

Early findings from the NEET National Research Project

Research

LSIS LEARNING
AND SKILLS
IMPROVEMENT
SERVICE

The logo graphic for LSIS consists of several overlapping, flowing lines in shades of orange and red, creating a sense of movement and energy.

**Understanding and
supporting young people
and adults not in education,
employment and training**

A report on a national research project managed by NIACE on behalf of LSIS

With thanks to Fiona Aldridge, Lorraine Casey, Emily Jones and Caroline Law of NIACE and to all the colleges, and other learning providers and outreach agencies that helped make the project a success by contributing to the research.

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Executive Summary

1. In 2010, NIACE (the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education) was invited by the Learning and Skills Improvement Service (LSIS) to develop a national research project, involving colleges, other learning providers and outreach agencies to look at the attitudes and experiences of adults and young people who are currently, or have recent experience of, not being engaged in education, employment or training (NEET).
2. The aims of the research project were to: improve understanding of the aspirations, motivations and behaviours of young people and adults who are not in education, employment or training; support providers in the learning and skills sector to secure institution-specific evidence to develop their understanding in relation to these issues; inform individual provider strategies to meet the needs of young people and adults in their locality; and inform the national strategy (in preparation) for the raising the participation age.
3. NIACE was commissioned to achieve these aims by supporting providers to collate a range of research evidence from young people and adults who are not engaged in education, employment or training, as well as on effective practice in engaging with people in these circumstances.
4. For the purposes of this study we defined 'NEETs' as young people (aged 16-24) or adults (aged 25+) years who were not in employment, education (full time, part time, or on a gap year having an agreed HE start date) or government supported training. Those who were defined as being NEET included those undertaking voluntary work or personal development opportunities, those seeking (or waiting to start) work or learning or those who are not active in the labour market (including those experiencing ill-health, caring for children, etc).
5. An initial analysis of a sample of the data has been undertaken and 15 early lessons emerging from the data was presented at an LSIS policy seminar, *Understanding NEETs – lessons for policy and practice*, attended by John Hayes, Minister of State for Further Education, Skills and Lifelong Learning. The points that follow summarise the information shared at that seminar and the emerging discussion.
6. The five early lessons from our analysis of the data from young people confirm that:
 - Motivation is curriculum
 - The NEET label masks a wide range of diversity
 - The route from non-participation into learning and employment isn't a simple or straightforward one
 - Schools can damage your learning health
 - Catching people when they are ready to learn is key

- 7.** The five early lessons from our analysis of data from adults confirm that:
- If we think that young people are diverse, then adults are even more so
 - Adults with the lowest skills have the longest journeys to sustainable work
 - Displacement from the labour market can seriously damage your life chances
 - Opportunities to learn informally affect attitudes towards formal learning
 - Big chunks of learning are difficult to fit into busy lives
- 8.** This was much more than just a research project! The five early lessons from our analysis of the impact on providers of their involvement in the project are that:
- Practitioners developed and utilised research skills
 - Providers developed better relationships with local partners
 - The project created a community of interest
 - The project was a field led innovation addressing a key and challenging social policy
 - Providers and practitioners need to be aware of, and understand policy, in order to communicate it well.
- 9.** Our discussion with providers at the policy event identified the following ten key areas where current systems get in the way of effective practice and where greater professional freedoms are needed to optimise services.
- i. Funding should recognise the additional costs of working with those at risk of disengagement.
 - ii. Performance systems should not deter providers from transferring learners to more appropriate provision or suspending participation whilst learners are dealing with health, family or other personal issues.
 - iii. Learners who leave their studies to progress to sustainable employment should be defined as a positive outcome rather than as a drop-out or negative outcome.
 - iv. A credit-based system would allow learners to bank all achievement in order to be able to build this up progressively even when study patterns are disrupted. This would enable providers to ensure that all learners leaving their programmes early receive credit for their achievements up to that point and are informed of opportunities for re-entry.

- v. Performance measures should recognise that maintaining positive engagement and closeness to learning can be a successful outcome for some at-risk learners and that qualification-bearing programmes are not always the most suitable option.
- vi. Many learners would benefit from a pause button after their compulsory education to ensure that they take up their precious entitlement post-16 when they are ready to take full advantage of it.
- vii. A strategic approach to working with young people who are NEET should view the years between 16 and 25 as a coherent single phase. It should offer a range of flexible opportunities for extended initial formation as young people explore different pathways to adulthood. This would enable the design of more integrated services pre- and post-18, including between BIS and DWP.
- viii. Reconsideration is needed about sharing information between providers – for example, when young learners are in care or living away from home.
- ix. Consideration should be given to making IAG a major focus of Ofsted inspections.
- x. People at risk of disengagement need multiple agencies to work together – for example, social services, mental health, and justice – in a coordinated manner, sharing resources and managing transitions and information appropriately.

The full report of the policy seminar can be found at <http://www.excellencegateway.org.uk/page.aspx?o=302200>

A NIACE perspective

It has been our privilege to work with LSIS in undertaking this important piece of research. In designing and commissioning this project, LSIS has not only made a considerable investment in developing a greater understanding of this key issue facing our society, and the young people and adults who live in it, but have also sought and, we believe contributed to, the building of greater research capacity within the sector.

As we have often experienced, allowing providers creativity and flexibility in undertaking their work, while providing them with professional support and guidance, can build confidence, competence and skills that support both personal development and improved practice. We believe this project has demonstrated the strength of practitioner-led development work as well as the value of structured external support. It has made a significant contribution to the LSIS research strategy of supporting practitioners and sector led research for the sector, by the sector.

There has been particular value in using providers to collect data from a target group that they may not already regularly engage with i.e. young people and adults who are not engaged in education, employment or training, and in ensuring that providers listen to and are able to act upon the experiences and aspirations of the people they interviewed.

'I am amazed how little they know about what is on offer and where to go for information. As a provider of adult education we advertise extensively but most interviewees had never heard of us. Therefore, we need a more focused approach to promoting our courses, perhaps in local papers and in Job Centres etc, places where people go for advice.' (Provider)

'They [support service] don't understand that I got kids and if I wanted to go to college it would have to be worked round my child and stuff and they didn't seem to understand that... they just tried to put me on a childcare course that I couldn't do because of childcare problems.' (Young person)

Furthermore, the breadth and high quality of data which has been produced through this approach will serve to be a valuable resource in addressing a range of research questions and policy challenges over the coming years.

As an organisation, NIACE too has found both the process and the findings emerging from the data to be developmental and extremely exciting to be involved with. We look forward to continuing to engage with the sector on this issue.

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Introduction

In February 2010, NIACE (the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education) was commissioned by the Learning and Skills Improvement Service (LSIS) to develop a national research project, involving colleges and other learning providers, to look at the attitudes and experiences of adults and young people who are currently, or have recent experience of, not being engaged in education, employment or training (NEET).

The aims of the research project were to:

- Improve understanding of the aspirations, motivations and behaviours of young people and adults who are not in education, employment or training;
- Support providers in the learning and skills sector to secure institution and locality specific evidence to develop their understanding in relation to these issues;
- Inform individual provider strategies to meet the needs of young people and adults in their locality; and
- Inform the national strategy (in preparation) for the raising the participation age.

NIACE was commissioned to achieve these aims by supporting providers to collate a range of research evidence from young people and adults who are not engaged in education, employment or training, as well as on effective practice in engaging with people in these circumstances.

In total, 124 learning providers were awarded small grants to undertake interviews with young people and adults. As well as undertaking over 2,000 interviews, providers were also invited to encourage individuals to submit testimonies in a range of formats, with a focus on what inspires them and how learning links into, or flows out of, this. Research tools and support materials were provided, along with ongoing support from a team of NIACE researchers (see appendices).

Definition of NEET

For the purposes of this study we defined ‘NEETs’ as young people (aged 16-24) or adults (aged 25+) years who were not in employment, education (full time, part time, or on a gap year having an agreed HE start date) or government supported training. Those who were defined as being NEET included those undertaking voluntary work or personal development opportunities, those seeking (or waiting to start) work or learning or those who are not active in the labour market (including those experiencing ill-health, caring for children, etc).

As the research project was primarily focussed on adults and young people currently not engaged in education, employment or training, providers were required to ensure that a minimum of 80% of interviews were with people in these circumstances. The remaining 20% of the interviews could be with those who have been outside of education, employment or training in the recent past (i.e. within the previous 12 months) but are now engaged in learning.

Who participated?

70 providers undertook 1,381 interviews with young people aged 16-24 and 39 providers undertook 684 interviews with adults aged 25+. Tables 1 and 2 provide a breakdown of the types of organisations involved.

Table 1:
Profile of providers undertaking interviews with young people

Total number of interviews	1,381	
Total number of providers	70	
Type of provider	College	47
	Local Authority	4
	Private Training Provider	7
	Voluntary Sector Organisation	12
Urban/rural	Urban	46
	Rural	24
Region	North East	7
	North West	9
	Yorkshire and Humberside	9
	East Midlands	5
	West Midlands	7
	East of England	7
	South East	9
	South West	10
	London	7

**Table 2:
Profile of providers undertaking interviews with adults**

Total number of interviews	684	
Total number of providers	39	
Type of provider	College	5
	Local Authority	8
	Private Training Provider	8
	Voluntary Sector Organisation	17
	University	1
Urban/rural	Urban	26
	Rural	13
Region	North East	4
	North West	6
	Yorkshire and Humberside	5
	East Midlands	4
	West Midlands	2
	East of England	2
	South East	7
	South West	3
	London	6

Fewer colleges applied to undertake interviews with adults, with most choosing instead to focus on young people. In contrast, voluntary and private sector providers tended to be more interested in interviewing adults.

While not all providers were able to meet their quota of interviews, several were so successful, and found participation in the project such a valuable exercise that they undertook additional interviews, beyond that which they were contracted to do.

‘Our contract was for 30, but we have done 45 interviews. We have found the information coming through so informative that we have decided to continue the exercise next week for our own information. We expect to interview a further 80 young people next week.’ (Participating provider)

‘We actually have a waiting list of NEET adults aged 25+ who are interested in participating in this project, and wondered if there was additional funding for another 30? We are very interested in continuing for both our own research purposes, and as a contribution to the national project.’ (Participating provider)

Reflections on the process

Reflections on the process by both NIACE researchers and participating organisations highlighted a number of key process issues that should be considered if using this approach again in future:

The approach was both cost and time effective in reaching over 2,000 young people and adults not in education, employment and training.

Although detailed guidance was provided for participating organisations, a number of issues arose, including:

- Consent: some organisations did not submit consent forms and did not seem to fully understand why these would be required;
- Interviewer style: some organisations used the interview topic guide like a questionnaire, rather than conducting an in-depth interview
- Data format: data was submitted in a range of formats, not always meeting the requirements

Recommendations:

Prepare clear and concise guidance for organisations to follow. Do not over-estimate how much knowledge participating organisations already have and make sure the guidance covers all aspects and stages of the work.

Be very clear and specific, in the guidance documentation, about how people should submit their work, including the format in which it should be saved and how it should be labelled into order to minimise time spent on data processing.

If there is enough time, consider running training events or if not, consider providing examples of final products, such as full transcripts.

