have been better off staying on.*

Others said that they wished that the policy had been in place as it would have forced them to make **a more positive choice at 16**. Thus, several interviewees said that because they had the option of dropping out, they had done so. However, with hindsight, they now wished that they had been encouraged more into continuing to participate in education or training. This was expressed in the following way by one young man:

> *What the government wants to do, I think it is a good thing, because it's making people carry on, it is pushing them more. I mean I think for me personally it was because I wasn't really pushed enough, only my family pushed me. If my teachers had told me to carry on and given me more options like I said a plan B, I would have done it then rather than leaving it till now.*

For many young people the proposed policy was viewed as a '*second chance offer*'. Several interviewees felt that they had failed in their education pre-16 for various reasons and that the education system had not really given them the chance to correct this failing - the RPA policy was seen as ensuring that schools and colleges **give them a second chance**. As one respondent put it:

> *I think it would be a good idea, because for kids like me who have been kicked out of school, it would give us another chance to get back into education.*

Many interviewees felt that under the current system, they had to '*fit the existing mould*' which they were often not suited to, but that the RPA policy would require providers to develop courses or make available **provision that would re-engage young people** and keep them engaged until they were 18. Thus, several interviewees said that under the current system they were often prevented from continuing in learning due to low grades or other factors. They appreciated that providers would need to cater for everyone's needs and *'not just the high achievers'*. One young person, for example, who had only achieved four GCSEs at grades D-G said that if the policy had been in place when he was 16:

> *I would have done college gladly. If they would have offered it straightaway and it was just handed to me on a plate, I would have done it, definitely. But it is quite hard to get into college just like that. Not everyone can do it, can they?*

It is also worth noting that several interviewees thought that once participating in education or training until 18 had become the norm, there would be much less resistance to the idea among young people. One respondent, who was currently NEET, likened it to having to get a passport to travel: '*It's like, you need a passport to leave the country, so you get one'.* Another interviewee said that, if this policy was '*introduced tomorrow, nobody would do it'.* But this would change once it became established:

> *Well I think if it was the norm nearly everyone would do it - the majority would do it, because it would help you get those qualifications. It is voluntary at the minute and no-one does it - well some do, but lots don't. If it was compulsory most would do it, because it was the norm.*

However, several young people emphasised that the success of the policy would depend on there being sufficient **non-classroom based provision** that would engage those disaffected by school and seeking opportunities for **more practical learning**. One interviewee, for example, said that provision would need to be made '*more fun, more physical. It depends, because people can be visual, practical, whatever works for them'.* Another young woman who had dropped out of college said that colleges needed '*better teachers, with better communication skills, who talk to you and are interested in you as an individual'.*

Young people's views were very much echoed in professionals' responses. Some of them said that even though many young people would resist the idea now, it would be much more successful once it had become the norm.

> *It has to be the norm. If you tell a 16 year old: 'Right, you need to stay on for two more years', then they're going to be like: 'Not fair'. But if you tell kids in primary school or really, really young that they're going to be in school till 18 then that's just the way it's going to be.*

They also emphasised that the success of the policy depended on sufficient and relevant provision: '*It'll fall flat on its face if the provision is not there*' and '*I think people need the right provision on offer. It needs to be tailored to the individual*'.

While several young people and professionals commented on the need for more engaging post-16 courses in both schools and colleges, many more respondents identified the need for **more jobs with training or apprenticeships** to engage those wanting or needing to earn money while learning. Thus, several young people, especially those in JWT, said they would have happily chosen an apprenticeship if they could have found a placement at 16. Others said that the RPA policy would only be a success *'if the government helps us more, findings jobs with training. I wouldn't want to be stuck in a classroom till I'm 18'.*

