

Research Report DFE-RR065

What works re-engaging young people who are not in education, employment or training (NEET)? Summary of evidence from the activity agreement pilots and the entry to learning pilots

Young People Analysis Division

Department for Education

This research report was commissioned before the new UK Government took office on 11 May 2010. As a result the content may not reflect current Government policy and may make reference to the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) which has now been replaced by the Department for Education (DFE).

The views expressed in this report are the authors' and do not necessarily reflect those of the Department for Education.

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1 Introduction

The Government remains committed to full participation in education and training for 16 and 17 year olds and to raising the participation age to 18 by 2015. This will help to raise attainment and give all young people, regardless of their background, the best opportunities to progress.

Local authorities have a statutory responsibility to secure suitable education and training to meet the needs of all young people in their area, including more tailored provision for those who are not in education, employment or training (NEET). Many of these young people fall into recognisable groups: they may be young parents, have learning difficulties or disabilities, or a history of offending. They will already be receiving support from local services, but need a package of help aimed specifically at returning to work or learning. There will be others who do not fall into one of these groups but whose lack of aspiration, behavioural issues or inability to travel independently mean that they cannot progress. Unless these issues are tackled, these young people are likely to remain NEET and at risk of other poor outcomes, with increased costs to the individual, their local community and the state.

What do we know about young people NEET?

The latest Official Statistics show that 183,000 (9.2%) of 16-18 year olds were NEET at the end of 2009.¹ The proportion of 16-18 year olds NEET has remained at around 10% over the last decade, but this hides two significant factors:

- i) the proportion of 16-18 year olds in education or training has risen from 76.7% in 1999 to 82.7% in 2009. But, this has been offset by a fall in the proportion in employment; and
- ii) the proportion of 16-17 year olds NEET has fallen from 7.0% in 1999 to 5.1% in 2009, but the proportion of 18 year olds NEET has risen from 10.4% to 16.9% over the same period.

Although the proportion of 16-17 year olds NEET has fallen, there is still some way to go to achieve full participation by 2015. England is also lagging well behind other countries. The most recent OECD comparisons of the 2007 participation data for 17 year olds places the UK 28th out of 30 countries.

Being NEET can impose high external costs on society; latest evidence suggests that the average additional lifetime cost per person NEET at age 16-18 was around £56,000 in public finance costs (Coles *et al*, forthcoming publication). The personal impact of being NEET is also significant. By age 21, young people who have been NEET for six months or more are more likely than their peers to be unemployed, earn less, receive no training, have a criminal record, suffer from poor health and depression (Social Exclusion Unit, 1999).

Young people who are NEET are a diverse group with wide ranging

¹ DfE Statistical First Release: SFR 18/2010

characteristics and needs and do not form a homogenous group (Spielhofer *et al*, 2007). Recent research (Spielhofer *et al*, 2009) into the characteristics and experiences of 16/17 year olds NEET segmented young people into 3 groups using the Youth Cohort Survey:

- i) '*Open to learning NEET*' who constituted 41% of the NEET group.
- ii) '*Sustained NEET*' who constituted 38% of the NEET group.
- iii) '*Undecided and NEET*' who constituted 22% of the NEET group.

Young people described as '*sustained NEET*' were more likely than those in the other two groups to be NEET in future sweeps of the survey. Most, however, said that they would consider education or training in the future although they were significantly more likely to choose a work-based route when they did re-engage and were less likely to move into full-time education. The research also found that those who were '*sustained NEET*' 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. They were also more 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 and say that they had not found a suitable job or course.

Further evidence of the characteristics of young people NEET is available from the Youth Cohort Study and the Longitudinal Study of Young People in England.² This shows that 17% of all young people had spent some time NEET by the time they were age 17/18, and 4% of all young people had spent over 12 months NEET. In comparison:

- 28% of young people with no qualifications spent more than 12 months NEET and 66% were NEET at some point in the period
- 27% of all disabled young people had spent sometime NEET by age 17/18, and 10% of disabled young people had been NEET for at least 12 months
- 59% of those permanently excluded and 42% of those who were suspended had spent at least some time NEET by age 17/18

Most areas will already have a range of programmes in place aimed at supporting young people to participate, including:

- i) Preventative measures pre-16 (such as Sure Start and school engagement programmes)
- ii) Personalised support, including financial support (such as the Discretionary Learner Support funds and Care to Learn) and information, advice and guidance; and
- iii) A range of education and training opportunities for 16-19 year olds, including entry level provision such as Foundation Learning and re-

² 2009 National Statistics Bulletin; The Activities and Experiences of 17 Year Olds: England 2009 (<http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SBU/b000850/index.shtml>)

engagement provision for those who are not ready or able to access mainstream provision.