As well as the guidance and support materials, participating organisations were also provided with access to a collaborative workroom on the Excellence Gateway, as well as email and telephone access to a team of NIACE researchers. Participating organisations made good use of this support, primarily to double check requirements before commencing interviews. Queries mainly related to issues around sample selection, the importance of consent, how data should be submitted, and the project timetable.

Recommendations:

Set up an email account specifically for the research project and encourage participating organisations to communicate via email to ensure that researcher time is used most effectively.

Post Frequently Asked Questions on shared message boards to minimise the need for individual support.

Time was the most challenging aspect of the project. Participating organisations were notified that they had been successful on 9th March and were officially required to submit all research data by 31st March. Although timescales were tight, many organisations met the 31st March deadline and most had submitted their data within the first 10 days of April.

Participants told us that one of the main lessons they had learned through the process was that they could work this quickly when they needed to, although a more generous timescale would have enabled them to secure greater reach within the target group. Many also told us that the most time-consuming aspect of the work for them was the transcribing of interviews.

Participating organisations were positive about the speed with which information about the project was shared with them, and with which their queries were answered.

Recommendations:

Ensure that any future work of this nature should allow sufficient time to plan, to recruit, to interview, to arrange transcription and to format data.

Supporting information should be provided in a timely manner to support participating organisations to successfully engage in similar research.

What happened next?

An initial analysis of a sample of the data has been undertaken and 15 early lessons emerging from the data was presented at an LSIS seminar, Understanding NEETs – lessons for policy and practice, attended by John Hayes, Minister of State for Further Education, Skills and Lifelong Learning.

All of the data collected as part of the LSIS research project is held centrally at NIACE, where interview transcripts are currently being coded for more detailed analysis. Further information on the research project and other practitioner research supported by LSIS can be found on the LSIS research site within the Excellence Gateway: <http://www.excellencegateway.org.uk/research>

This includes the report of the seminar findings which can be found at the following link:

<http://www.excellencegateway.org.uk/page.aspx?o=302200>

Young People

Our initial analysis of the data from young people is based on a sample of 100 interviews from nine colleges, seven of which are in urban locations and two in rural areas. Two-thirds of the sample is aged 16-19 while the final third is aged between 20 and 24. Approximately one half live with their parents or other family members, approximately a quarter live alone, a small proportion live with their children or in care settings.

Experience of school

The young people interviewed have mixed experiences of school, with a fairly even split between those who had positive experiences of school and those for whom overall, schooling was a negative experience. In the main, negative experiences were connected with factors such as:

- bullying;
- having 'got in with the wrong crowd' and been involved in fighting and trouble making;
- poor relationships with teachers;
- finding school boring and learning not suited to them;
- lack of attendance and/or effort; and
- suspensions and expulsions.

'I couldn't go back to school cause of the bullying and threatening behaviour from older lads.' (Male, age 17)

'I was bullied in the first couple of years and then by year 10 I got fed up of being bullied and got in with the wrong crowd, so then it... To be honest it was more me lashing back at them that'd picked on me.' (Female, age 19)

'I haven't really got any [experience of school] because I had to look after my brothers...I had to bring them up since I was about 10 and then when I did go school I just got bullied so I didn't bother with it, and the teachers never helped.' (Female, age 19)

Many young people provided a detailed account of their time at school, and how it influenced them. In particular, they spoke about their teachers and whether or not they found them supportive.

'When I was growing up in school teachers only taught the people who they wanted to teach and the other people they don't want to teach, they threw them out of class and didn't bother with them, they didn't give them the support that they give other students...' (Male, age 21)

The vast majority of the sample left school at age 16 or 17, when they came to the end of year 11. Less than one fifth of the sample left school early, and this tended to be linked to expulsion or threat of it.

Post-school learning

The vast majority of young people have taken part in some form of learning since leaving school, either immediately afterwards or after taking some time out. Many of those interviewed had participated in college courses, although there was a high incidence of non-completion. Approximately half had not completed a course, and several spoke of withdrawing early from a number of programmes. Young people reported being 'kicked out' or, more frequently, leaving of their own accord.

The majority of young people have qualifications at level 1 or level 2, with the latter being mainly GCSEs. A minority have either no qualifications or have level 3 qualifications.

Current activity

The majority of the sample is either job hunting or applying for learning courses, with some due to start courses in September. Many young people are doing both to see which will come to fruition sooner; or they are searching for work to earn money before they start a course in September. A significant minority are not doing anything relating to employment or education, and a small proportion are either full time parents or expecting a baby.

Little mention was made within the interviews of any experience of either paid employment or volunteering. For those who have experience of paid employment, this has usually been short term.

Support

The majority of the sample is in receipt of some sort of governmental or third sector support: Almost half receive support from Connexions, while others are receiving support from Jobcentre Plus, housing services, social services, Sure Start, drug and alcohol support teams, and Youth Offending Teams.

¹ Although some interviewees gave permission for their real name to be used, pseudonyms have been used for all pen portraits within this report.

Sally¹, age 16

Sally lives with her Mum and Dad and is currently job hunting. At 16, she is finding it difficult to find a job, having dropped out of college.

In primary school Sally was 'picked on' by other pupils; but she had plenty of support from teachers, and her older brother who was also at the school. However, at secondary school things got worse and she was bullied for many years.

For some reason they used to target me...the bullying would start in school and then it would carry on out of school and they would start picking on me like finding me in the park and trying to start fights and stuff...

Sally did get support from her family, but her Mum was suffering with depression and she would often argue with her Dad.

It kind of tipped me over the edge... I went through therapy and everything.

In spite of the difficulties she was having, Sally left school at age 15 with 13 GCSEs. She went on to do a level 3 travel and tourism course at college, but didn't enjoy this and dropped out after a few months.

It was a lot harder and I just didn't think I could cope with it because it was a lot of work... I know it sounds harsh but nobody tried to help.

Sally is planning to return to college in September to do a course in animal care. She hopes to one day become a vet and is going to explore volunteering opportunities with the RSPCA.

Barriers to education, employment and training

Young people highlighted a wide range of barriers – situational, structural and dispositional – to engaging in education, employment or training. These included:

- a lack of useful and timely information, advice and guidance.
- financial difficulties, including lack of money to pay fees or support oneself during study, not wanting to incur debts while studying, not wanting to lose income support, and delays in receiving their Educational Maintenance Allowance (EMA);
- not having the correct qualifications to access jobs or courses;
- a lack of job opportunities within the current economic climate;
- difficulties getting on with certain teachers and inadequate teaching methods and support (including racism and a lack of disability related support);

- teaching methods not being practical enough;
- difficulties getting on with other learners including experiences of bullying and racism (and retaliations to these);
- being easily distracted by friends/peers and difficulties concentrating;
- issues relating to drug taking including a culture of drug taking within learning centres and/or individual substance misuse problems;
- personal and family circumstances changing such as experiencing homelessness or unexpected pregnancies;
- a lack of childcare support, or learning not being available at childcare friendly times (i.e. between 9:00 am and 3:00 pm);
- difficulties in travelling to the learning centre;
- a lack of confidence and self-belief;
- laziness and a lack of self-motivation;
- having 'got in with the wrong crowd'; and
- mental health and well-being difficulties including personal difficulties after bereavement.

'I want to learn, I want to work and I want to study...I know I can do it. It's just everything around me that stops me like having a kid, needing money...' (Female, age 24)

'I want to do it [learning], it's just I can't financially support myself and I've got no one to fall back on.' (Female, age 19)

'My family decided to move back to South Africa. Which kind of left me in a rough spot, which meant I had to leave college...and start working.' (Male, age 22)

Many of the young people interviewed faced a complex array of barriers that influenced and reinforced one another, as illustrated in the following examples.

Tim, age 18

Tim lives with his family. He spends his time trying to find a house and a job.

Tim enjoyed school and left with GCSEs. In year 10 Tim's Gran died. This resulted in Tim experiencing anger management issues and subsequently his Mum kicked him out of home. Connexions worked with him to rebuild his relationship with his Mum and to enable him to move back home.

After school Tim had a brief spell in the Armed Forces, and then went to college to undertake a two-year course to become an electrician. However, after a year the course was discontinued.

I looked online for information, rang up, arranged interviews and passed it and then went in September 2008 to start and then passed the NVQ and then the course got dropped by the government in 2009...It's not nice not having work when you've done something for a year which you like. It's like losing a limb. It hurts when you find you're not going forward with your dream.

The college offered him other options, but he had his heart set on the electrician course. They found him two suitable replacement courses at different colleges but when he rang to make enquiries, one was only for people on Apprenticeships and another was too far to travel to.

If I went back to what I thought I would be doing at 18... I wouldn't have expected myself to be thinking about claiming Jobseekers' Allowance and not having a job. I'm stuck in a big rut.

Jessica, age 19

Jessica is currently claiming Employment Support Allowance, and will soon be moved onto Jobseekers' Allowance. She lives with her family, and has little to fill her days.

Jessica loved school – especially Maths and English. She achieved 9 GCSEs at grades B and C.

After secondary school Jessica moved to a new area. She went onto college to do A Levels, but she found the transition very difficult.

Everything was a lot harder for me because most people go to college [in their local area] and even though they do have to make new friends they still know certain people, they know they're not going to be sitting and eating lunch on their own, whereas for me I didn't know anyone so that just made it a lot harder because I was a bit isolated.

Jessica became involved with an older man, who was a heroin addict. She felt he was the only person close to her in her life, and during the relationship Jessica became a heroin addict herself. Tutors and other learners at college didn't notice a change in her behaviour, because they didn't know her well enough.

It wasn't until I'd had quite a bit of time off and my lecturer said they'd have to stop me from taking exams, that I eventually told her and they set me up with (drug support service) to help young people get off drugs.

This helped Jessica get off heroin and get through her exams. But after the exams Jessica ended up relapsing. Now, Jessica doesn't have any plans or motivation for the future.

I just don't care anymore about that kind of thing [training and courses]...I have really low self esteem... I just think that anything I set my mind to I'm going to fail...I don't feel motivated for anything. Might obviously be because I had a bad experience of college and I don't want to go back there. Even some of the jobs have Apprenticeships but you've got to spend one day a week at college.

Daniel, age 20

Daniel lives with his Mum and claims Jobseekers' Allowance. He spends his days at home, playing computer games.

Daniel's school experiences were rife with conflict. He felt that certain teachers were racist to Black pupils. Daniel got kicked out of school two weeks before his GCSEs, for bullying other pupils. He had no qualifications.

My Mum tried to fight for me to take my GCSEs, but they wouldn't let me.

Daniel became involved in crime and has had two jail sentences.

I know that if I'd had qualifications I wouldn't have been doing half the stuff I have been. I would have been in education if I'd finished school and GCSEs but I have nothing so it's hard for me. I can't apply for a job and when they say 'have you any GCSEs?' I'm like 'no GCSEs'.

However, while in jail Daniel got qualifications in English, Maths, IT and level 3 Business Administration.

Jail... when you are there you have like nothing to do so it's either you sit in your cell or you get up and go get an education and I chose to get an education.

Daniel feels he needs to sort out new housing before he can think about his future, but he does have a goal of a paid job working in an office. However, he feels his lack of qualifications and criminal record may count against him when job hunting.