Most of the 39 professionals interviewed concurred with the view that many of those young people currently choosing a JWT could be persuaded to start an apprenticeship instead. However, several of them recognised that this relied on much **more successful strategies of engaging employers** and persuading them to take on young people under the age of 18. They also said these had to be in place before the RPA policy '*goes into action, because otherwise it will end up with being all classroom-based activities and learners will just disengage*'. Some interviewees said that the only way of engaging more employers, who are often reluctant to take on young people as apprentices, is to offer them **more financial incentives**. One professional said that the main barrier to engaging more employers was:

> *Money! We hear it again and again. 'What's in it for me? We're taking a young person, but they're no use. I've got to train them. I'm not spending my time and money training them, they might leave at the end, where's my incentive?'*

However, some professionals were concerned that adding more financial incentives to employers could encourage a '*substitution effect*' - that employers would take on more apprentices, but would not employ them at the end of their training, but instead replace them with other apprentices to save costs. As a result, young people would become disaffected with the apprenticeship route as it would no longer be viewed as leading to a job on completion of the training:

> *I think if apprenticeships are coming in* [as an alternative route for those in jobs without training]*, there has to be a guaranteed route into employment. So yes, you're going to spend two years of your life doing a job where you're paid less than you should be, but you're also going to get trained, and you're also going to come away with this qualification, and at the end of it you're going to get a guaranteed job. But I don't think that is going to happen, because if a company takes on say ten apprentices a year, then the next year there will be ten more, and there will come a point when there are not the jobs available to take on any more apprentices.*

Another key enabling condition for the success of the RPA policy identified by both professionals and around a quarter of young people was **increased financial support** for those staying in education or training. Suggested changes included the universal provision of EMA regardless of parental income and raising the level of EMA from £30 to £35 or more. As one interviewee put it: *'I know for a fact, if you put EMA up to £35, more people would carry on training'*. Another young woman thought it should be raised to £40 per week *'because I struggle on £30 at the moment. This will get even worse next year when my mum will stop getting child support and I'll have to give her £10 per week for food'*.

Other important factors to enable more young people to stay on post-16 included:

- better pre-16 experiences, including more engaging teaching, more vocational options, and better strategies to tackle bullying

- improved information, advice and guidance to make young people more aware of all the options available to them, including college tasters and more work experience opportunities

- more individual support for young people to help them stay engaged in learning, once they start at college or an apprenticeship.

Just over a quarter of the young people interviewed (31) expressed **negative views** on the proposed policy. Several interviewees saw the RPA policy as **infringing their freedom** to make their own choices - as one respondent put it: '*I think it's a bad idea, because you can't force people who are over 16 to do things they don't want to do. They will just leave'*. Others thought that this policy would prevent young people from *'making mistakes and learning from their mistakes, as I've done'*. This view was most likely to be expressed by young people who had re-engaged in education or training - they often saw the process of leaving school and getting a job without training as beneficial, as it made them aware of the value of qualifications. One young woman, for example, who had dropped out of sixth form, had worked for almost a year in retail and now wanted to do a college course to boost her progression opportunities in the retail industry, contended:

> *I don't think that would be fair, because I've learnt so much from having my year out. I've got so much experience from it, and I think that's a good basis to go to college on, to be honest. It's going to be going to college because I want to go there, not because I'm going just to get my qualifications. I'll be going to college to get my work done, not just to mess around. Yes, so I'm actually really glad I've had a year out, because it's taught me what I want to do in life.*

Some young people were also resistant to the proposed policy because they could not see the benefit of increased participation. One interviewee, for example, who was planning to go back to college himself said:

> *I think that's stupid. I know someone who is doing a job and his boss who also worked his way up is rich; he even has his own helicopter. I know a lot of people with jobs with no training and they're happy, so each to their own.*

It is worth noting, though, that some young people's negative reactions to the proposed policy were due to a **misconception** that RPA would force young people to stay in school until they were 18. Such a view was, for example, expressed by one young woman:

> *I've heard about the plans for participation until 18 and my little sister who is in Year 9 is already crying about it. She hates school already. So is my boyfriend's little sister who's nine. She's only nine and she wants to leave school already.*

When told that the RPA policy required young people to participate in any form of education or training including apprenticeships, several interviewees said that they were more in favour of such a policy. However, many young people still said that they objected to it being compulsory.