What can be done to re-engage young people who are NEET?

The figures above show that there is more to do, especially to reduce the proportion of vulnerable young people who are NEET, and to take action before young people become “long term NEET”. The Department has been trialling two programmes which are aimed specifically at re-engaging the hardest to help young people; the Activity Agreement Pilots and the Entry to Learning Pilots. These pilots are the focus of this summary.

Activity Agreement Pilots were set up in 2006 to test ways of helping young people aged 16 and 17 who needed additional support to re-engage in education or training. Different groups were targeted in different phases of the pilot, including those who have been ‘long term NEET’, were Job Seekers Allowance claimants and/or belonged to specific vulnerable groups. These initiatives were followed in 2008 by Entry to Learning Pilots aimed at working with the voluntary and community sector to bridge the gap between re-engagement activities and more formal education and training programmes. Both the Activity Agreement and Entry to Learning Pilots will come to an end in 2010-11. The pilots have been evaluated and links to the full reports can be found in Appendix 1.

This report summarises the evaluations of the Activity Agreement and Entry to Learning Pilots, harnessing the years of piloting and evaluation to highlight the key features of the programmes, their impact, what has worked well and what has worked less well, so that local authorities and providers have access to the many helpful lessons learned from the pilots.

This report starts with a brief description of each pilot and sets out the evidence on their impact (section 2). Section 3 summarises the lessons learned from the pilots, highlighting a number of features that were common to both pilots, and areas that could have been improved. This report is not intended to be a comparison between Activity Agreement and Entry to Learning Pilots. The scale of the pilots were very different, they did not have the same eligibility criteria, and the evidence on each pilot was collected using very different research methods which mean that direct comparisons are not advised. The Activity Agreement was subject to a multi-stranded approach that included robust survey methods, an assessment of operational issues and in-depth case studies to generate understanding about how and in what ways Activity Agreements worked well. The Entry to Learning Pilot was subject to a much smaller, qualitative evaluation.

2 Key features of the Pilots

Activity Agreements

Activity Agreements were piloted in eight “high NEET” areas of England, covering around 50 local authority areas, to test ways of re-engaging 16 and 17 year olds who were NEET. The pilot ran initially between April 2006 and March 2008, and was extended for a further three years, testing its effectiveness on different groups young people, with an increasing focus on those falling into one of the recognised vulnerable groups.

The Activity Agreement is a personally negotiated contract between the young person and their Personal Adviser/Keyworker³. Appendix 4 has a template for an Agreement, which outlines the specific steps the young person should take to progress to education, employment or training. Young people received continuous support from their Adviser throughout the process. Discretionary funding was made available to cover the cost of activities, which were focused on:

- **personal development** – to help cope with personal difficulties and/or boost confidence and motivation. This might include anger management, dealing with money or help to travel independently
- **skill development** – either filling existing skill gaps or more proactively seeking to acquire skills that are necessary to progress to further training or employment - for example, literacy/numeracy
- **work-related activities** – including work tasters, workplace behaviour, CV and interview skills. These activities were particularly popular with participants but could be difficult to source.

The pilots were based on a ‘something for something’ model in which non-means tested financial incentives of between £10 and £30 per week were offered but were conditional upon young people fulfilling their agreement. Participants who were in receipt of certain benefits were not eligible for the allowance. Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA) was not payable.

The Activity Agreement was designed to reflect the young person’s individual needs; young people could begin and finish their agreement at any time of the year and it could last from anything for 6 to 20 weeks, with the average length of stay around 12 - 15 weeks.

Management Information shows that over the period April 2006 - March 2010, approximately 25,000 young people took part in an Activity Agreement. Using Management Information data from the first two years of the pilots the costs are estimated at £2,122 per participant. This breaks down into average costs of:

- £1,279 on staffing and administration

³ For brevity, from here on the term ‘Adviser’ will refer to both either personal advisor or a keyworker.