Triggers to learning

When asked about what would encourage them to take up learning now, or what has done so in the past, young people identified three main factors: improving their chances of finding paid employment, experiencing good quality support and teaching, and receiving support from family and friends.

The most powerful of these incentives to learn is the possibility of gaining paid employment. Young people appreciate the longer term benefits of taking up learning for employment: they believe it can result in a good job, and that this will enable them to lead a comfortable life, buy a house and car and provide for their children.

'When I was younger I weren't bothered [about learning] but now I am bothered cos I want to get into a job.'
(Female, age18)

'The only thing that would make me do it [learning] is if there were jobs on offer at the end, so if it was a scheme and there were places being offered, then I think I would be quite interested.' (Female, age 20)

Secondly, young people explained that having good quality support (including emotional and learning support, and disability related support) and teaching within learning centres had encouraged them to take up (or stay in) learning in the past, or would do so now.

'I want to do a full time course in college or do an Apprenticeship...If I'm supported then it makes me feel better, makes me feel like I'm doing the right thing... [I would need] extra help and like people understanding that I need more help and stuff. And not getting angry because they have to help me and not making me feel stupid just because I'm asking.' (Female, age 18)

Finally, interviewees also made clear that support and advice from family, carers, friends, peers and agencies has been instrumental in them taking up learning in the past, or in decisions to take up learning in the near future.

'I need to come back to college...I've got the support of social services behind me, I've got the support of family and friends so hopefully this time I should be able to stick to it.' (Female, age 21)

'I think what encouraged me was my peers around me, the people that are at college and uni and stuff like that, it really is starting to dwell on me, what am I doing with my life?' (Male, age 19)

Other triggers and motivational factors to take part in learning, included:

- receiving good information, advice, guidance and support, from organisations such as Connexions. Lack of, or poor quality, information and support can act as a barrier;
- having the option to take part in learning that is interesting and enjoyable;
- having money to support oneself through learning; and
- for a small minority, having the opportunity to improve skills.

For many interviewees who have decided to take up learning in the near future, it is evident that they feel that their own determination and long-term vision will be a sufficient motivator.

Attitudes to learning

In general, the majority of those interviewed have positive attitudes toward learning. In particular, learning and the achievement of qualifications is valued as a route to gaining paid employment and developing a successful working life.

'I think I'll need it [learning] to get some qualifications otherwise I'll just end up in a dead end job, where it won't go anywhere. And I'd like to do a bit better for myself.'
(Female, age 21)

'You need education to get somewhere in life.' (Male, age 19)

As such, learning is therefore primarily perceived as being a means to an end, although a small proportion of interviewees also made reference to the role of learning in enhancing confidence and motivation, and in developing transferable skills and knowledge.

It is apparent from the interviews that young people's positive attitudes towards learning have developed over time, with many young people only realising the value of learning several years after leaving full time education. Many of the sample expressed regret at having left education when they did, or having not taken it seriously or worked harder when they had the opportunity. In the main, however, young people regret not having gained sufficient qualifications, seen as the gateway to future success. Despite these regrets, it was acknowledged by some that at the time, nothing or no-one would have persuaded them to have made different choices.

'I wish I had stayed now and done everything right. I wanted to be a midwife so I needed to go to college and university first, so if I hadn't left school and got the qualifications then... I could have gone straight to university but [now] I can't go.... I started growing up about a year ago when I was about 17 and you realise you want your GCSEs, you want your education. You need it to get on in life. If you haven't got it then you're stuffed really.' (Female, aged 18)

'I'd give anything to go back and do it [GCSEs] again.'
(Male, age 17)

'I could have been doing the job I wanted to do if I'd have stayed at school.' (Female, age 19)

'I used to get told by a lot of people before I left school that it's gonna be hard you know to leave school with no qualifications and...I used to think whatever but it's actually true...I should have actually continued with qualifications and I kind of regret it really.' (Male, age 21)

Future plans

Most of those interviewed spoke about their ambitions and plans for the future – gaining a job, developing a career, having their own business. However, there was considerable variability in the extent to which young people had thought about how to achieve their goals and the role of learning and training in doing this.

‘That’s one dream I’m not going to let go of – to become a qualified electrician...My main aim is to go back to college where I can get an Apprenticeship then continue my college, which is killing two birds with one stone really.’ (Male, age 18)

‘I want to own my own company, like my Uncle, being a handyman, electrician, plumber...I want to do it, I want to succeed.’ (Male, age 17)

A significant minority of young people expressed very negative attitudes to learning and appear to have little inclination to make any changes in their lives with regards to employment, education or training.

‘I would never, ever go back into learning. I hated it so much.’ (Female, age 19)

‘I just wouldn’t see the point of going back again [to learning] after failing at it three times.’ (Male, age 18)

Interviewer: *At the moment what are you doing with yourself?*

Interviewee: *Nothing.*

Interviewer: *And where do you see yourself in 12 months’ time?*

Interviewee: *Signing on the dole.*

Early lessons in working with young people

Drawing on the data generated from interviews with young people and in light of the initial analysis presented above, the following five early lessons were presented at the LSIS policy seminar.

1. Motivation is curriculum

The young people interviewed have a wide range of interests and passions that were creatively illustrated by the testimony materials submitted as part of the project. Although these young people are often labelled ‘hard to reach’, many acknowledged that they would be prepared to engage in learning that was relevant, purposeful and attractive. We need to take time to find out what people want to learn, as well as to maintain the flexibility to provide an appropriate range of opportunities to engage them.

2. The NEET label masks a wide range of diversity

This diversity can be in terms of needs, experiences and attitudes, but also diversity in terms of age, other demographics as well as wider circumstances. There is a danger that by applying a single label, we fail to appreciate the different challenges and opportunities within people's individual lives.

What we already know from research and practice is that to successfully engage young people and support them to succeed, we need long-term, individually tailored approaches. Many of those interviewed within this study faced multiple disadvantages and will require extensive support and encouragement to enable them to successfully take part.

3. The route from non-participation into learning and employment isn't a simple or straightforward one

Many of the young people interviewed reflected on a lack of useful and timely information, advice and guidance (IAG). They also talked about having to take a longer and more uncertain path to employment because of poor qualifications.

We need to ensure that young people have access to appropriate impartial IAG in order to support them to make informed choices about their future. As a result, IAG should be about more than simply finding a way through the next transition or crisis point, but should be more effectively embedded in wider programmes of support.

4. Schools can damage your learning health

One of the clearest messages from the NIACE surveys of adult participation in learning is that your past experiences of learning have a significant impact on how likely you are to take up learning now or in the future. The young people interviewed had mixed experiences of schooling. For some school was enjoyable, while for many others their school years were an extremely difficult time, which has had a negative effect upon them. This negative impact is associated with a range of factors, the most common being bullying, getting in with the wrong crowd, poor relationships with teachers, non-attendance/suspension/expulsion, or just perceiving school to be boring or irrelevant.

5. Catching people when they are ready to learn is key

Many of the interviews clearly show that some young people are just not ready to engage in learning at certain ages or stages in their lives. A system that provides support only for people of particular ages can therefore serve to limit opportunities for those who are not ready to engage at that point. For example, the connexions service was often cited as providing valuable support, but this support is only available to those up to 19. Our interviews show that those aged over 19 can often face the same issues and barriers but without access to the same level of support. We need a system flexible enough to kick in when people are ready to learn.

Adults

Our initial analysis of the data from adults is based on a sample of 81 interviews from six voluntary sector organisations. Those interviewed were either not currently in learning or work, or had recent experience of being in this position. Two-thirds of the sample is aged between 25-49, with a difference of 53 years between the youngest and oldest interviewee. Around a quarter of the adults interviewed are living alone. Others are living with their parents and/or siblings, with their partner and/or children, with a carer or in a care setting. Those living with their parents tend to be younger adults.

Adults who are currently (or have recent experience of being) not in education, employment and training are not a homogenous group. Although there are some commonalities, they are a diverse group in terms of age, gender, cultural background, geographical location, family circumstances, lifestyle and physical and emotional well being. Their past experiences of, and attitudes towards, learning and employment differ, as do their ambitions and aspirations for the future. The reasons why they are (or have been) not engaged in education, employment or training also vary.

Interviewees include adults who:

- have recently been made redundant/ have taken voluntary redundancy;
- are out of work due to ill health / disability;
- are carers or who have had caring responsibilities in the past;
- have retired from paid work or are coming up to retirement age;
- are financially secure and do not need to work;
- are seeking work;
- are volunteering;
- are now engaged in some form of learning; and
- are now in paid employment.

Many of the sample are in receipt of some form of external support, including financial help (state benefits) and personal and specialist support.

² Providers were allowed a maximum of 20% of interviews with people who have recent experience of not being engaged in education, employment or training.

Current activity

Only a very small number of the sample are currently employed². For the majority, paid work is something they would like to do, although not all are actively seeking work. Others are some distance away from the job market and work is a longer-term ambition.

'My aim in life is one goal – to get back into employment.'
(Male, age 43)

'I want to get off the benefits and get a job if possible.'
(Female, age 50)

At least one third of the sample are volunteering, with around one quarter engaged in some form of learning – either formal or informal.

Paid employment

The majority of adults interviewed have some employment experience, with many having worked for long periods of time. While there are examples of managerial positions and specialist jobs being held, more typical jobs include: factory work; cleaning; catering; caring; retail; administration; construction/ manual labour; and childcare.

A number of adults have particular jobs they hope to pursue, for example, youth worker, teacher, researcher, setting up own business. Others spoke of wanting *'just a decent job'*, a *'better'* job, or to be *'happy'* in a job.

Those who have not done, or did not mention, any paid work vary in age and include men and women. Most left school without any qualifications.

Post-school learning

Around a quarter of the adults interviewed are currently taking part in some form of learning. There are examples of academic and vocational study, and also more informal learning. Subjects of study include: health and social care; computers; language, literacy and numeracy; arts and crafts; photography; sign language; first aid; and childcare.

The vast majority of adults have engaged in some form of learning since they left school. Locations for post-school learning include school sixth forms, further education colleges, higher education institutions, community venues, prisons, workplaces and at home. Some adults have A-levels and Degrees. Many adults have completed job-related training, including formal qualifications (such as NVQs and HNCs) and *'in house'* activities.

However, around one in six adults within this sample appear not to have taken part in any learning activity since school, with the majority of them having left school without any qualifications.

A number of adults mentioned starting courses but not completing them. The reasons for non-completion include: having children, caring responsibilities, lack of financial support, lack of confidence, illness and communication difficulties.

Overall, the adults within this sample have positive attitudes towards learning. This is perhaps surprising, given the high number who disliked school or found it difficult.

'When I was young I thought education was a bad thing, but now I think it's a good thing.' (Male, age 55)

'Don't say you can't do it because you can.' (Female, age 60)

School experiences and qualifications

Many adults spoke of experiencing bullying or being 'picked on' at school. This was probably the most common issue reported, but other difficulties raised included:

- problems with / lack of support from teachers;
- health/ disability issues, such as dyslexia not being diagnosed;
- struggling with subjects;
- changing schools;
- truancy/ poor attendance;
- expulsion;
- lack of interest; and
- domestic distractions/ responsibilities.

