

## **The Leverhulme Trust Research Project Grant Annual Report**

**Applicant:** Professor Lisa Russell

**ID/Ref:** RPG-2021-144

**Project title:** Mapping the provision of NEET early interventions in England (MINE)

**Report submission date:** November 2022

### **The grant overview:**

This longitudinal research project aims to improve understandings of early intervention programmes for young people aged 14-16 considered vulnerable to becoming NEET (not in education, employment or training). The project started on the 22<sup>nd</sup> November 2021 and is 52 months in length. It is due to be completed on the 22<sup>nd</sup> September 2026.

**Size of budget:** £357,704

### **Names of those undertaking research:**

Professor Lisa Russell

Dr Jo Pike

Dr Ron Thompson

Dr Jo Bishop

### **Research activity completed to date:**

The project is on track and Phase 1 of the fieldwork has been completed with Phase 2 having commenced in September 2022. In summary work done to date includes:

- As set out in the timeline contained in the funding application, a structured literature review was developed and is currently being updated. Several thousand publications were screened and classified as relating to: the structure of the NEET population, risk factors and protective factors associated with an increased risk of becoming NEET, as well as literature that conceptualises, defines and evaluates NEET interventions and programmes (and their related outcomes). This work helped to shape the online survey employed in Phase 1.
- As set out in the timeline, a protocol for contacting Local Authorities was developed. In total, 150 upper tier local authorities with statutory NEET reporting duty were invited to complete an online survey. A robust and detailed contact recording process was developed and over 260 contacts were generated. Contacts were obtained via a variety of means to include speculative emails; referrals; existing contacts and Combined Authority level contacts gained via attendance and membership of the Youth Employment Group (YEG). Representatives from a total of 78 Local Authorities agreed to complete the survey and we received and have analysed 60 responses in total.
- Research tools were devised to include
  - Project information sheets and consent forms (tweaked according to relevant participant/organisation)
  - LA online survey
  - Post-survey semi-structured interview schedule

- Seven exploratory interviews were conducted with key LA representatives, learning providers and one young person to help shape the development of the survey and subsequent post-survey semi-structured interviews, as well as help us to gain access to the wider LA field – all these interviews have been transcribed and analysis is ongoing.

A total of 15-20 post-survey interviews with LA representatives was anticipated in the timeline. In fact, we were able to conduct twenty-five such interviews to supplement the survey data and gain in-depth data regarding insights into how LA systems are understood by those operating them, use of tools used to identify young people, as well as building a national picture of what types of interventions are in place, where and for whom. All of these interviews have been transcribed and a coding grid is currently being developed to systematically analyse findings.

- A project website has also been devised (see <http://hud.ac/MINEHud> for details).
- A project twitter account has been activated (see @MINEHud for details).
- Two images developed by a NEET young person have been found via a competition launch (Funded by Ethnography and Education and titled 'NEET image competition - depicting what it feels like to be NEET (Not in employment, education and training') to commission a young person to develop an image depicting what it feels like to be NEET. These images are used on the project's social media spaces in agreement with the young person who developed them.
- A Public Engagement Event took place on 4<sup>th</sup> June 2022. This event was called 'Engaging with NEET young people about their experiences of NEET prevention work' and was funded by The University of Huddersfield. It involved eight young people who have experienced being NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training), two CatZero (Intervention based in Grimsby) staff and two artists, as well as Jo Pike and Lisa Russell acting as project researchers. Findings from this event helped the team secure relationships with providers working with NEET young people, as well as informed the research team about issues pertinent to the young people themselves when thinking about NEET interventions, the support NEET young people receive and how their general life experiences shape their education and employment pathways.
- Two (online) Advisory Board Meetings have taken place on 31<sup>st</sup> January 2022 and 11<sup>th</sup> July 2022 with a third scheduled for 23<sup>rd</sup> January 2023.
- At the beginning of Phase 2, access has been gained in four Local Authority ethnographic case study sites. Two face-to-face visits in LA 1 have already occurred, together with plans to interview key staff in LA 2 and conduct an online open forum to invite relevant LA 3 schools to partake with the study. Work is ongoing to identify and obtain consent from a further two case studies in order to achieve our planned total of six case studies.