Most of the professionals interviewed also objected to the RPA policy - only six of the 39 respondents thought that overall it was a positive step. One interviewee, for example, lauded it as a 'very brave policy' and commented:

> *To be honest, I think it's great, because* [the young people] *need it, they really do. Because they've got the option, and they've got a lot more options than I've ever been given, as well, they can't decide what to do. They're not following it up. In all honesty, I think it's about laziness, and no motivation.*

Of the remaining interviewees, about half expressed largely negative views and half said they had strong reservations about the policy but could also see positive aspects to it. The main objection to the RPA policy was that it would not succeed in engaging those really disaffected young people, who would object even more to participating in learning if it was made compulsory. Some interviewees also thought that some of those currently willing to engage in learning would be put off:

> *There would just be more young people on the path to exclusion. If they don't want to be there, they won't be there. Even if other training or college was an option, they would still feel they were being forced to be there, whereas now hopefully it's their choice.*

Others said that they were not sure how those who really did not want to comply could be made to do so - they were concerned that it would lead some to be even more reluctant to engage with agencies such as Connexions as a result of this policy. They also objected to the **introduction of penalties** to try and force such young people to comply with it:

> *Most are willing to do it; it's the core group the problem would be with. And within this group there are a lot of young people with a lot of barriers and if they were penalised it would be another issue you were piling on them that they could kick against.*

Apart from the hardest to reach young people, professionals were also concerned about how to engage those young people who really wanted to leave school and get a job at 16. They felt that the wages paid to apprentices were too low to entice such young people to forego more highly paid job without any training. As one interviewee put it:

I suppose with the ones who come out of school and want to go straight into jobs, it's going to be the hardest. If they need the money - are they going to get paid an apprenticeship wage, which is going to be a lot less? If the family needs that income when they're 16 - what happens? That would probably be one of the biggest barriers.

6.6   Conclusions

It was apparent from many of the interviews with young people who had re-engaged in some form of education or training was that they had never really fully disengaged. Despite the fact that they experienced periods of being NEET or in JWT after leaving compulsory education, there was often an intention to return at some point and the point at which they returned varied for different young people depending on their circumstances.

Indeed, for some, the time that they had spent NEET or in a JWT had served a purpose for them by giving them time to reflect on their path through life and value of learning within that, and experience of employment and other opportunities that had helped them to refine their choices. It was also evident that, at the time when they felt ready to make a decision to re-engage in education or training, professionals such as Connexions Personal Advisers were often instrumental in supporting and guiding them in this process of re-engagement. While it may not be possible for policies to be devised that encourage young people to reflect and recognise the value of learning sooner, policy and practice can ensure that contact with young people is continued so that there is a known and trusted individual available to them at the time when they do consider re-engaging in learning.

Another key factor that is required to enable young people to re-engage is the need for appropriate provision to be available, including the need for work-based provision and employer involvement. Young people and professionals who were positive about the Raising the Participation Age policy held an expectation that the policy would help to improve the nature of provision and policy makers may wish to promote to young people, parents and professionals how and in what way, this will be achieved.

Finally, the evidence from the interviews with professionals indicated that they had some reservations about the Raising the Participation Age policy. These particularly related to the risk of it discouraging young people from contacting Connexions and concerns about the effect of any introduction of penalties for young people, some of whom have complex lives and issues with authority. As professionals who work with young people were often key in supporting re-engagement with learning, policy makers may wish to consider how best to communicate with, and gain the support of, professionals in order to ensure the effective implementation of the policy and improved outcomes for young people.