'I liked school when I wasn't been bullied.' (Male, age 58)

'I didn't particularly like school when I was growing up. I was more quiet and shy, so it was just summat I went and did and got it over with.' (Female, age 37)

'I actually missed out on a lot of school because I had a few health problems so I missed out on quite a few lessons at school, especially secondary school due to my health problems.' (Male, age 30)

The adults interviewed attended different types of schools, including grammar schools, special schools and boarding school. The majority left school aged 15 or 16, sometimes without taking exams. Some adults continued into further education but several spoke of going immediately into work. Given the age profile of those interviewed, this is perhaps not surprising. The pathways available to school leavers several decades ago, and also societal expectations and norms, were different to today.

Interviewer: *So how old were you when you left school?*

Interviewee: *Fifteen.*

Interviewer: *Fifteen. Right, did you have any qualifications when you left?*

Interviewee: *No I went straight into factory work.*

Interviewer: *Did you? So is that why you left school?*

Interviewee: *Yeah. I worked there from when I was fifteen until I was thirty two. (Female, age 60)*

'I left before I could take the O' levels. At the time I wanted to do an apprenticeship.' (Male, age 51)

'We had to leave school there was no further education.' (Female, age 49)

A high number of adults appear to have left school without any qualifications (around two thirds of the sample). Others achieved qualifications but the amount and type varied. CSEs, O levels, GCSEs, RSAs, and GNVQs were all mentioned.

A small number of adults interviewed left school before the age of 15. Two interviewees who completed their schooling outside of the UK finished at aged 10. One interviewee left early to care for a sick parent. Another was expelled at 14 (but continued to study in alternative provision).

Benefits of learning

Adults spoke of the benefits of learning. Many highlighted the importance of learning for improving job prospects, and linked to this the limitations of a lack of education:

'It's best to have a lot of certificates and exams behind you. It goes well with the interview person, and it goes well with employment.' (Female, age 36)

'If I could get a job, I would do, but I've no qualifications.' (Female, age 50)

'I've sort of lived a bit of a sheltered life not having stayed in education longer.' (Female, age 40)

Interviewer: *What impact do you think leaving school at this age has had?*

Interviewee: *A lot. I wasn't able to go into jobs which I would have enjoyed and I was pushed into labouring menial jobs for a measly £6 a week.* (Male, age 54)

'I wish I had studied more and taken an apprenticeship like I was offered as I would have been a time-served roofer by now' (Male, age 43)

In addition to employment gains, adults identified many other benefits of learning. Learning was recognised as being able to:

- occupy/ expand your mind;
- develop your knowledge and skills;
- increase your confidence and self-esteem;
- improve your health and well-being;
- increase your independence and give you more choice;
- provide experience and demonstrate commitment;
- give you time for yourself;
- help you to keep up with other people and make friends; and
- bring benefits to your family, for example, grandchildren.

'[Learning] gives me a sense of well being that you are trying achieve something.' (Male, age 50)

'It's a sense of achievement for me, to make me proud and to show my daughters that if I can do it they can really do well at school as well.' (Female, age 29)

Karen, age 31

Karen is a single parent of two children. She describes herself as 'a highly motivated person that's made myself think I can do this, a person that doesn't give in'. Her confidence has grown considerably since leaving school.

I wouldn't have done this 10 years ago, I wouldn't have spoken to a, no offence but we're complete strangers, I've never met you before, about my issues, problems in life dealing with it, how I feel etc

School was a difficult time for Karen.

I just switched off I used to suck my thumb

I absolutely hated school. I wouldn't say I had a short attention span but I struggled to grasp the concept of learning, I just didn't get what they were trying to say to me and I came out of school with very poor grades because they didn't give me any help whatsoever or support in the way that I needed to learn.

Karen left school 'feeling like a failure and quite thick' but she did not give up on learning. In fact she has been studying almost non-stop ever since. She has gained several NVQs and completed the equivalent of NVQ Level 4 in Childcare through the Open University. It was during her first NVQ that she was diagnosed with dyslexia and got the support she required.

I achieved so much as an adult, I've got qualifications coming out of my ears but it's via my own learning ways

I've now learnt later on in life [I am] a kinesthetic learner, someone who's very practical and hands on and that's me. Whereas at school you have to sit in front of a chalk board

It's taken me a while not to be embarrassed about how I feel, and just think well it's who I am and take it on the chin and deal with it or I don't, and struggle. Thankfully I am a strong person that can overcome it and don't mind admitting I need help

Karen is currently doing an NVQ in Health and Social Care. She knows what she would like to do in the future.

I'd like to be able to help a mum or a family that are struggling to cope-be a family support worker I suppose, definitely working with mental health-I love it, absolutely love it

She is interested in training to be a social worker but may need some encouragement to boost her confidence.

Social work...I'm thinking, from what I've achieved now I kind of think 'I bet I could' 'I bet I could' if I push myself but then I don't want to burn myself out, I don't want to push it too much...cos there's nothing worse than trying and failing because obviously for me the failing just reminds you...

A part of me from school still thinks 'can I do that?'

Barriers to learning

For some adults, learning is not something on their agenda. For others, there are potential barriers to taking part. Interviewees cited situational barriers such as time and money, as well as structural barriers.

'Well I like to learn but like with current things with government you set off to do a course in something and when you get a job you've gotta pack the course inand go do that again.'
(Male, age 53)

Many adults also spoke about dispositional and cultural barriers, which can often be particularly complex to resolve and often overlap with other types of barriers.

'I would have like to study for longer but girls in India have to get married.' (Female, age 41)

'It sounds a bit daunting as well because I don't want it to be like the school days.' (Female, age 49)

'It's just getting the confidence to get onto that line...that escalator to go up.' (Male, age 45)

Graham, age 58

Graham is currently looking for work. He is not finding many suitable vacancies at the Jobcentre. Graham is visually impaired. He started to lose his sight about 10 years ago.

I mean if they [Jobcentre staff] could say to me go home and don't come they would do

Graham is thinking about learning Braille. He thinks this would help him in everyday life, including paid work. He suspects his sight will continue to deteriorate.

It is something that I might need. In the very near future Braille would learn me to be able to cope with life a lot better

For Graham the ideal would be to study Braille locally but he has heard that this may not be possible. He needs to find out more and could contact a local organisation that supports people with visual impairments.

I know they would help without a doubt. Now they used to have a Braille school there, but I'm sure it's been stopped now according to what I've been told

Another potential barrier to learning for Graham relates to a previous educational experience. In his late 30s, Graham wanted to be a chef and took an NVQ which he really enjoyed. Although he was doing well on the course he was not able to complete it for financial reasons. He felt very let down by the Government and believes that completing the course would have completely changed his life.

To me it were a waste of money by the government paying for the first two year and not finishing it off

I could have... gone a long way as a top chef

Graham lost interest and confidence in learning as a result, and is not sure if he will study again.

If I knew the system had changed I might do

His daughter is encouraging him to take part in further education.

Simon, age 42

Simon is currently living with his parents due to ill health. He has been “on the sick” for close to two years now.

Throughout his life he has experienced health problems, including depression, which have affected both employment and learning opportunities. One year into an HND course he had to withdraw.

Which was a pity cause I got really good grades

You kinda think that if I hadn't got ill it would have been really good for my career

Simon's time is spent managing his health. He would like to work in the future and has a Disability Employment Advisor. Recently, Simon had wanted to do a course but his advisor did not think he was ready. He now feels this was the right decision.

He didn't think I could manage it. He did me a favour. I really wanted to do it, if I'd started it, I would have had to drop out, which would have been a bit of a blow

Simon would like to do some learning to help him secure work in the future. He is interested in updating his computer skills.

I hope to at least show a prospective employer that although I have been ill for over a long period of time, I haven't just sat on my backside doing nothing and...whatever qualifications I get, would show that what energy I have, to better my chances, would show willing

I don't think I've ever had a job which kinda lived up to what my abilities were. But I've never quite had the qualifications for it either

Adults interviewed highlighted a range of triggers to learning and interventions that can support engagement, for example:

- comfortable and supportive atmosphere;
- good advertising of classes;
- local learning opportunities;
- support from tutors and others (e.g. family, employer);
- interesting, relevant and flexible provision;
- the 'right' course / information, advice and guidance;
- financial support;
- confidence building activities; and
- practical learning.

'It's when I sit down and have to start thinking that I just get bored.' (Male, age 30)

'I think that the learning experience at the college suited me, the different authority style of not being told what to do, it was your choice.' (Male, age 30)

Volunteering

At least half of the adults interviewed have undertaken some type of unpaid work. Approximately a third of the sample said they were currently 'volunteering'. This does not include everyone who mentioned caring responsibilities or supporting a family member with their business, which might also be defined as voluntary work.

The types of volunteering adults are undertaking include:

- helping out at local school;
- parent governor;
- working in charity shops;
- volunteer driver; and
- providing support at a local family learning centre.

'When we came back to England and I had my second baby we settled a bit and I became a HomeStart volunteer which I did for 9 years. Working with children under 5.' (Female, age 58)

'I'd like to learn how to write bids ...I'd like to help the community.' (Male, age 54)

Mark, age 41

Mark is a university graduate. He would like to be a playwright and novelist.

My kind of burning ambition is to have a play on at the National Theatre

I suppose I'd like at one point to write a play that would outlive me

In recent years, Mark has done a significant amount of volunteering which has enabled him to pursue his interests and gain experience. He has not done any paid work since university due to illness.

I got into the habit of doing creative projects when I was at University and that hasn't really stopped since then, even though I'm not formally working I'm always working on projects

Over the past four years particularly I've volunteered with community theatre groups basically so I've run projects, I've written plays, I've directed plays as well

Mark's health problem persists and he can be poorly for up to five hours a day. However, he would like to secure work which he can manage alongside his health. He is currently putting together a portfolio of work to help with this. Financial worry is a driving force.

I feel quite jaded because I did a degree and I'm living on crumbs and over the next couple of years these crumbs are going to get smaller and that's one of the things that's motivated me to try and get a career

My health is so bad, I couldn't do a 9-5 job at all...writing is something I could probably do in the times during the day when I'm actually well

Mark may enrol on a Masters course if he finds out this would improve his chances of getting work and could defer payment of course fees.

Early lessons in working with adults

Drawing on the data generated from interviews with adults aged 25+ and in light of the initial analysis presented above, the following five early lessons were presented at the LSIS policy seminar.

1. If we think that young people are diverse, then adults are even more so

Interviews were conducted with adults with an age range of over 50 years, with each generation having different experiences of initial schooling. There is much more variety in terms of employment and educational histories, as well as in terms of current roles and responsibilities than among the young people interviewed. For example, adults were more likely to have a history of paid employment and also to have been engaged in voluntary activity.

In the current economic climate, the term 'NEET' is increasingly being used to cover not only young people and adults disadvantaged by their socio-economic status, but also experienced professionals who have found themselves out of work as a result of the recession.

2. Adults with the lowest skills have the longest journeys to sustainable work

As with young people, adults also need access to impartial information, advice and guidance (IAG) and appropriate learning opportunities to enable these journeys to take place. It is also important that our accreditation systems can take these complex learner journeys into account – for adults as well as for young people.