- £461 on discretionary funding which was used to buy provision and to meet travel and equipment costs
- £383 on allowances

However, as with any programme of intervention, there was some deadweight - which is essentially the percentage of positive outcomes that would have happened even without the programme. The evaluation assessed this by matching individuals who took part in the pilot with young people in non-Activity Agreement areas who had very similar characteristics in terms of gender, age, qualifications on leaving school, and employment and training undertaken since leaving school and comparing the two groups. Using this method, evidence suggests that 72% of participants in the first two years who progressed into education or training would have done so without an Activity Agreement, so programme deadweight is around 72%.

Taken with the cost per participant, this means the costs per *additional* individual who progresses into education or training as a result of Activity Agreements are significantly higher than average cost per participant outlined above. Despite the costs attached to re-engaging young people, there are some elements of Activity Agreements that are more effective than others and important lessons can be learned from the approach.

What difference did the Activity Agreement Pilots make?

The evaluation of the Activity Agreement Pilots measured the impact of the programme by comparing participants in the 2006-2008 stage of the pilot with a group of young people who were NEET, shared similar characteristics and lived in areas where the pilots did not operate. By comparing outcomes for Activity Agreement participants with those for the comparison group, it was possible to see what difference the programme made.⁴

The analysis found that in the short-term, 3 months after participation, 49% of young people were engaged in education and employment related activities. This compared to 36% in the control group. In greater detail, this included:

- 28% of participants were studying towards a qualification compared to 20% in the comparison group
- 17% of participants were in paid work without training compared to 27% without an Activity Agreement*
- 10% entered elementary occupations compared to 16% in the comparison group
- 7% of participants reported doing some voluntary work, compared to 5% in the control group (Tanner *et al*, 2009)

The Activity Agreement also had a small, but positive impact on attitudes. Across a range of measures, between 5% and 10% of participants

⁴ Asterisks denote statistical significance. All tests were based on a 10% significance level.

demonstrated more positive attitudes towards education, employment and the future in general as a result of their participation (ibid).

The impact of the 2006-08 pilot was assessed again two years after participation. A sample of 250 former Activity Agreement participants and 250 young people in matched control areas were interviewed about their activities and attitudes to learning. The key findings were:

- Activity Agreements had a sustained impact on participation in work-based training or studying towards a qualification. Some 48% of participants reported doing some studying or work-based training at the time of the follow-up interview, which is about 8% higher than would have happened without the Activity Agreement*
- Activity Agreements had an impact (of about 9%) of moving young people who would have been in work with no training into education, work-based training or a job involving training
- Employed Activity Agreement participants were working at a higher occupational level than young people in the comparison sample, and more likely to have achieved a qualification
- Activity Agreement participants were more likely to have completed a qualification since the first interview than those in the comparison group (73% compared with 62%) (Tanner *et al*, 2010)

The evaluation concluded that whilst the intensive support and tailored learning were resource intensive in terms of staffing, these two facets of the programme helped to support the needs of young people who had failed to engage through mainstream interventions.

Entry to Learning

The Entry to Learning Pilots ran between 2008 and 2011 in four local authority areas in England. The pilots were designed to provide young people who were NEET with opportunities to improve their skills and employability through strengthening the progression between voluntary and community sector re-engagement activity and formal learning (Bickerstaffe and Walton, 2010).

Echoing the Activity Agreement Pilots, each young person was assigned an Adviser to support them throughout their time on the programme (an average of 15 weeks) and to broker access to bridging activities that would help them progress to further learning, and which were accredited wherever possible. Entry to Learning Pilots also involved a financial allowance, paid to young people as an incentive to take part and retain them on the programme.

The main difference between the two pilots was that within Entry to Learning some local authorities contracted with voluntary sector organisations (or a consortium of organisations), to employ Advisers and either deliver the learning provision themselves or commission this from other established providers. As a result, there were various approaches to the delivery of the pilot, with some areas building on existing engagement work with young people, while others

selected one voluntary sector organisation to act as a 'portal' through which the local authority worked with to identify and access other voluntary sector providers (*ibid*).