7 Conclusions and implications

7.1 Conclusions

This study provides strong evidence that young people in JWT and those who are NEET are not homogenous groups. Instead, it is possible to differentiate between a variety of sub-groups with different experiences, achievements and motivations. Analysis of the Youth Cohort Study (YCS) has helped to quantify the size of the six main sub-groups. It has shown that within those who are NEET, there is a very large sub-group of young people (41 per cent) who are NEET only in the short-term and ultimately re-engage in learning (classified as 'open to learning NEET'). The two remaining sub-groups are much less likely to re-engage and, therefore, present much more of a challenge to the government policy of ensuring that all young people participate in education or training up to the age of 18. These include about 38 per cent of young people who are NEET (classified as 'sustained NEET' as they were more likely to remain NEET for a longer period of time than those in the other two segments) who often face many challenging personal issues that prevent them from re-engaging, but also a smaller sub-group of about 22 per cent ('undecided NEET') who appear to remain NEET predominantly due to a dissatisfaction with the options available to them.

Within the young people who are JWT, the analysis of the YCS also distinguished three segments. The two largest groups consisted of young people 'sustained in a JWT' (48 per cent), who were very unlikely to re-engage in learning, and about a third of all those in a JWT (35 per cent), who were most 'at risk of becoming NEET'. The analysis also identified a smaller sub-group of young people, categorised as 'transitional in JWT', who like the 'open to learning NEET' sub-group, were very likely to re-engage in learning in the future.

Interviews with 120 young people who were NEET, in a JWT or who had recently re-engaged in education or training helped to explore these sub-groups further and examine the possible strategies for ensuring that these young people all participate in some form of learning until they are 18. This part of the research provided evidence of similarities and differences between some of the sub-groups identified through the analysis of YCS. In particular, it showed that:

- young people in a JWT categorised as 'being at risk of becoming NEET' and those who were 'sustained NEET' share many of the same characteristics and faced similar challenges to re-engagement.

- most interviewees in a JWT categorised as 'transitional' and those regarded as 'open to learning NEET' were very similar in that they were both very likely to include young people who had dropped out of learning post-16 but had definite plans to re-engage in learning

- some interviewees in a JWT categorised as 'transitional' and young people who were 'undecided NEET' were similar in struggling to decide on what courses or careers to pursue, but differed in their educational and employment histories.

Interviews with young people as well as professionals highlighted the fact that different strategies are needed to ensure that these different sub-groups of young people participate in learning until they are 18.

7.2   Implications

7.2.1   Young people who re-engage in the short-term

Within the NEET and JWT groups, two sub-groups (those who were 'open to learning NEET' and 'transitional JWT') have a greater tendency to re-engage with education and training in the short-term, most frequently through a course-based route. These two segments (who represent more than a quarter of the cohort) may, therefore, present less of a challenge to policy-makers and practitioners in terms of re-engaging them in education or training. However, it is evident that they have either not engaged in education or training on leaving school at 16, or have made a choice that was not right for them and so discontinued. In general, they then had to wait until later in the year to re-engage with an alternative course when it starts. Consequently, there would be value in **ensuring that such young people are provided with better information, advice and guidance pre-16, and made more aware of the range of options available to them, to ensure that they make a more appropriate choice for them.** The research has revealed that several young people felt that they had not been supported in exploring a wide range of options and had sometimes received advice that they felt did not encourage them to examine a wider range of post-16 locations of study.

In addition, in the context of raising the participation age to 18, those young people who realise that they have made the wrong decision will need to remain engaged in an alternative course as their current response, of being NEET or entering a JWT in the interim, will not be possible. **Provision will, therefore need to be flexible in terms of start dates in order to accommodate young people who make the wrong choice.**

7.2.2   Supporting young people who are in a JWT

The Connexions Service does not maintain such close contact with young people who are in JWT as they do with those who are NEET. The evidence suggests that young people in this position, including those who are 'sustained in JWT' and 'at risk of becoming NEET', therefore, are not proactively encouraged to re-engage in learning. However, the study suggests that many of them would be open to this, but perhaps need some **impetus or stimulation to explore the options most suited to them.** The evidence from interviews with professionals indicates that some young people begin to reflect on their situation and, at **around 18 years old**, they often start to explore alternatives and to consider re-engaging in education or training. **This age may be a key point, therefore, at which intervention by information, advice and guidance professionals could be targeted.** However, it is worth noting that it may be harder for young people to re-engage at this age due to the financial implications.

