

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: 21st November 2023

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 22nd November 2021 and is 52 months in length.

Size of budget: £357,704

Names of those undertaking research and extent of their commitment:

Professor Lisa Russell

Dr Katherine Davey

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 as indicated in the previous annual report.

As indicated in the original outline Phase 1 can be summarised as follows.

Mapping Early Interventions in England (Nov 21-Nov 22)

- 7 exploratory interviews have been conducted and transcribed to ‘map’ the national provision landscape and help inform the development of key research instruments and the analytical coding frame used to analyse Phase 2 interview data.
- 151 NEET-reporting LAs were contacted to find the ‘right’ person to complete an online survey.
- We have received and now analysed 60 verified completed LA online survey responses.
- 25 LA representatives were also interviewed, transcribed and analysed to supplement survey data.

Phase 2 of the research design commenced in September 2022 and as per the original timetable is on track and ongoing.

In summary work done during this second year focuses on data gathered at school/organisation level within six case study locations (five based on local authorities and one concerned with home-educated young people across a number of authorities). It incorporates more sites than in the original proposal and as justified in the previous annual report, this thus far includes:

- 6 active ethnographic case study sites located across England:
 - **Northern Urban** – interviews with 20 young people, 5 professionals; 19 lifecycle maps; 11 cardboard cut-out images and Year 11 follow-up interviews; 13 participant observations. Hours in the field: 52 hours 25 minutes in-person, 6 hours 5 minutes virtual (3 settings).
 - **Northwest Urban** – interviews with 16 young people, 6 professionals; 16 lifecycle maps; 11 cardboard cut-out images and Year 11 follow up interviews; 11 participant observations. Hours in the field: 48 hours 15 minutes in-person, 6 hours virtual (5 settings & LA).
 - **Midlands Rural/Urban** – interviews with 17 young people, 10 professionals; 10 lifecycle maps; 7 cardboard cut-out images and Year 11 follow-up interviews; 10 participant observations. Hours in the field: 79 hours 25 minutes in-person, 8 hours virtual (4 settings & LA).
 - **London** – interviews with 2 professionals, 15 young people; 12 lifecycle maps; 2 participant observations. Hours in the field: 31 hours 10 minutes in-person, 2 hours 45 minutes virtual (4 settings).
 - **Northeast Urban** – interviews with 7 young people, 3 professionals; 7 lifecycle maps; 1 cardboard cut-out image and Year 11 follow-up interview; 1 participant observation. Hours in the field: 13 hours 10 minutes in-person, 2 hours 45 minutes virtual (2 settings).
 - **EHE** (not geographically specific) – interviews with 10 professionals, 5 young people and 7 family members; 3 lifecycle maps; 3 participant observations. Hours in the field: 31 hours 10 minutes in-person, 11 hours 15 minutes virtual (across 7 LAs separate to the case study areas).

- Overall, the main corpus of data collected so far includes:
 - 115 interviews with 80 young people aged 14-16 (17 currently EHE across the case study sites).
 - 67 young people lifecycle maps.
 - 30 cardboard cut-out 'current and future self' images.
 - 36 professionals.
 - 7 family members (EHE).
 - Total time spent in the field: 292 hours 25 minutes.
 - 255 hours 35 minutes (in person).
 - 36 hours 50 minutes spent in field (virtual).
 - 40 participant observations.
 - 18 education settings – including: mainstream secondary schools, pupil referral units, 14-16 FE college provision, adult community education settings, social emotional mental health school.

- A coding frame has been devised using NVIVO for transcripts of young people interviews and professional interviews: 30 young people and 4 professional interviews have been coded. Analysis is ongoing.
- The project website has been updated (see <http://hud.ac/MINEHud> for details).
- The project twitter account remains active (see @MINEHud for details).
- The second project newsletter has been distributed to our project key contacts.
- A Stakeholder Event took place on 13th November to discuss Phase 1 findings with key Local Authority representatives and the DfE.
- Two (online) Advisory Board Meetings have taken place 23rd January 2023 and 10th July 2023 with a third scheduled for 15th January 2024.

Next Phase of the research plans

Phase 2 in school/organisation level data will continue to be collected and analysed on an ongoing basis.

Phase 3 incorporates gathering post-school data to investigate how the young people experience their first year of their post-school transitions.

Summary of initial findings:

- The organisation, staffing and resources allocated to NEET preventative work is very diverse but overall, there is a focus on participation and progression.
 - The professional background of respondents and the organisation and resourcing of LA provision for NEET and ‘at risk’ young people represent a highly diverse picture.
 - There is evidence of a variety of job titles/descriptors working within a range of organisational structures.
 - In general, these job titles indicated a positive emphasis on participation and progression rather than a problematisation of young people as potentially excluded.

“I’ve got responsibilities across I suppose all ages of education and training in the district. I specifically lead on ... careers and technical education... from Early Years all the way up. But also ... our adult education service ... Also ... responsibilities around ... the old 14-19 agenda. And also, as well generally around post-16 sufficiency ... towards trying to improve standards to ensure that there’s sufficiency of provision in the district for 16-18-year-olds”

[Post-survey interview, Participant 1].