Young people who took part in Entry to Learning participated in a range of bridging activities that can be broadly grouped into 3 types:

- **Mentoring and support** from the Adviser
- **Personal development** designed to increase confidence and motivation (eg group activities, first aid course, driving theory, activities to improve literacy and numeracy)
- **Work-related learning** (eg CV writing, vocational taster courses and preparing for going on a course)

Management Information shows that over the period February 2009 - March 2010, approximately 1,500 young people took part in Entry to Learning. Using Management Information data the costs are estimated at £1,757 per participant. This breaks down into average costs of:

- £1,026 on staffing and administration
- £455 on bridging activities
- £63 on discretionary funding
- £213 on allowances

What difference did the Entry to Learning Pilots make?

Entry to Learning was piloted on a smaller scale and for a shorter time than the Activity Agreement and subject to a smaller, qualitative evaluation, which means that issues such as deadweight could not be assessed. The evidence on the impact of participating in Entry to Learning is therefore based on the perceptions and experiences of those involved in the pilot.

Management Information collected by the pilots offers an indication of where young people went immediately after they had left the programme and at a 13 week follow-up, however this should not be compared to the data from the Activity Agreement pilot evaluation above; Entry to Learning had less rigorous eligibility criteria, had far fewer participants than Activity Agreement Pilots and was not subject to external quantitative evaluation.

The Management Information from the end of December 2009 showed that of a total of 1192 participants:

- 41% were still participating in the programme
- 61% had left the pilots and progressed to a positive destination, half of them into education and two fifths to training (largely Entry to Employment or an Apprenticeship). The remainder have entered employment with training
- Of those who progressed to a positive destination, 72% were still recorded in a positive destination 13 weeks after they had left the programme

In addition, stakeholders observed that for many young people there were a range of softer outcomes, often relating to personal or social development which they felt will have benefited the participants and demonstrated a degree of progress, albeit not a formal positive destination. The development of employability skills was also identified as a critical soft outcome (Bickerstaffe and Walton, 2010).

More detail on the pilot programmes and the different variants that were tested can be found in Appendices 2 and 3.

3 Lessons from the evaluations of Activity Agreement and Entry to Learning Pilots

What works best to re-engage young people in education and training?

Activity Agreement and Entry to Learning Pilots consisted of three key features that together made a strong approach in terms of the engagement, retention and progression of 16 and 17 year olds who were NEET. The intensive support and one-to-one engagement with an **Adviser** helped young people get the most out of their participation on the programme, the **activities** were tailored to meet individual need and gave young people the platform to progress and the **allowance** worked as an incentive to help engage and retain young people. The following section discusses each feature in turn.

The role of the Adviser

The Adviser played an important 'broker' role between meeting the needs of the young person and finding the right activities that would enable them to progress. Young people valued the support from their Advisers and the opportunity to negotiate what activities they did, rather than being told what to do. Advisers found that young people had very different starting points; some had a clear idea about what they wanted to do and in a relatively short number of discussions with their Adviser, they identified a set of activities that led towards a particular goal in education or training.

Others had more complex needs and required more individualised help. This became increasingly apparent as the Activity Agreement Pilot narrowed its focus onto the most vulnerable within the NEET population. The increased personal and social needs of many of the participants led to a greater emphasis on the intensive support offered by Advisers, as well as a move towards 'one-to-one' activities and a tailoring of provision to meet individual needs. (Maguire *et al*, forthcoming publication). However, while vulnerable young people often had a specific barrier or barriers to overcome, the long-term NEET group had often tried or rejected all other types of intervention and were entrenched in inactivity. For this reason, young people who were long-term NEET were often described as being the most difficult group to engage and support.

The final phase of the pilots required Advisers to extend and strengthen links with local support agencies, such as Youth Offending Service, Leaving Care teams, Housing Departments, Teenage Pregnancy/ Parents support services, Sure Start Centres, Youth Services and Social Services (*ibid*). Pilots found it worked well to have Advisers who developed a specialism focusing on one specific vulnerable group, such as young carers, pregnant teenagers, or young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, enabling closer working with other agencies supporting these young people (Maguire *et al*, 2010).

Over the course of Activity Agreement Pilots, some Advisers developed closer working relationships with Jobcentre Plus, sharing data and expertise. In a limited number of pilots, staff were seconded from Jobcentre Plus to work in Connexions and in other areas, Advisers found that holding regular briefing

sessions with Jobcentre Plus staff to provide updates on Activity Agreement worked well.