Another benefit of maintaining contact with young people who are in JWT is that it would enable guidance professionals to ensure that young people who re-engage in training when an opportunity was provided by their employer embark on appropriate training that provides development and progression.

7.2.3   Nature of provision

It was evident that, other than the sub-groups of young people who were 'open to learning NEET' or 'transitional JWT', young people who were NEET and in a JWT often had a preference for work-based provision. Overall, it appears that, in order to re-engage some young people in the context of raising the participation age, **provision will need to reflect their preferred mode of learning and developing. Given the generally lower levels of achievement among these sub-groups of those who are NEET and in JWT, more work-based provision would need to be available at Level 1.**

7.2.4   Young people who are content in a JWT

Young people, who were defined as 'sustained in a JWT' tended to be content in their occupation. This group is potentially challenging to re-engage in education or training as the research has revealed that some are content to remain in their role and either do not see the value of education or qualifications and/or are motivated by being able to earn. Nevertheless, it included some young people who were open to education and training through a **work-based route**. Indeed, some would have embarked on an **apprenticeship** but were unable to do so due to lack of availability of work placements. In order to meet the needs of such young people in the context of raising the participation age to 18, there is a need to **ensure that such provision is available and that young people are provided with guidance and direction to access it.**

7.2.5   Young people who are harder-to-reach

Within the cohorts of young people who are NEET and in JWT, some young people are particularly disinterested in engaging in education or training, often as a result of negative experience leading to disengagement with school pre-16. These young people are likely to require **strategies to address their aversion to education and training by making it more appealing and as unlike school and classroom-based activity as possible. This could include structured informal learning opportunities, which could help young people to appreciate the value of learning in a non-threatening way.**

7.2.6   Decision-making and maturity

One of the sub-groups to emerge from this research, who appear to be particularly challenging to re-engage fully in education or training, are those who are 'undecided NEET'. Such young people lack a clear direction and have a tendency to be dissatisfied with the available opportunities. The evidence suggests that, to some extent, this indecision is related to their maturity and, over time, many of them choose to engage. In addition, they may not always be open, pre-16, to hearing advice and guidance. The evidence suggests that a period of time in a JWT can be the catalyst to encouraging such young people to participate in education or training. Consequently, there may be value in **strategies that reflect the indecisive nature of this sub-group such as taster courses and opportunities to sample a range of employment opportunities. In addition, promoting the opportunity to 'bank' any elements of a qualification that they achieve through the Qualification and Credit Framework, might assist in ensuring that any achievements by such young people who change options can be built up over time.**

Table 7.1 illustrates the likelihood of re-engaging with learning for each of the segments and summarises the main barriers for each segment and the possible strategies to overcome them based on the evidence from this research.