### **Next Phase of the research plans and slight amendments to original proposal:**

As the project moves into Phase 2 of the fieldwork, the project team aim to gather school-level data as outlined in the original bid. However, the approach taken has slightly differed in that rather than just operating at the micro-level ethnographic study of six schools, up to six LA sites will be invited to partake to help research team members understand and gain access to relevant school sites within the designated LA. The reason for this is that operating at one school site level may not yield up to fifteen year 10 young people who are deemed

'at risk' of becoming NEET as outlined in the original bid. During Phase 1 of the fieldwork it became clear that a complex and sometimes fragmented picture of interventions was emerging and appeared related in some way to the LA geography and socio-political and economic landscape. Time will still be spent at the school level and within each LA ethnographic case study site and it will still aim to include:

- Interviewing up to fifteen young people
- Participant observations depicting a day-in-the-life of around five young people
- Interviewing at least two professionals

It is envisaged that the above will be grounded in a more in-depth contextual analysis of the LA.

### **Summary of initial findings:**

- In England, the use of Risk of NEET indicators (RONI) is now widespread at school and LA level. However, many LAs rely on individual professional judgement rather than standardised processes.
- Following RPA legislation, young people have been required since 2015 to remain in education or training until their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday – and LAs have a statutory duty to promote this. In some LAs, activities do not exceed the statutory duty, whilst in others further support is provided, including pre-16 support and/or support beyond the 18<sup>th</sup> birthday.
- EHE learners were viewed as a particular concern in the LA survey response data and there is little academic evidence that has investigated this group in relation to predicting their NEET status in a post-Covid landscape. Many LAs reported the EHE group as significantly increasing after home learning was enforced during the pandemic lockdowns.
- There is a very wide diversity in terms of strategic organisation of NEET prevention work, this is evidenced in terms of
  - Variety of job titles.
  - Variety of team size/resources used and how they are utilised in response to LAs statutory duty.
  - The types of local and regional partners LA's work with.
  - Whether LAs have a formal NEET strategy action plan, with some declaring none and others taking more informal approaches (usually based around relationships formed in schools).
  - Approaches to identifying at-risk young people differs from one LA to the next (see survey response below).

*'We do not use formal RONI tools in the borough but schools know their pupils well and refer people at high risk to the NEET Prevention Service' (survey response)*

- Targeting of specific groups differs also (see LA interview response below).

*'So we've targeted by BAME, by locality, by length NEET, by SEND, and we sort of go in a bit of a circle around that' (LA interview)*

- Funding (Removal of the European Social Fund seems to be a concern for Local Authorities with many using a vast diversity of funding sources ranging from core funding obtained at the LA level to various charity and grant funding).
- An intervention typology is emerging
  - Interventions seem to differ according to approaches taken to key transitions. points, with some aimed at pre-14, most aimed at 14-16 and 16-18 and some at 18+ (not just for SEND and LAC).
  - Some interventions work with both 'at risk' and NEET young people.
  - Interventions find it harder to track long(er) term outcomes.
  - Interaction between locality, deprivation and school type matters.
  - Good careers service matters – but this in isolation is not generally viewed as an effective tool in NEET prevention.
  - There has been a perceived impact of Covid at the LA level, specifically in terms of increased concern and resources being focused on young people's mental health and increase of EHE group.

**List of research events where initial project findings have been disseminated via a presentation (face-to-face events):**

1. Bridging the Gap – supporting sustainable Learning and Work for NEET-Experienced Young People' (30<sup>th</sup> June 2022) at The University of Huddersfield titled - 'Mapping early interventions for young people at risk of becoming NEET, methodological insights and emerging findings'.
2. HudCRES School Research Conference (4<sup>th</sup> July 2022) at The University of Huddersfield titled - 'Mapping early interventions for young people at risk of becoming NEET, methodological insights and emerging findings'.

**List of intended publications (in preparation):**

Two papers are currently being developed and worked upon these include:

1. At risk and protective factors associated with the risk of becoming NEET – a structured literature review (led by Dr Ron Thompson and Professor Lisa Russell) to be presented at JVET (Journal of Vocational Education and Training) Conference 2023.
2. Methodological insights into working closely with Local Authority Representatives (led by Professor Lisa Russell, Dr Jo Pike, Dr Jo Bishop and Dr Ron Thompson) to be presented at BERA (British Educational Research Association) Conference 2023.