3. Displacement from the labour market can seriously damage your life chances

The current economic climate means that we are facing a changing profile of young people and adults who are outside of education and employment. An increasing proportion has higher level qualifications and our data show that early success is not necessarily a guarantee against marginalisation in later years. Displacement from the labour market can seriously damage your life chances at whatever stage it occurs. We will need to ensure that adults have ongoing opportunities to take part in learning and to continue to develop their skills and knowledge.

4. Opportunities to learn informally affect attitudes towards formal learning

Like young people, a significant proportion of adults have had negative experiences of schooling. By the time they were interviewed however, (which for some was much later), many of them were positive about learning, often as a result of their experiences of informal opportunities to learn in the workplace or the voluntary sector. This is an important reminder of the value of informal adult learning, especially as a progression route to more formal learning opportunities, as well as a reminder of the crucial role of the voluntary sector in providing such opportunities.

5. Big chunks of learning are difficult to fit into busy lives

Many learners interviewed had employment, volunteering or caring responsibilities. Others had mental or physical health issues which impacted upon their ability to take up opportunities. In order to be able to fit learning into the complexities of life, adults need access to bite size learning opportunities.

Provider impact

Once all of the interview data had been collected, participating organisations were asked to complete a short online questionnaire (Appendix 9) to provide contextual data on their organisation, to outline their work with young people or adults who are not engaged in education, employment or training and to identify the critical success factors of this work. Providers were also asked for their reflections on what they learned from taking part in the research project and how this would inform their ongoing work with the target group. NIACE received 122 responses to the survey (98% of participating organisations).

Overall, providers reported beneficial effects from participating in the research project. Most gained a better understanding of the circumstances of those who are not engaged in education, employment or training, what their barriers to learning may be and how they can best be supported to overcome these barriers. Many providers reported that they now plan to improve their provision as a result of what they have learned. In addition, providers also reported having developed new relationships, or built upon existing relationships, with partnership organisations and agencies especially in their locality. Many providers reported that they have learned more about the research process and would now feel confident to take part in similar research projects in the future.

Accessing potential interviewees

Many providers found it very difficult to access potential interviewees, taking multiple approaches before successfully engaging participants. In order to achieve their sample, most learning providers approached and worked in partnership with other agencies and organisations in their local area, including:

- Connexions;
- Youth Offending Service;
- Young people's service;
- Youth clubs;
- Family Intervention Service;
- Social Services;
- Jobcentre Plus;
- Homeless hostels;
- Barnado's;
- YMCA;
- Sure Start centres;
- Housing Associations; and
- Prince's Trust.

Taking part in this project has therefore served to build and improve relationships between learning providers and local partner organisations, as they have learned more of each other's roles and ways of working. This has helped them to consider how they can better work together in the future to tackle the multiple barriers to learning and complexity of learning needs at play within their local constituency.

'When organisations really do feel they have contributed or learned by working together to achieve a goal this builds confidence in the relationship and hopefully willingness to extend the links and build the mesh. Sharing targets, getting beyond institutional cultures, rules, norms and expectations can free up the ability to provide more effective support.'
(Participating provider)

Where interviewees were directly recruited by the learning provider, these tended to be prospective students, ex-students, or current learners on programmes such as Entry to Employment (E2E). A small number of organisations used the snowballing technique, asking interviewees whether they knew of anyone else that met the requirements of the sample. A significant proportion of organisations were already delivering projects with young people or adults who are not engaged in education, employment or training and so chose to interview those with whom they were already working.

Most organisations offered incentives to potential interviewees, such as store vouchers or the cost of travel to and from the interview. One organisation that approached potential interviewees through Jobcentre Plus, offered a first aid course in addition to a shopping voucher. Providers offered these gifts as an incentive to take part, but also as a way of thanking participants for their contribution.

Lessons learned about the research topic, methodology and process

Most providers reported gaining an insight into the many and complex reasons why individual young people and adults are not engaged in education, employment or training. For many, taking part in the research dispelled the myth that this group is an homogenous one and challenged stereotypes of those who are labelled 'NEET'.

Many providers commented that interviewees did not seem unwilling to engage in learning, employment or training but were generally unaware of opportunities available to them. However, the approach of undertaking this research using learning providers and with such a tight timescale, meant that the sample is likely to be more positive about learning than other young people and adults not in education, employment and training.

'There may be a case that a longer turnaround time would have allowed a greater degree of community outreach which would have helped us to penetrate into a deeper level of people disengaged from education and training – to some extent most of the people we interviewed were at the very least willing to enter our building, whereas that may not be the case for all the NEET group.' (Participating provider)

Providers reported that they felt encouraged by the enthusiasm of individuals to participate in the project. Interviewees appeared to value the attention and interest shown through the interview process and appreciated the time and opportunity to reflect on their experiences and what their future aspirations are.

'Although there appeared to be some common factors running through, each had their own story and were entirely different. In the main none had any idea of the guarantees and how raising the age limit would affect them. Young people were surprised that anyone would be interested in their life and what had happened in the past. Seemed to appreciate the opportunity to be listened to and for somebody to have the time to sit and talk with them. Most had very clear thoughts on what they wanted to do but negative experiences either at school, college or work had severely affected their confidence in moving forward.' (Participating provider)

One of LSIS's key aims in designing this methodological approach to the work, was to build the research capacity of the sector and to support the development of research-engaged professionals. Feedback from the provider survey confirmed the success of the project in addressing these aims. Providers reported that they learned a lot about the research process itself and that they would now feel confident to take part in research like this again. They added that this experience would help them in future planning and funding applications as well as developing their own practice:

'This is the first time we have participated in this type of research. We have found both the process and methodology easy to use and follow . . . The research has helped us to gain a better understanding of the needs of NEETs. As these constitute the vast majority of our current clients, this has proved to be invaluable. We will use this information in future planning and funding applications.' (Participating provider)

'The process has given us valuable insight into the lives of the local residents who we are trying to help. Even though we know some of these interviewees quite well, the interview process threw up information that was new to us. We were moved by the candour of some of our subjects and we hope that you find their stories useful. Their insights will help us to plan future projects and hopefully shape the way that resources are used in the area. We really appreciate being given the opportunity to take part in your research and we hope that we can be involved in future work of this nature.' (Participating provider)

'We've found it to be a very humbling and rewarding experience, and have been able to capture the impact of both negative and positive learning and work experiences. It will certainly inform our practice, and we're excited to be able to leverage this as part of the research.' (Participating provider)

As well as gaining confidence in conducting research, a number of providers said that the project also encouraged staff and renewed their motivation. As one provider told us:

'The staff participating have gained renewed motivation and commitment to this client group. They recognise more than ever before the importance of the role that they have in trying to re-engage with youngsters that many have given up on. To have their interest in the students recognised by the participants has proved to be invaluable as a motivational force.' (Participating provider)

A significant proportion of providers already collect and record information about people's circumstances and experiences but not in a systematic way. Taking part in this project has provided them with tangible evidence about the barriers to learning and training.

Through the process of identifying interviewees and engaging with individuals who are not currently learning, the majority of organisations have gained a better understanding of the needs of individuals in these circumstances and how best to engage with them in the future. Providers have also developed and built upon relationships with other organisations and agencies; they now have a better understanding of how these organisations work, what difficulties they face and how they may continue to work together in the future.

'The project clearly required us to communicate with young people and adults who were in an identified NEET situation. Setting up interviews etc. required us to engage with a range of agencies, providers and third sector organisations. This has been very productive and will lead to longer term relationships.' (Participating provider)

Taking part in the project also enabled organisations to evaluate the provision they currently offer to those who have not been engaged in learning, training or employment. Many organisations are now planning to implement or improve provision for this group, such as short courses or a more individualised service, tailored to needs.

Most providers commented that individuals were not aware of the options available to them and so they are going to review their information, advice and guidance policies and procedures and investigate whether they require further resources. Although providers market themselves, a significant proportion told us that they need to improve their approach. They now plan to work with partners and their marketing teams to make sure that opportunities are communicated to those who are currently disengaged.

'There are a large number of organisations working within the area and targeting the NEET population. However, delivery appears to be fragmented and there is no overall awareness or co-ordination of provision. . . The College may now look to set up some form of umbrella organisation to coordinate activity and to act as a clearing house for target population information. There is a need to recognise and adopt a more flexible provision to respond to the needs of the target group. Some of these may have constraints imposed by caring for others (own children or dependent adults) and provision of delivery should recognise needs and be able to support flexibility in time, location, mode of study and others.'
(Participating provider)

Providers found the experience of interviewing and working with the individuals who are currently not engaged in learning very rewarding and said they would encourage other organisations to be open minded about engaging with these groups of people. Although they were not currently engaged, many interviewees explained that they were not unwilling to re-engage but simply did not know how. Respondents felt very strongly that people in these circumstances may have had negative experiences of education in the past and should be given a chance to break this cycle.

'These young people had resigned themselves to the idea that it was too late for them, that they had wasted any chance of education and had no future. . . There seemed to be a cycle of struggling, not receiving enough help and giving up. However, nearly all of the interviewees provided some form of testimony . . . This seemed to suggest that the young people are still eager to achieve something.'

'This research has challenged assumptions that there is an unwillingness to learn or re-enter some form of educational/vocational programme. This was hugely contested by our interviewees.'

Current provision for young people and adults not in education, employment and training

When asked about their current provision for young people or adults, 98 (80%) participating providers stated that they currently make specific provision for those who are not currently engaged in education, employment or training. This includes:

- E2E and pre-E2E programmes;
- Adult Community Learning;
- Work-focused training;
- Response to Redundancy training;
- English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL);
- Pre-learning courses, such as anger management;
- Mentoring schemes;
- Skills for Life;
- Functional skills courses;
- IT Entry Level;
- Learning and Skills Council (LSC) Skills for Jobs Project;
- Information, advice and guidance, including CV writing, action planning and interview technique;
- Debt and Finance courses;
- Motivational programmes to improve confidence and assertiveness;
- Family Learning;
- Community Learning Champion projects;
- Work placements; and
- Taster sessions

The main aims of this provision are to help people to engage with learning, training and/or employment. Provision is based on inclusivity and equality of opportunity in order to widen participation in learning or to get people ready for the job market.

Some of the provision is specifically aimed at enabling people to make choices about their lives, helping them to identify and overcome barriers and supporting them in deciding what their next step should be. This can be a very valuable stage for some individuals prior to commencing on a learning course. As one provider explained:

'We offer interventions such as anger groups, anxiety groups, counselling, needle exchange and a drop in social area. It may be a client engages with one or more of these interventions before they gain the confidence to ask about educational opportunities.' (Participating provider)

Much of the provision is deliberately creative and innovative in order to be attractive to those who have had negative experiences of initial education or who have been disengaged from learning for a significant period of time. Many learning providers offer short courses or taster sessions to encourage young people and adults to give learning a try.