7 Conclusions and implications

7.1 Summary of barriers to engagement and possible strategies for each segment

Segment	Size	Barriers	Possible solutions / strategies	
Open to learning NEET	41% of NEET 19% of NET	• Feel that they did not make the right choices at 16 including not choosing the right location of study • Dropped out of post-16 education or training	• Better pre-16 guidance and support • Need unbiased advice to explore a range of learning options and locations	
Transitional JWT	17% of JWT 9% of NET	• Some low level truanting and exclusion pre-16 suggests some dissatisfaction with formal education • Do not feel they were supported to consider all post-16 options available to them • Are motivated to engage in further learning but can lack direction or be undecided	• Better pre-16 guidance and support • Support when dropping out of post-16 learning before taking a JWT could help re-engage them sooner • Need unbiased advice to explore a range of learning options and locations, including apprenticeships or Diplomas	MOST LIKELY TO RE-ENGAGE
Undecided NEET	22% of NEET 10% of NET	• Dissatisfied with what is on offer – this may be that they are unrealistic or it may be that provision is not meeting their needs • Do not see value in education or qualifications • Had a negative experience of school and perceive post-16 learning to be the same as school • Lack skills to make positive decisions about future • Lack resilience to overcome obstacles when they are engaged and so drop-out	• Appropriate provision • Better guidance to manage their expectations in light of available provision and to explore a range of options including having experience of a variety of options • Help them to develop strategies to tackle obstacles • Raise their awareness of the value of qualifications	

Sustained JWT	48% of JWT 25% of NET	• Often ignored pre-16 guidance or changed mind after leaving school • Chose JWT sometimes because of lack of apprenticeship placement opportunities • Financial incentive is key reason for working • Often do not see benefits of achieving qualifications • Contented with their jobs • Dislike formal education as a result mixed/negative pre-16 experiences • Lack awareness of work-based learning opportunities available to them and are not pro-active in seeking training	• Offering a viable work-based route that offers clear future benefits and financial incentives • Encouraging more employers to offer apprenticeship placements • More opportunities for work-based learning below Level 2	**LEAST LIKELY TO RE-ENGAGE**
In JWT and at risk of becoming NEET	35% of JWT 18% of NET	• Low attainment and negative experiences of school • Lack planning skills • Lack support and guidance while they are in a JWT to help them re-engage in learning	• Offering a viable work-based route that builds on their motivation to work • Remaining in contact when they start on a JWT after school so that they are contacted before the leave their job and become NEET to identify alternative routes	
Sustained NEET	38% of NEET 18% of NEET	• Have complex needs • Parental unemployment • Few or no qualifications and a dislike of school leading to high levels of truancy and exclusion • Missing careers advice support as a result of missing school and are less likely to have any plans for their future • Lack of appropriate jobs	• Offering a viable work-based route • Improving their engagement pre-16 by providing more opportunities for applied learning and a mutually respectful environment between teachers and learners • Ensuring that appropriate provision is available post-16 including to those with low levels of achievement and/or learning difficulties including informal learning opportunities • Targeting preventative work and proactive careers advice at young people who truant or are excluded so they do not miss out and their horizons are broadened • Finding creative solutions to engaging young people in discussions about their futures including using adults whom they trust and ensuring that these adults are well-informed • Building on the motivation of some young people in this group to re-sit their GCSEs	

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Appendix A - Further details on the segmentation methodology

Tables A1 and A2 present the data from the segmentation analysis of the YCS. The tables detail the percentage of young people in each segment who gave each response to the questionnaire. Where relevant, whether the item was in the sweep 1 (S1) or sweep 2 (S2) questionnaire is indicated in the table. These findings are reported in Chapter 2 and the tables present the items from the questionnaire under the headings that are used in this chapter.

Table A1   Responses to the YCS for each sub-group within the NEET cohort - weighted data

Item	Response	Open to Learning %	Sustained %	Undecided %
Educational Attainment				
Highest Year 11 qualification	Level 2 or above	22	1	16
	Level 1	67	41	71
	Less than Level 1	11	58	13
Educational Experience				
How would you describe your overall experience at school in Years 10 and 11? (S1)	Very good	11	2	9
	Good	57	18	48
	Neither good nor poor	23	34	31
	Poor	6	27	9
	Very poor	2	19	3
Did you play truant in Year 11?	For weeks at a time	2	27	4
	For several days at a time	2	16	4
	For particular days or lessons	8	17	18
	For the odd day or lesson	35	26	40
	Never	52	14	34
Were you excluded from school at any point during Years 10 or 11?	Yes, permanent exclusion	1	11	2
	Yes, fixed term	7	42	19
	No	92	47	79
Future Activity				
Activity at sweep 2	In education/training	62	23	27
	JWT	21	19	16
	NEET	16	58	57
Activity at sweep 3	In education/training	58	17	23
	JWT	27	33	10
	NEET	15	50	66
Activity at sweep 4	In education/training	50	6	39
	JWT	33	50	24
	NEET	17	44	37

Due to rounding, percentages may not sum to 100.