Across both pilots, there was a consensus that one-to-one support was a critical factor, however there were certain aspects of the Adviser's role that pilots found could be carried out by other, more junior colleagues, such as sourcing provision, booking appointments and managing the more routine mentoring. This reduced cost, 'tiered' approach to the support meant using the time and professional skills of the Adviser more effectively to concentrate on supporting the most vulnerable. Pilots found that the ideal case load for Advisers was between 15-20 young people per Adviser (Maguire *et al*, 2009).

The combination of the intensive support provided by Advisers, together with the ability to offer young people bespoke provision helped sustained participation. (Maguire *et al*, 2009 and Bickerstaffe and Walton, 2010).

Activities

Key to both pilots was the provision of a range of activities tailored to the needs of each individual. The flexibility of the pilots was very important to the progression and outcomes achieved by young people. Provision was purchased from a wide range of private, voluntary and public sector agencies. There were many examples where Advisers had researched and negotiated individual programmes of learning for young people. Some of the young people involved in the pilot had personal issues either as a result of or as a cause of the position they were in. The initial task was often to start to overcome these issues through confidence building support activities, such as anger management, team building skills or personal hygiene and fitness (Maguire *et al*, 2009). In other cases, Advisers worked together, sometimes within and between local authority areas, to start courses for groups of young people where a shared need for a specific course had been identified, and where group provision was needed in order to make the programme of learning viable, such as in construction skills (Hillage *et al*, 2008).

Over the course of the pilots, Advisers developed a better understanding and knowledge of the provider market and available provision. Most pilot areas accessed provision funded through other sources such as the European Social Fund or local authorities, for example basic skills provision, support for dyslexia and ADHD. This worked well but could have been developed further, making greater links between neighbouring local authority areas for example and mapping the potential overlaps between Activity Agreement and mainstream provision. (Maguire *et al*, 2010).

Whilst there were many examples of provision that could be easily sourced or negotiated for small groups of young people with a common interest or gap in skills, a minority of participants, required intensive, one-to-one mentoring and support to build their confidence and this is unlikely to be delivered through a prescriptive, pre-set programme of activities (Newton *et al*, 2009).

The pilots helped to identify gaps in the locally available provision. The most consistently identified gap was a lack of work experience placements. Other

shortage areas included the provision of basic skills courses and construction skills courses. The lack of availability of provision of basic skills provision was a key concern to Advisers because of the high demand for this type of support. In some cases, Advisers commissioned the voluntary and community sector to deliver suitable provision (Maguire *et al*, forthcoming publication). There were also issues for a minority of young people accessing provision that was not in their immediate area, and this was noted in urban as well as rural areas. This tended to relate to transport difficulties, confidence issues or notions of territoriality (Hillage *et al*, 2008 and Bickerstaffe and Walton, 2010).

The involvement of the voluntary sector gave young people access to opportunities that might not otherwise be available. It provided access to venues where young people felt comfortable, and where the provision was different to the mainstream 'statutory' provision many had previously disengaged from. Voluntary sector involvement also brought access to a range of inter-related support mechanisms for example housing, IAG and job clubs. (Bickerstaffe and Walton, 2010). However, although smaller voluntary sector organisations offered important flexibility and alternative ethos to mainstream provision delivery, they could be limited in practice in what they could deliver because of the funding arrangements that were in place. Some voluntary organisations also had limited geographical coverage and lacked consistency in terms of policies, procedures and quality (*ibid*).

As the pilots developed, there was an increasing emphasis on the accreditation of learning. This was an important factor in the assessment of the additional value of Activity Agreement and gave young people a sense of achievement and in some cases helped them progress. In some areas, Advisers built accreditation around existing programmes and colleges were encouraged to offer accreditation to young people as part of their Activity Agreement or Entry to Learning work taster programmes, helping some young people to progress to mainstream provision. For example, in one pilot area, a Youth Offending Service team had linked a young offenders' reparation programme with Activity Agreement delivery. The reparation part of the programme involved young people repairing bicycles and the Activity Agreement element had introduced accreditation for the work, with a group of young people completing a qualification in bicycle repair work (Maguire *et al*, 2010).