- The legacy of the Connexions service (and earlier versions of an authority-wide careers service) permeated much of the discourse employed, either as
 - a part of the professionals experience now ten years in the past,
 - a point of comparison with current youth transition policies,
 - a continuing presence in some LA’s.

“It was wonderful, because me and the team, some of the team were from the old service that went into administration and they were made redundant. So we picked some really experienced individuals to help build this service. We looked at what worked well in the past when we were Connexions, and previous to that ... and kind of picked the bits that we thought worked well, and we kind of went back to a traditional careers service”

[Post-survey interview, Participant 6].

“So in-house we kept the Connexions umbrella. It doesn’t mean the same as what Connexions used to mean, but we’d kind of, when we’d gone through restructure we sort of took the decision that it was a familiar brand to the local residents and partners”

[Post-survey interview, Participant 7].

- There has been a perceived decline in resourcing since 2010 due to years of austerity and changes in legislation and governance.
 - Financial support for young people such as the post-16 bursaries was considered by some respondents as an inadequate replacement for the Education Maintenance Allowance.
 - Others complained of a lack of policy learning, with initiatives being recycled after a few years.

“Five years ago when the DfE said ‘we’ve identified [you] as an opportunity area’ ... the local stakeholders ... your employers, your colleges, your school leaders etc. – kind of gave the same thing, and I would’ve said this myself, which was ‘please don’t let this be yet another initiative that funds something that might’ve worked elsewhere but may or may not work [here] ... that is only here for a very short time ... so you don’t know whether it’s made any difference ... We all wave bye bye to that initiative until the next one comes along”

[Post-survey interview, Participant 8].

- There has been a diversity in approaches used to identify young people at risk of becoming NEET across different Local Authorities.
 - Reflected in differing approaches to strategic planning in relation to NEET prevention, reduction or support.
 - Almost 60% of survey respondents reported that their local authority had an action plan updated at least every three years, over one-third either had no action plan or did not know of one currently operating.
 - For 14-16 year olds, 54 responses were obtained. It was possible to classify the great majority of approaches referred to into a small number of categories as follows:
 - Using a risk of NEET indicator (RONI)
 - Targeted
 - Referrals from schools or other providers
 - September Guarantee data
 - Other

- Funding matters – the nature of support seems to be closely related with funding sources available to the Local Authorities.

Funding source	Number of respondents	% of respondents (N = 58)
Local authority budget	36	62.1
ESF	28	48.3
Charitable body funding	11	19.0
Central government	8	13.8
Regional funding	8	13.8
Other	3	5.2
Don't know	5	8.6

- There is concern around the removal of European Social Funding and uncertainty around the replacement UK Shared Prosperity Fund and how this may shape provision.

“... we know the Shared Prosperity Fund will kick in at some point. We believe that won't be until 2024 though, in terms of the skills and work part of it ... it feels like there's going to be a gap around specific skills and work investment”

[Post-survey interview, Participant 15].

“I'll tell you what one of my big worries is actually, which definitely should be in your report, is that the replacement for European funds, UK Shared Prosperity, starts at age sixteen ... So all of the work that's done in schools across the country through European funds at fifteen will be gone”

[Post-survey interview, Participant 16].

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

- Next steps? Understanding EHE young people's experiences of education and work transitions (25th April 2023) at The South Yorkshire NEET Group: Local Authority Network Meeting at Sheffield.
- Mapping interventions for young people vulnerable to becoming NEET (6th July 2023) at the HudCRES School Research Conference at The University of Huddersfield.
- Predicting educational exclusion: a literature review of risk factors associated with early leaving from education' (13th July 2023) at 15th International Conference and 75th Anniversary of the Journal for Vocational Education and Training (JVET 2023) Conference.
- Conducting research with local authorities in England: the complexities for young people 'at risk' of becoming NEET (not in employment, education and training) (13th September 2023) at the British Educational Research Association Conference (BERA 2023) at Aston University. This presentation was nominated for the BERA 'Research in Education Best Presentation Award'.

List of publications:

- Mental health and its implications for young people vulnerable to becoming NEET (Not in Employment, Education or Training). Russell, L., Thompson, R., Pike, J. & Bishop, J., 24 Jan 2023, All-Party Parliamentary Group for Youth Employment Report: The Impact of Mental Ill Health on Young People Accessing the Labour Market and Quality Work, October 2022 - January 2023. Youth Employment UK, p. 48-55.

List of publications (sent for review)

- Conducting research with local authorities in England: the complexities for young people 'at risk' of becoming NEET (not in employment, education and training). Russell, L., Thompson, R., Davey, K. & Bishop, J. Submitted to the British Educational Research Journal, currently under peer review.
- Identifying and supporting young people at risk of becoming NEET (not in education, employment or training): the practices of local authorities in England. Russell, L., Thompson, R. & Bishop, J. Submitted to Research Papers in Education, currently under peer review.

List of publications (currently in preparation)

- Time spent in a multi-sited, national-based ethnography when understanding NEET (Not in Employment, Education or Training) interventions in England to be presented at The Rethinking Critical Ethnography: Interconnections between doing ethnography and transformation in educational contexts. June 6-7, 2024, Faculty of Education. University of Zaragoza, Spain.