Item	Response	Open to Learning %	Sustained %	Undecided %
Post-16 Experience				
Since Year 11, the courses, jobs or training I have done have generally worked out well for me (S2)	Agree	79	41	4
	Disagree	21	59	96
How easy did you find it to make changes from Year 11 to now? (S1)	Very easy	15	23	7
	Fairly easy	41	32	38
	Fairly difficult	32	29	38
	Very difficult	12	16	16
Since Year 11 are there any qualifications which you have stopped before any formal assessment?	Yes	39	22	53
	No	61	78	47
I am currently having a break from work or study (S1)	Applies to me	35	13	36
	Does not apply to me	65	87	64
Support and Planning				
I know how to find out about future work, education and training opportunities (S2)	Agree	95	88	69
	Disagree	5	12	31
I am optimistic about the future (S2)	Agree	93	81	55
	Disagree	7	19	45
I get enough support in planning my future (S2)	Agree	86	73	37
	Disagree	14	27	63
I have not yet decided what sort of job or course I want to do (S1)	Applies to me	37	49	66
	Does not apply to me	63	51	34
I want to do more education and training in the future (S2)	Agree	81	69	75
	Disagree	19	31	25
Barriers				
I have got all the qualifications I need for the job or course I want to do (S2)	Agree	40	21	11
	Disagree	60	79	89
I need more qualifications and skills to get a job, education or training place (S1)	Applies to me	28	58	55
	Does not apply to me	72	42	45
There are no decent jobs available where I live (S1)	Applies to me	20	40	51
	Does not apply to me	80	60	49
I have not found a suitable job or course (S1)	Applies to me	47	68	91
	Does not apply to me	53	32	9

Due to rounding, percentages may not sum to 100.

Table A2 - Responses to the YCS for each sub-group within the JWT cohort - weighted data

Item	Response	At-risk %	Sustained %	Transitional %
Educational Attainment				
Highest Year 11 qualification	Level 2 or above	4	20	60
	Level 1	59	71	40
	Less than Level 1	37	9	0
Educational Experience				
Left FTE because I didn't like FTE and wanted to leave as soon as I was allowed to (S2)	Not ticked	44	64	60
	Ticked	56	36	40
How would you describe your overall experience at school in Years 10 and 11? (S1)	Very good	3	10	17
	Good	36	66	47
	Neither good nor poor	32	20	26
	Poor	15	3	7
	Very poor	14	2	3
Did you play truant in Year 11?	For weeks at a time	13	1	2
	For several days at a time	12	1	4
	For particular days or lessons	19	6	13
	For the odd day or lesson	34	29	39
	Never	21	63	42
Were you excluded from school at any point during Years 10 or 11?	Yes, permanent exclusion	7	1	0
	Yes, fixed term	35	7	10
	No	58	92	90
Future Activity				
Activity at sweep 2	In education/training	14	57	75
	JWT	50	37	15
	NEET	36	6	10
Activity at sweep 3	In education/training	16	45	67
	JWT	50	47	27
	NEET	34	8	6
Activity at sweep 4	In education/training	34	33	64
	JWT	32	54	31
	NEET	34	13	5
I want to do more education and training in the future (S2)	Agree	67	83	87
	Disagree	33	17	13

Due to rounding, percentages may not sum to 100.