'The College is now developing a re-engagement project, 'Outdoor Leadership', a four week project targeted at NEET identified youth and offering a range of outdoor pursuit activities and leadership development with them aim of increasing self-esteem, personal awareness and achievement.' (Participating provider)

'The main aim of the project is to get the young people back into doing something with a view to moving them on to appropriate provision whether in college or the job market. We use a range of activities to do this including gym fitness, hair and beauty, street dance . . . These courses are based on demand from the young people and are very much tailored to them and their needs. . . Alongside every course we deliver a Wider Key Skill or City and Guilds PSD module so that the young person gains an accreditation.' (Participating provider)

Most providers do not specifically target 'hard to reach' groups, instead their courses or programmes are designed for those in particular age brackets, e.g. 14-19 years. Those providers who did target specific groups, focussed on some of the following:

- disabled people;
- people with learning difficulties;
- people with mental illnesses;
- young parents;
- traveller community;
- visually impaired;
- those at risk of redundancy;

- refugees;
- asylum seekers;
- carers;
- care leavers;
- women;
- families;
- drug/alcohol addicts; and
- young offenders.

Most learning providers told us that the learners they work with are referred to them by local partner organisations, including:

- Young people's services;
- Connexions;
- Youth Offending Service;
- Social housing providers;
- YMCAs;
- Health visitors;
- Social Services; and
- Jobcentre Plus.

When asked about transferable lessons and critical success factors from their existing work with young people and adults not in education, employment and training, providers' main message related to the need for flexibility in availability of learning opportunities. Many providers reported that taking part in the research project provided them with a better understanding of young people and adults in these circumstances and what their learning needs might be, as well as being reminded that 'one size does not fit all'. In order to meet these varied and sometimes complex needs, providers suggested the following:

- smaller class sizes;
- one-to-one support;
- creative and practical learning;
- mentoring schemes;
- impartial information, advice and guidance;
- marketing of courses/services; and
- short courses.

'We don't just run a project, we work very closely and targeted with each young person to find out clearly what is preventing engagement, to raise confidence and help open up doors to success. We ensure that every young person matters and work very hard with them to achieve sustained success.'
(Participating provider)

Providers also told us that the following elements of their provision enable them to work effectively for the learner:

- working in partnership with other organisations and agencies, including Local Authorities, schools, colleges and employers;
- a small team of staff able to react and cater for needs quickly;
- professional, dedicated and experienced staff;
- proper assessment of the needs of the individual.

As many interviewees reported negative experiences of schooling, providers reinforced the message that as well as being practical and creative, a very different approach should be taken to that used within initial education. Young people should be treated more like adults and adults should be treated with respect, remembering that many of them already have qualifications and experience.

'It is essential that the structure of programmes do not replicate the formal learning environment these young people have already rejected. The college therefore develops individual learning programmes with confidence and motivation building as key to progression.' (Participating provider)

Providers said there should be more time and space for learners to reflect on what they would like to achieve, and how. A significant proportion highlighted that many of the target group have issues around low self esteem, low confidence and anger management, which can make engagement in learning or employment more difficult. Consistent and tailored support is therefore required in order to enable them to remain engaged.

The importance of high quality, relevant and easily available information, advice and guidance was also considered to be a critical success factor. Providers suggested that signposting activity needs to be impartial and offered at earlier stages. Marketing of available courses and services should also be improved. Most providers market themselves through advertising in newspapers, newsletters and on the internet. A few said they raise their profiles by speaking at events and take part in Adult Learners' Week and the Family Learning Festival. Many providers encourage people to sign up to their courses by offering taster sessions.

A number of organisations said that they sometimes struggle to engage with individuals considered to be the most 'hard to reach' and feel that they would like to work more creatively to engage with these people. Although they are able to work well with many people who have recent experience of not being engaged in any learning, training or employment, a small number of individuals will not engage no matter what incentive is offered.

However, one organisation stated that this project had helped them to engage with people who are currently not involved in learning:

'We feel this has been a very valuable project and we have engaged with hard to reach learners in a more positive way than just a recruitment campaign.' (Participating provider)

Many organisations said that they have been finding it difficult to help learners progress into employment due to the economic downturn and one provider said they were particularly concerned that the young people they work with may become disillusioned.

Early lessons on the impact on providers

Drawing on the data generated from provider feedback and in light of the initial analysis presented above, the following five early lessons were presented at the LSIS policy seminar.

1. Practitioners developed and utilised research skills

Taking part in the research enabled practitioners to develop and use research skills with a direct implication for their work. It has developed their understanding of the target group in a way that has challenged any pre-conceived ideas they may have had and also enabled them to evaluate and develop their own provision.

2. Providers developed better relationships with partners

In trying to reach those who are not learning, providers have had to develop new relationships, as well as build on existing relationships, with other organisations and agencies. This now means that they are in a better position to take forward a more holistic approach towards addressing the range of issues faced by these young people and adults.

3. The project created a community of interest

The model adopted by LSIS of using an intermediate organisation, such as NIACE, to support practitioners to undertake interviews with potential learners has created a community of interest that has rediscovered outreach skills, but that is also interested in sharing these skills and knowledge with each other. Practitioners involved in the research were encouraged by the enthusiasm of young people and adults to take part, which in turn has renewed their own motivation. Practitioners also reflected that they have learned more about the *process* of undertaking research and are keen to take part in similar exercises in the future.

4. The project was a field led innovation addressing a key and challenging social policy

This is why we believe that this is a model for future ways of working that both capture learner voice and provider energy, and could easily be adapted to address other key, and equally challenging, areas of social policy.

5. Providers and practitioners need to be aware of, and understand policy, in order to communicate it well.

Finally, a point that became apparent to us as we looked at the interview transcripts was the importance of practitioners being both aware of, and having a good understanding of policy, in order to be able to communicate it well. This is an important reminder that practitioners need to be well-briefed, trained and supported. There is an important role for trusted intermediaries in making sure that this takes place.

Appendix 1

Guidance for providers on meeting the requirement of the grant

Your organisation has been selected to take part in the LSIS NEET national research project which is being administered by NIACE on behalf of LSIS. Your organisation has been allocated a grant in order to undertake research interviews with young people (16-24) or adults (25+) who have current or recent experience of being NEET. This guidance has been developed in order to provide you with the information that you will need to undertake this work.

The aim of this work is to:

- improve understanding of the aspirations, motivations and behaviours of young people and adults who are not in education, employment or training (NEET);
- understand how the September and January guarantees have operated
- inform the national strategy (in preparation) for the raising the participation age;
- support you, as a provider in the learning and skills sector, to secure institution-specific evidence to develop your own understanding in relation to these issues; and
- inform provider strategies to meet the needs of young people and adults in your locality.

We have developed a **briefing sheet for providers**, outlining the project, which you may wish to share with colleagues in your organisation, as well as with external providers.

Identifying your sample

The national research project is primarily focussed on young people and adults who are not in education, employment or training. Therefore a minimum of 80% of your interviews should be with young people/adults in these circumstances.

The remaining interviews (maximum of 20%) can be with young people/adults who have been outside of education, employment and training in the recent past (i.e. within the previous 12 months), but are now engaged in learning.

For the purposes of this study, we are defining NEETs as young people (aged 16-24) or adults (aged 25+) years who are not in:

- employment
- education (full time, part time, or on a gap year having an agreed HE start date)
- government supported training

Those who are defined as NEET include those undertaking voluntary work or personal development opportunities, those seeking (or waiting to start) work or learning or those who are not active in the labour market (including those experiencing ill-health, caring for children, etc). Because of the predominant focus on current NEETs, education providers are expected to work with partners such as the Connexions service, Jobcentre Plus, pupil referral teams,

relevant voluntary sector organisations etc. to identify interviewees. It is left to the provider's discretion as to whether any of the grant is passed on to partner agencies.

Selecting your sample

You have already identified how you intend to recruit your sample. Please ensure that this sample is as diverse as possible, in terms of age, gender, ethnicity, disability and wider context.

It will be left to providers' discretion as to whether any of the grant offered by LSIS is passed onto interview participants, although the use of some form of incentive, such as store vouchers, is recommended.

As part of the support materials that we have produced, you will find:

- A **briefing sheet for participants**, explaining the project and their role in this. Please ensure that interviewees receive a copy of this in an appropriate format (i.e. large font, Braille, coloured paper, etc) and understand the points raised within it.
- A **participant information form** to collect useful contextual information on each of the individuals involved in the project. Please ensure that this is completed and returned for each individual being interviewed.
- A **consent form** for participants to sign that will enable us to use the material generated from your work. The form must also be signed by the interviewer. The original form should be returned to NIACE and a copy given to the participant. A signed consent form relating to each interviewee will need to be returned to NIACE in order to satisfy the requirements of the grant agreement.

If you anticipate that you will have problems in undertaking the full number of interviews specified in your grant agreement, please let us know as soon as possible by contacting NEETresearch@niace.org.uk

Undertaking the interviews

As part of the support materials that we have produced you will find a document entitled **Planning and Conducting Interviews**. This should help you to think through some of the issues and practicalities of undertaking research interviews.

We have also provided **topic guides** for interviewers to follow when undertaking interviews. These guides identify the key questions that we are concerned with, as well as a set of prompts or sub-questions that should enable interviewers to engage young people in a rich discussion. You may need to think about the best way of phrasing these questions for the people you are interviewing.

We anticipate that interviewers will have a good understanding of issues affecting young people and adults who are not in education, employment or training and be able to develop a good rapport with them.

Audio recording and transcription

As part of the project we require you to digitally audio record the interviews and to fully transcribe them. You may want to undertake the transcription within your organisation or you may want to identify an external organisation to do this for you. Using professional audio-typists/transcribers is likely to be quicker and more accurate than using individuals inexperienced in doing this. Funding for audio equipment and for transcription is assumed to be part of this grant.

As well as providing an accurate account of your interview, creating a digital audio recording will allow you to concentrate on what the interviewee is saying and more easily capture verbatim quotes. Digital recording is superior to tape recording as you do not have to worry about the tape finishing during the interview. Before the interview, take time to familiarise yourself with, and test the equipment. Make sure that you have additional batteries for the recorder.

In order to satisfy the requirements of the grant agreement, you will need to submit to NIACE an electronic copy of the digital audio file and the transcription in Microsoft Word. Submissions should be sent on an encrypted disc or in a compressed password protected .zip file, providing us with the password.

Testimonies

As well as including interview data within this research project, we are also extremely keen to receive photos of those being interviewed as well as their personal testimonies. Please encourage interviewees to submit testimonies in a range of formats including diaries, written stories and poems, audio and video recordings, scrapbooks, drawings, photographs drawings and storyboards.

In order to provide complementary data to that provided in the interviews, we suggest that individuals focus on what inspires them, and how learning is able to link into or flow out of this. This material should be collated by you the provider and returned to NIACE along with the interview data and relevant documentation.

Provider questionnaire

Towards the end of March, we will be sending you a link to an **online provider questionnaire** in which we will ask you to provide a range of contextual data about your organisation, an overview of your work with NEETs and your assessment of critical success factors. We will also be asking for your reflections on what you have learned as part of this process and how this will inform your ongoing work with NEETs. This questionnaire will need to be completed and submitted in order to satisfy the requirements of the grant agreement.

Supporting your CPD

A short **reflective log and certificate** has been developed to enable staff to use their participation in the project towards their CPD record. Certificates will be issued by LSIS to participating staff at the close of the project.

Project outputs

All data should be submitted to NIACE by 31st March 2010. This will include:

- A completed online provider questionnaire
- Encrypted or password protected audio files and full transcription of all interviews, accompanied by participant information sheets and consent forms
- Individual testimonies from NEETs and learners

Material should be sent to:

Dr Fiona Aldridge
Programme Director, Research
NIACE
20 Princess Road West
Leicester
LE1 6TP

Or emailed to NEETresearch@niace.org.uk

Material sent by post should be sent by recorded delivery.