However, there was also recognition that non-accredited activities (for example, anger management or team building skills) were still important, especially for those participants who needed the opportunity to engage and gain confidence (Maguire *et al*, forthcoming publication and Newton *et al*, 2009). A key component of the Activity Agreements was the flexible tailored approach and part of this was the balance between activity of the non-accredited kind and activity that led to qualification attainment. Activity Agreements worked well by utilising both approaches according to the needs of each individual.

Allowance/ Financial incentive

The role of the weekly financial allowance was multiple; the evaluation of Activity Agreements found that to some young people it was the 'carrot' that initially drew them into the programme, while for others it helped engage and

retain them on the programme. While many young people had a genuine need for the allowance, a small minority simply saw it as a bonus (Johnson *et al*, 2008).

Some pilots used the allowance to help young people to understand that breaching their agreement, missing appointments or poor behaviour were not tolerated. Across both pilots, the evidence suggests that the allowance brought more people into the programmes and kept them there, than would have been the case if there had been no financial incentive (Bickerstaffe and Walton, 2010 and Maguire *et al*, 2009).

Participants needed to have a bank account in order to be paid the allowance, and arranging this was one of the first steps for many young people. Advisers regularly helped young people obtain the identification needed to open an account and guided them through the process (*ibid*). Having a bank account in place also made it easier for participants to make a claim for EMA or other financial support when they progressed to education or training.

Both pilots had access to a 'Discretionary Fund' which was used by Advisers to fund activities and any specific costs, such as travel to activities, clothes for interviews or tools that a young person needed to progress. This could immediately lift a barrier to young people participating. For both pilots, the Discretionary Fund was seen as an important part of the financial support that worked very well; enabling Advisers to make quick, pinpoint financial interventions that made an immediate difference to young people's ability to participate. (Maguire *et al*, 2010).

The Agreement

The three key features (Adviser, activity and allowance) were underpinned by 'the Agreement'. This proved to be an important part of both programmes; it demonstrated that the support being offered was truly personalised and created for the individual and it worked well to make it clear young people that they had to try their best to keep their part of the agreement.

Part of the Adviser role was to instigate the weekly payments and, if terms and conditions in the agreement had not been met, they also had the authority to withhold payment. This process worked well and it was felt that it helped retain the programme's credibility (Hillage *et al*, 2008).

At the beginning of both pilots the Agreement covered a fixed time period on the programme; 15 weeks for Entry to Learning and 20 weeks for Activity Agreements. Whilst this was more than enough for many young people and they progressed into education or training within this timeframe, as the pilots developed, it became clear that a minority of young people required support for longer and some were ready to leave the pilot before the end of this period. It was accepted that the pilots needed to have certain flexibilities, in particular the most vulnerable young people required very small steps towards engagement that often took longer than the prescribed 15-20 weeks.

What could be improved to re-engage young people NEET

One of the benefits of a pilot programme is that new approaches and methods can be tried and tested and that lessons can be learnt. Various learning points have been identified during the course of the evaluations of Activity Agreement and Entry to Learning Pilots and they are summarised below.

The importance of knowing the cohort

Some pilots operated in areas that had good tracking systems in place which meant they could effectively manage their performance and monitor their progress. All pilots improved their tracking of young people, but few local authorities had a reliable estimate of the eligible population or had systems in place to track young people's progress after their involvement in the pilots. Good local authority data and tracking systems would have helped the projects to get going more quickly and enabled better assessment of impact (Hillage *et al*, 2008).

Getting young people to take part

It was expected that the majority of referrals would come from Connexions services, but this was not always the case and many of the pilots sought to recruit directly. Significant numbers were recruited through 'cold calling' or through word of mouth recommendation (*ibid*). Others were recruited through referrals or networking with key stakeholders, such as colleges, youth centres, third sector, work based learning providers and other providers that have direct contact with young people (Maguire *et al*, 2009 and Bickerstaffe and Walton, 2010). However, they tended to have limited knowledge of the eligibility requirements and some young people had to be turned down as a result.