Item	Response	At-risk %	Sustained %	Transitional %
Post-16 Experience				
Since Year 11, the courses, jobs or training I have done have generally worked out well for me (S2)	Agree	52	92	54
	Disagree	48	8	46
Have you obtained any qualifications since sweep 1? (S2)	Yes	6	18	14
	No	94	82	86
Did you get the place in work, education or training that you wanted? (S1)	Yes	24	41	25
	To some extent	30	35	45
	No	46	24	30
How easy did you find it to make changes from Year 11 to now? (S1)	Very easy	28	21	17
	Fairly easy	42	58	45
	Fairly difficult	23	18	28
	Very difficult	7	4	10
Since Year 11 are there any qualifications which you have stopped before any formal assessment? (S1)	Yes	26	17	96
	No	74	83	4
Support and Planning				
I know how to find out about future work, education and training opportunities (S2)	Agree	77	94	84
	Disagree	23	6	16
Making plans for the future is a waste of time (S2)	Agree	23	7	6
	Disagree	77	93	94
I am optimistic about the future (S2)	Agree	72	93	93
	Disagree	28	7	7
I get enough support in planning my future (S2)	Agree	57	94	64
	Disagree	43	6	36
I have got all the qualifications I need for the job or course I want to do (S2)	Agree	18	56	40
	Disagree	82	44	60

Due to rounding, percentages may not sum to 100.

Appendix B   Literature review strategy

Prioritisation of the literature

There is a wealth of published literature that deals with issues surrounding young people who are disadvantaged, disaffected, socially excluded and failing to participate in mainstream society, which has the potential to be of relevance to a review of young people who are not in education or training (NET). Initial searches yielded hundreds of potentially relevant references and the research team at NFER spent some time sifting through abstracts and making judgements about what should, and should not, be included in the literature review for this study. In order to maintain the focus of this review, the research team at NFER set strict parameters for the conduct of the literature review in order to ensure that the most relevant items of literature were covered. In prioritising literature for the review, we focused upon approximately 40 items complied with one or more of the following.

- **Produced or published within the last ten years**. The rationale for this was to ensure that all relevant literature produced since the publication of *Bridging the Gap* (Social Exclusion Unit, 1999) could be included in the review. *Bridging the Gap* sought to explain why concerning numbers of young people in the UK were outside education, training and work for long periods after leaving school at the age of 16 and set out the Government's approach to dealing with this problem.

- **Related to young people in Britain (and normally England)**. As the study seeks to explore the needs and characteristics of young people who are NEET and in JWT within the context of raising the statutory leaving age to 18 in England, studies focusing on young people in the English context were given priority.

- **Related to young people aged 16 and above**. Some of the studies in the review focus upon issues such as pre-16 information, advice and guidance (IAG), family history and background. However, as the primary focus of the research is on young people who are aged between 16 and 18 and are NEET or in JWT, this is the primary focus of the reviewed literature also.

- **Focused on young people's characteristics, and the barriers and enablers to their participation in education and training**. These elements were considered of crucial importance in enabling the research team at NFER to address the key research objectives of the study, as outlined in Chapter 3.

- **Focused on those who were not in education, employment or training (NEET), or who were in jobs without training (JWT)** rather than on studies of disadvantage or social exclusion more generally (except where these were major research studies).

Key research terms

Any review of young people who are NEET or in JWT is likely to draw in literature from a number of fields. In order to focus our search strategy as far as possible, the research team identified a number of key research terms for searching purposes. These included the following keywords, and variants of them:

- not in education or training (NET)

- not in education, employment or training (NEET)

- jobs without training (JWT)

- young people aged 16-17/16-18

- drop out (dropping out)

- staying on

- leaving (education / training)

- black economy / grey economy

- barriers

- challenges

- disadvantage

- disaffection

- social exclusion / inclusion.

Approach to searching

Initial searches were focused at the national level. In addition to searching the full range of education and social science databases, NFER library staff conducted a range of internet searches as follows:

- by keyword (as above)

- government and related websites

- authors of known reports in order to identify additional references

- institutions that have produced relevant research.

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