Providers will receive their full payment from LSIS on receipt of the Grant Claim Form (attached to their grant letter). Prior to submitting their claim form, providers will have received a purchase order from LSIS. The PO number will need to be quoted on the claim form. Failure to complete the provider questionnaire or to submit data on the agreed number of interviews will result in a claw back of the proportion of the grant at a later date.

Further information, support and advice

If you have further questions not covered within this guidance, or require research support and advice, please email NEETresearch@niace.org.uk

A NIACE researcher, working on this project, will be available to answer any queries and will contact you either by email or by telephone within 48 hours of receiving your query.

Appendix 2

Briefing sheet for providers

NIACE, the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education, has been asked by LSIS to undertake a national research project involving a wide range of learning providers to look at attitudes and experiences of those not in education, employment or training (NEET).

The research project will involve two parallel pieces of work: the first looking at young NEETS, aged 16-24) and the second at adult NEETs aged 15+. In the work with young NEETs we are particularly interested in exploring young people's awareness and experience of the September and January guarantees.

Aim

The aim of the research project is to:

- Improve understanding of the aspirations, motivations and behaviours of young people and adults who are not in education, employment or training;
- To support providers in the learning and skills sector to secure institution-specific evidence to develop their understanding in relation to these issues;
- To inform individual provider strategies to meet the needs of young people and adults in their locality; and
- To inform the national strategy (in preparation) for the raising the participation age.

Focus

This project is primarily focussed around those people who are not currently in education, employment or training (minimum of 80% interviews), although we are also looking for some evidence from learners (maximum of 20% interviews) who have been outside of employment, education and training in the recent past, but are now engaged in learning.

Method

Selected providers have been allocated a grant to undertake individual face-to face-interviews with young people and adults with current and recent experience of being NEET. In addition, providers will be asked to complete a short provider questionnaire to provide contextual data, and overview of their work with NEETs and to identify critical success factors. Providers will also be required to encourage interviewees to produce testimonies of their personal story in a range of formats including diaries, written stories and poems, audio and video recordings, scrapbooks, drawings, photographs and storyboards. A range of support materials and services will be provided by NIACE to undertake this work. You will need to seek permission from those interviewed to record the interview and use other materials they provide you with for the testimonies. Please use the consent form provided.

Outputs and timescale

All data should be submitted to NIACE by 31st March 2010.
This includes:

- A completed online provider questionnaire
- Audio recordings and full transcriptions of all interviews
- Individual testimonies

What next?

Following 31st March, NIACE researchers will be undertaking a detailed analysis of the data submitted with a view to producing two publications focussing on the experiences of young and adult NEETs.

If you have any queries about the NEET national research project, please email NEETresearch@niace.org.uk

Appendix 3

Briefing sheet for participants

What is the project about?

NIACE are undertaking a research project with learning providers to look at attitudes and experiences of people not in education, employment or training. This project is funded by LSIS, the Learning and Skills Improvement Service, which is an organisation set up by the government to help Colleges and other learning providers provide the best possible service for learners.

We would like to hear of your experiences so that Colleges and other organisations that provide learning/training can design their courses better.

Why have I been invited to take part?

We would like to hear about the experiences of people who are not, or who have recently not been, in education, employment or training.

Do I have to take part?

No you don't, it's up to you. If you do, we will ask you to sign a consent form. You are free to leave the research at any time.

What will I have to do if I take part?

We would like you to be involved in 2 parts of the research.

1. An interview

The interview will be about:

- Your experiences of education in the past
- Your attitude towards learning in the future
- How you currently spend most of your time
- Your ambitions and aspirations for the future and any plans you have to get there

If you have recently started a learning course or programme, we would also like to know what you are learning, how you got started, your experiences so far and whether this has changed your plans for the future.

We would like your permission to digitally record the interview.

2. A testimony

A testimony is a story about your journey and experiences. We would like to hear about your personal story in your own words. This can be done in a range of ways, including:

- A diary
- Stories or poems
- Audio and video recordings
- Scrapbooks
- Drawings
- Photographs

We would really like to know what inspires you and how this relates to learning.

What are my rights?

- You can leave the research at any time
- You can tell us whether you would like us to use your real first name or use another name
- We will follow the Data Protection Act 1998 in storing and using any information you give us. This means that we will keep your contact details securely and in a separate place from the information collected during your interview. Nothing you say will be linked to you unless you have given us permission to do this

What will happen to the results of the research?

Once we have completed the project we will write a report which will include the stories of the people that have been interviewed. We may also use the information and materials you give us in future publicity and other promotional material.

If you have any questions, please email us
NEETresearch@niace.org.uk
or call Emily Jones on 0116 2859676.

Appendix 4

Topic Guide for interviews with young people who are currently not in education, employment or training (NEET)

To be used with a minimum of 80% of interviewees within total package

Topic	Question	Prompts
Background information and context	What is your name?	
	How old are you?	
	Where do you live?	Do you live on your own, with your family, or with somebody else?
	Where did you live when you were growing up?	Who did you live with?
Experience of school	What was your experience of school like?	<p>What was positive?</p> <p>What was negative?</p> <p>Did you have any particular problems/ difficulties at school?</p> <p>Did you find anyone particularly helpful/ supportive at school?</p>
Leaving school	How old were you when you left school?	
	Did you leave with any qualifications?	
	Why did you leave school at this point?	<p>Were there any particular reasons?</p> <p>Was there a particular trigger?</p> <p>If you felt that learning wasn't for you, can you explain why?</p>
	What impact do you think leaving school at this age has had?	
	Have you been involved in any further learning since leaving school?	<p>If yes: What other learning have you been involved with?</p> <p>How and why did you get involved – did someone help you?</p> <p>What were you expecting from this learning?</p> <p>What did you think of the learning?</p> <p>What were the benefits – how did it help you?</p>

Topic	Question	Prompts
Current activity	How do you currently spend your time?	Any education, training or paid employment? Any unpaid work such as volunteering or caring? Any involvement in groups/ projects? Particular interests or hobbies?
	Do you receive any support from individuals or services such as connexions, housing or health services?	What sort of support is this? How useful is this support?
	How, if at all, has this support affected your thoughts about learning?	Has your attitude to learning changed? Are you more or less likely to get engaged in learning?
Ambitions and aspirations	What are your plans for the future?	Is there anything particular that you would like to achieve in the next few years? What about your longer terms aspirations and ambitions?
	How do you plan to achieve these?	What will you need to do? What opportunities or support will you need, and from whom?
	What might hold you back?	
Attitudes towards learning	In what ways, if any, do you think learning could benefit you?	What benefits might there be for you? OR Why do you think that learning would be beneficial to you?
	What role do you think learning might play in achieving your ambitions?	Why do you think this?
	What would encourage you to take up learning?	What support and opportunities would you need?
Views and experience of policy change	Have you heard of the January and/or September guarantees for young people?	<i>Explain what the guarantees are in a clear and simple way (see appendix 1)</i>
	Did you know that you as part of the guarantee, you are entitled to a suitable offer to engage in learning, including full-time or part-time education, an apprenticeship or programme-led apprenticeship, E2E or Foundation Learning or employment with training to NVQ level 2?	Did you receive such an offer? Did you take it up? Why or why not?

Topic	Question	Prompts
Views and experience of policy change <i>Continued</i>	<p>[ask of 16-17 year olds] What has been your experience of the guarantee?</p> <p>OR</p> <p>[ask of those aged 18+] what difference do you think the guarantee will make to young people?</p>	<p>[ask 16-17 year olds) How has your experience of the guarantee affected your attitude towards learning?</p> <p>How has it affected how likely you are to engage in learning in the future?</p>
	<p>Were you aware of the governments' plans to extend the age of participation in learning and training to 18?</p>	<p><i>Explain the policy around Raising the Participation Age (RPA) (see appendix 1)</i></p>
	<p>What do you think of this proposal?</p>	<p>What difference do you think it will make to young people?</p>
	<p>What sort of support or incentives need to be made available to encourage young people to make the most of this opportunity?</p>	<p>Which organisations or individuals do you think should offer this support?</p>

Topic Guide for interviews with young people with recent experience of not being in education, employment or training (NEET)

To be used with a minimum of 20% of interviewees within total package

Topic	Question	Prompts
Background information and context	What is your name?	
	How old are you?	
	Where do you live?	Do you live on your own, with your family, or with somebody else?
	Where did you live when you were growing up?	Who did you live with?
Experience of school	What was your experience of school like?	<p>What was positive?</p> <p>What was negative?</p> <p>Did you have any particular problems/ difficulties at school?</p> <p>Did you find anyone particularly helpful/ supportive at school?</p>
Leaving school	How old were you when you left school?	
	Did you leave with any qualifications?	
	Why did you leave school at this point?	<p>Were there any particular reasons?</p> <p>Was there a particular trigger?</p> <p>If you felt that learning wasn't for you, can you explain why?</p>
	What impact do you think leaving school at this age has had?	
	Prior to your current learning experience, have you been involved in any further learning since leaving school?	<p>If yes:</p> <p>What other learning have you been involved with?</p> <p>How and why did you get involved – did someone help you?</p> <p>What were you expecting from this learning?</p> <p>What did you think of the learning?</p> <p>What were the benefits – how did it help you?</p>

Topic	Question	Prompts
Current activity	In addition to the learning in which you're currently involved, How do you spend your time?	Any education, training or paid employment? Any unpaid work such as volunteering or caring? Any involvement in groups/ projects? Particular interests or hobbies?
	Do you receive any support from individuals or services such as connexions, housing or health services?	What sort of support is this? How useful is this support?
	Can you tell me about the learning that you are currently involved in?	Why did you get involved? What's the programme called? What and how are you learning? How often do you attend?
	How did you get involved in this learning?	What were your motivations for learning? Who and what helped you to get started? Who or what hindered your involvement? What were your initial expectations?
	So overall, are you enjoying your learning?	What is it that you particularly like about it? Are there things that you find difficult about the learning? Would you say it's different to your experience of school? In what way?
	Since starting this learning, have you benefited in any or made any particular progress?	E.g. do you feel more confident, have you developed personal or social skills – provide specific examples? Have you learnt any vocational or practical skills? Have you gained any qualifications? Has it helped you to get a job (or do you think it will help you to get a job in the future)? Any other benefits?
	Is this learning having any impact on your wider life?	Why are these things important to you? Have other people noticed this impact?

Topic	Question	Prompts
Current activity <i>Continued</i>	Which elements of your learning experience have you found most valuable?	Content of learning? Style of learning? Learning environment – anything that has particularly helped or which could be improved on? Length/structure of course? What support have you received and from whom?
Attitudes towards learning	Has this experience changed your perceptions of learning?	In what ways? What do you now think that learning can offer you?
	Any other experiences post-school that have changed attitudes to learning?	In what ways? What do you now think that learning can offer you?
Ambitions and aspirations	Has this learning experience changed the way you see your future?	Has it helped you to feel more positive about what you can achieve? If so, how?
	What are your plans for the future?	Is there anything particular that you would like to achieve in the next few years? What about your longer terms aspirations and ambitions?
	How do you plan to achieve these?	What will you need to do? What opportunities or support will you need, and from whom?
	What role do you think learning might play in achieving your ambitions?	Why do you think this is?