Appropriate provision

Across the pilots, Advisers found it difficult to source work experience and work shadowing opportunities. This type of provision was felt to be important for young people who were ready to sample different work areas, understand the requirements of a work environment and pick up 'employability skills' (Hillage *et al*, 2008). Accessing literacy and numeracy skills development was also challenging for the pilots. In some areas this was available at no cost to the pilot and in others there were considerable costs. Linked to this, the high cost of assessments for learning difficulties and disabilities was a cause of concern, particularly since assessments would underpin the ability of a young person to make a transition into mainstream provision (Maguire *et al*, forthcoming publication).

Flexible provision

Inflexible start dates were repeatedly cited as a barrier to young people's progression. The lack of opportunities outside the main September-October intake and the desire for roll-on roll-off provision meant that participants were less likely to be able to reengage as soon as they were ready. Further partnership working with the FE sector could help address this issue (Bickerstaffe and Walton, 2010).

Building expertise

Some pilots experienced delays in getting staff in place, and keeping staff on temporary contracts towards the end of each pilot extension. It also took the pilots time to establish the best ways of identifying and engaging young people (Hillage *et al*, 2008).

Lowering costs

Various ways of reducing the cost of running a programme to re-engage young people were identified and many were put into operation during the lifetime of the pilots. They included a tiered staffing approach to the Adviser support, accessing provision that was funded through other sources, pooling provision across LA areas, developing and maintaining understanding of the local provider market and strengthening links between Advisers and related support agencies. The pilots were efficient at identifying programmes which could be sourced outside of the mainstream provision offer in order to meet the needs of young people ie the initiatives tended to be young person 'led' rather than provision 'led'.

Clarifying benefits interaction

The interpretation and understanding of the regulations surrounding benefit receipt varied within and between pilot areas. Despite the dissemination of national guidance, there was much confusion and misunderstanding particularly around Job Seeker's Allowance and Income Support (Maguire *et al*, 2010 and Maguire *et al*, forthcoming publication).

Conclusion

This summary has drawn together the headline evaluation evidence from the Activity Agreement and Entry to Learning Pilots and the numerous publications that span four years of evaluation. The evidence suggests that the combination of Adviser support, tailored activities and a financial allowance has worked to help re-engage some young people who are NEET at 16 and 17, but it is clear that this approach is relatively costly. However, this is balanced by wider evidence that points to the longer-term social costs of being NEET at 16 and 17 and related limited future life chances. As we move towards raising the participation age, local authorities and providers will be considering new approaches to engaging young people who are not yet ready or able to begin more formal education or training. This summary provides information on the key elements of the pilots, highlighting what has worked well and what worked less well, to help inform decisions around this challenging issue.

Appendix 1: References

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Appendix 2: Background to the Activity Agreement Pilots

Activity Agreements were initially piloted for 2 years in 8 areas of England, for 16 and 17 year olds not in education, employment or training (NEET). The initial pilots ran between April 2006 and March 2008, and were subsequently extended for a further 3 years to pilot different client groups.

Table 1 below shows the areas and the different models piloted between 2006 and 2010.

Table 1: Pilot areas

AA area	2006-2008 (Main evaluation)	2008-09	2009-11
West Yorkshire	Model 1 Variant 1 –	Models 1 and 3	Model 4
Tyne and Wear	Model 1 Variant 1	Models 1, 2 and 3	Model 4
Kent and Medway*	Model 1, variant 1	Models 1	Model 4
Cornwall and Devon	Model 1, variant 2	Models 1, 2 and 3	Model 4
Greater Merseyside	Model 1, variant 2	Models 1, 2 and 3	Model 4
Central London	Model 1, variant 2	Models 1 and 3	Model 4
Greater Manchester	Model 1, variant 3	Models 1 and 3	Model 4
London East	Model 1, variant 3	Models 1 and 3	Model 4

*Kent only from 2008

Model 1: 13 and 20 weeks

This was a direct extension of the pilots which tested an earlier intervention at 13 weeks NEET, whilst continuing to offer AAs to 20+ weeks NEET young people. Whilst participating in an AA, young people received an allowance (subject to completion of agreed activities) for a maximum of 20 weeks. 3 variants were trialled:

Variant 1 - £20 per week to YP

Variant 2 – £30 per week to YP

Variant 3 - £20 per week to YP and £30 per week to family

Model 2: EMA drop-out

This model allowed young people who had previously been in receipt of EMA immediately prior to their referral to Connexions, to enter an AA six weeks after leaving their course or training programme. Following notification of 'drop out' by their learning provider, follow-up contact was made by Connexions. A young person could start an AA if they had not secured a future start date in EET by week 5 and if no more than eight weeks had elapsed since notification of their drop-out had been received.

Model 3: Vulnerable Groups

This model allowed particularly vulnerable young people to be fast-tracked onto an AA. Initial assessment and advice was completed by Connexions. Young people who were classified as belonging to a vulnerable group started an AA after a six-week eligibility period and received £30 each week unless they were

claiming some types of benefits, for a maximum period of 20 weeks. Vulnerable groups were defined as young people from a number of different categories including carers, the homeless, young offenders and young people with learning difficulties/disabilities.

Model 4: Vulnerable Groups

To be eligible for model 4, the young person must fall into at least one of the following categories:

- a JSA recipients (on an agreement only basis)
- b Vulnerable groups (as model 3) who had previously worked with Connexions services for 6 weeks
- c NEET for 26 weeks or more;

The Activity Agreement Evaluation

A consortium of contractors, led by The Institute for Employment Studies (IES) and involving the National Centre for Social Research (NatCen) and the Centre for Education & Industry (CEI) carried out the evaluation of the main pilot that ran from 2006 to 2008.

The evaluation had three strands:

1. Quantitative Evaluation – Survey data and differences analysis between pilot and control areas, gathered by telephone and face-to-face interviews, to gain measures of programme effectiveness.
2. Process Evaluation – case studies in all pilot areas to explore the operational issues and the implementation chain, identifying problems and good practice.
3. Programme Theory Evaluation – in-depth work in a number of areas to generate understanding of why the pilots have or have not been effective; to provide insight on the types of young people, the circumstances and the respects in which the programme mechanisms work to best effect.

The evaluation extensions of 2008-2010 were subject to smaller evaluations than the 2006-2008 period and were based on survey and case-study methods.

Appendix 3: Background to the Entry to Learning Pilots

Entry to Learning was built on the lessons learned from the early phases of the Activity Agreement Pilots. Four pilots were launched in November 2008 in Brighton and Hove (with East Sussex), Birmingham, Sandwell and Lancashire.

Eligible groups are:

- young people who are not in any form of employment, education or training when they start an Entry to Learning programme;
- young people participating in personal development opportunities who are not in receipt of wages or an allowance;
- young people who have been in receipt of EMA immediately prior to leaving learning i.e. those who have completed their course and those who have 'dropped-out';
- Vulnerable groups.

Vulnerable groups were defined as: young people from a number of different categories including carers, the homeless, young offenders and young people with learning difficulties/disabilities

The Entry to Learning Pilots tested three key elements of support:

- A trusted adult to provide continuity of support throughout the young person's reengagement
- Bridging provision to provide small manageable steps between reengagement provision and formal learning; and
- A financial incentive to encourage young people to take part in the programme.

These three elements have been tested through two specific models:

- In Model 1, the Connexions Personal Adviser acts as the trusted adult;
- In Model 2, the local authority contracts with a third sector organisation (or consortium of organisations) to provide the trusted adults.

Appendix 4: Agreement Example

Name:	YP Identifier:
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Name of Personal Adviser:	Date Agreement started:
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Original Goals
This section is used by the young person together with their personal advisor/key worker to set out the young person’s long term goals, which might be, for example, to prepare for college or for employment in a certain occupational area.

Steps on the way
This section is used by the young person with the help of their personal advisor/key worker to identify and agree the steps required to achieve the young person’s long term goal. Steps might include finding somewhere to live, basic skills, and learning to manage money and assistance with setting up a bank account.

Who can help
This section is used to identify and name who will be supporting and helping the young person to achieving their goals, which might be for example their Connexions Personal Advisor, YOT Key Worker, Drug Rehabilitation Worker and Social Worker.

What next – agreed action	By whom	By when
Total number of hours		

<p>I am willing for this information to be shared with providers in order to help me. I am aware that the information may be held on a computer system and that I am entitled to see any information held about me</p> <p>I understand that if I do not complete the activities agreed for this week I will not receive my allowance.</p> <p>Signed:.....</p> <p>Name Date...</p> <p>Signed Personal advisor/key worker:.....</p> <p>Name of Personal advisor/key worker:.....Date</p>

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