Topic	Question	Prompts
Views and experience of policy change	Have you heard of the January and/ or September guarantees for young people?	<i>Explain what the guarantees are in a clear and simple way (see appendix 1)</i>
	Did you know that you as part of the guarantee, you are entitled to a suitable offer to engage in learning, including full-time or part-time education, an apprenticeship or programme-led apprenticeship, E2E or Foundation Learning or employment with training to NVQ level 2?	Did you receive such an offer? Did you take it up? Why or why not?
	[ask of 16-17 year olds] What has been your experience of the guarantee? OR [ask of those aged 18+] what difference do you think the guarantee will make to young people?	[ask 16-17 year olds) How has your experience of the guarantee affected your attitude towards learning? Are you currently engaged in learning as a result of the guarantee?
	Were you aware of the governments' plans to extend the age of participation in learning and training to 18?	Explain the policy around Raising the Participation Age (RPA)
	What do you think of this proposal?	What difference do you think it will make to young people?
	What sort of support or incentives need to be made available to encourage young people to make the most of this opportunity?	Which organisations or individuals do you think should offer this support?
And finally...	What would you say to other people like you to encourage them to get involved in learning?	
	What do you think learning providers need to do to make this happen / encourage people like yourself to take up learning?	

Raising the Participation Age (RPA)

By 2015 all young people will be required to continue in education and training until their 18th birthday. This is not about raising the school leaving age - young people will be able to participate in a way that suits them. This could be in: full-time education, such as in full-time education at school or college; work-based learning, such as an Apprenticeship; or part-time education or training, if young people are employed, self-employed or volunteering for more than 20 hours a week.

September Guarantee

The September Guarantee is an offer, by the end of September, of a suitable place in learning to young people completing compulsory education. The guarantee was implemented nationally in 2007 and extended to 17 year olds in 2008 to give those who had enrolled on one-year or short courses, or who had left the activity they chose when leaving school, a further opportunity to engage in learning.

The offer must be one of the following:

- Full or part-time education in school, sixth form college, independent learning provider, or FE college;
- An apprenticeship or programme-led apprenticeship. This must include both the training element and a job or work placement, where this is a requirement of starting the apprenticeship;
- Entry to Employment (E2E) or Foundation Learning;
- Employment with training to NVQ level 2

The guarantee is an important element of the Department's strategies for reducing the proportion of young people not in education, employment or training, increasing participation, and raising attainment at age 19.

January Guarantee

Plans to build on the September guarantee with a January guarantee were proposed in November 2009. This ensures an offer of a place on an Entry to Employment programme to all 16 and 17 year olds who are not in education, employment or training (NEET) in January 2010.

Appendix 5

Topic Guide for interviews with adults who are currently not in education, employment or training (NEET)

To be used with a minimum of 80% of interviewees within total package

Topic	Question	Prompts
Background information and context	What is your name?	
	How old are you?	
	Where do you live?	Do you live on your own, with your family, or with somebody else?
	Where did you live when you were growing up?	Who did you live with?
Experience of school	What was your experience of school like?	<p>What was positive?</p> <p>What was negative?</p> <p>Did you have any particular problems/ difficulties at school?</p> <p>Did you find anyone particularly helpful/ supportive at school?</p>
Leaving school	How old were you when you left school?	
	Did you leave with any qualifications?	
	Why did you leave school at this point?	<p>Were there any particular reasons?</p> <p>Was there a particular trigger?</p> <p>If you felt that learning wasn't for you, can you explain why?</p>
	What impact do you think leaving school at this age has had?	
	Have you been involved in any further learning since leaving school?	<p>If yes:</p> <p>What other learning have you been involved with?</p> <p>How and why did you get involved – did someone help you?</p> <p>What were you expecting from this learning?</p> <p>What did you think of the learning?</p> <p>What were the benefits – how did it help you?</p>

Topic	Question	Prompts
Employment history	<p>What sort of paid or unpaid work have you been involved in since leaving school?</p> <p><i>Unpaid work can include caring responsibilities such as raising children.</i></p> <p>What is your current situation in relation to work?</p>	<p>Did this include any opportunities to take part in learning?</p> <p>If so, what did you expect from it? what did you think of it? what were the benefits?</p> <p>How did this come about?</p>
Current activity	How do you currently spend your time?	<p>Any education, training or paid employment?</p> <p>Any unpaid work such as volunteering or caring?</p> <p>Any involvement in groups/ projects?</p> <p>Particular interests or hobbies?</p>
	Do you receive any support from individuals or services such as JCP, housing or health services?	<p>What sort of support is this?</p> <p>How useful is this support?</p>
	How, if at all, has this support affected your thoughts about learning?	<p>Has your attitude to learning changed?</p> <p>Are you more or less likely to get engaged in learning?</p>
Ambitions and aspirations	What are your plans for the future?	<p>Is there anything particular that you would like to achieve in the next few years?</p> <p>What about your longer terms aspirations and ambitions?</p>
	How do you plan to achieve these?	<p>What will you need to do?</p> <p>What opportunities or support will you need, and from whom?</p>
	What might hold you back?	
Attitudes towards learning	In what ways, if any, do you think learning could benefit you?	<p>What benefits might there be for you?</p> <p>OR</p> <p>Why do you think that learning would be beneficial to you?</p>
	What role do you think learning might play in achieving your ambitions?	<p>Why do you think this is?</p>
	What would encourage you to take up learning?	<p>What support and opportunities would you need?</p>

Topic Guide for interviews with adults with recent experience of not being in education, employment or training (NEET)

To be used with a minimum of 20% of interviewees within total package

Topic	Question	Prompts
Background information and context	What is your name?	
	How old are you?	
	Where do you live?	Do you live on your own, with your family, or with somebody else?
	Where did you live when you were growing up?	Who did you live with?
Experience of school	What was your experience of school like?	<p>What was positive?</p> <p>What was negative?</p> <p>Did you have any particular problems/ difficulties at school?</p> <p>Did you find anyone particularly helpful/ supportive at school?</p>
Leaving school	How old were you when you left school?	
	Did you leave with any qualifications?	
	Why did you leave school at this point?	<p>Were there any particular reasons?</p> <p>Was there a particular trigger?</p> <p>If you felt that learning wasn't for you, can you explain why?</p>
	What impact do you think leaving school at this age has had?	
	Prior to your current learning experience, have you been involved in any further learning since leaving school?	<p>If yes:</p> <p>What other learning have you been involved with?</p> <p>How and why did you get involved – did someone help you?</p> <p>What were you expecting from this learning?</p> <p>What did you think of the learning?</p> <p>What were the benefits – how did it help you?</p>

Topic	Question	Prompts
Employment history	<p>What sort of paid or unpaid work have you been involved in since leaving school?</p> <p><i>Unpaid work can include caring responsibilities such as raising children.</i></p> <p>What is your current situation in relation to work?</p>	<p>Did this include any opportunities to take part in learning?</p> <p>If so, what did you expect from it?</p> <p>What did you think of it? What were the benefits?</p> <p>How did this come about?</p>
Current activity	<p>In addition to the learning in which you're currently involved, How do you spend your time?</p>	<p>Any education, training or paid employment?</p> <p>Any unpaid work such as volunteering or caring?</p> <p>Any involvement in groups/ projects?</p> <p>Particular interests or hobbies?</p>
	<p>Do you receive any support from individuals or services such as JCP, housing or health services?</p>	<p>What sort of support is this?</p> <p>How useful is this support?</p>
	<p>Can you tell me about the learning that you are currently involved in?</p>	<p>What's the programme called?</p> <p>What and how are you learning?</p> <p>How often do you attend?</p>
	<p>How did you get involved in this learning?</p>	<p>What were your motivations for learning?</p> <p>Who and what helped you to get started?</p> <p>Who or what hindered your involvement?</p> <p>What were your initial expectations?</p>
	<p>So overall, are you enjoying your learning?</p>	<p>What is it that you particularly like about it?</p> <p>Are there things that you find difficult about the learning?</p> <p>Would you say it's different to your experience of school? In what way?</p>
	<p>Since starting this learning, have you benefited in any or made any particular progress?</p>	<p>E.g. do you feel more confident, have you developed personal or social skills – provide specific examples?</p> <p>Have you learnt any vocational or practical skills?</p> <p>Have you gained any qualifications?</p> <p>Has it helped you to get a job (or do you think it will help you to get a job in the future)?</p> <p>Any other benefits?</p>

Topic	Question	Prompts
Current activity <i>Continued</i>	Is this learning having any impact on your wider life?	Explore wider impact – on family, children etc. Why is this impact important to you? Have other people noticed this impact?
	Which elements of your learning experience have you found most valuable?	Content of learning? Style of learning? Learning environment – anything that has particularly helped or which could be improved on?
		Length/structure of course? What support have you received and from whom?
Attitudes towards learning	Has this experience changed your perceptions of learning?	In what ways? What do you now think that learning can offer you?
	Any other experiences post-school that have changed attitudes to learning?	In what ways? What do you now think that learning can offer you?
Ambitions and aspirations	Has this learning experience changed the way you see your future?	Has it helped you to feel more positive about what you can achieve? If so, how?
	What are your plans for the future?	Is there anything particular that you would like to achieve in the next few years? What about your longer terms aspirations and ambitions?
	How do you plan to achieve these?	What will you need to do? What opportunities or support will you need, and from whom?
	What role do you think learning might play in achieving your ambitions?	Why do you think this?
And finally...	What would you say to other people like you to encourage them to get involved in learning?	
	What do you think learning providers need to do to make this happen / encourage people like yourself to take up learning?	

Appendix 6

Planning and conducting interviews

Introduction

Interviewing is one of the most common methods used to collect research evidence. We are asking you to undertake semi-structured interviews with individuals who are not in education, employment or training. These interviews will enable you to explore the research topics and gather in-depth data. Through your interaction with the interviewees, you will be able to find out more about their experiences, aspirations, motivations and behaviours.

The topic guide

We have designed a topic guide to help you frame and lend some structure to the interview. In doing so, we have endeavoured to:

- construct questions that your interviewees are likely to be able to answer easily
- sort topics into a logical sequence, beginning with non-threatening questions that will help you to put interviewees at ease.
- construct sequences by 'funnelling' from broad questions to more specific, probing ones.
- ensure that questions are open-ended so as to elicit detailed and full answers, rather than closed questions that tend to generate single word responses. For example, "What do you think about returning to learning?" is likely to be more productive than : "Do you think you will return to learning?"
- ensure that language is simple, direct, clear, succinct and appropriate to the particular group of interviewees
- avoid double barrelled (or multiple-barrelled) questions such as: What do you think about your educational experiences and achievements over the past 5 years?"
- avoid leading questions which encourage a specific answer, such as "Don't you think that all young people should stay in education until they are 18 years old?"

Setting up interviews

- Make sure you have gained permission in order to speak to interviewees.
- Decide how you will approach interviewees to arrange the interviews.
- Decide when and where interviews will take place. Select a venue and an environment that are quiet, comfortable and accessible and will feel 'safe' to interviewees and the interviewer.
- Make sure all of the potential interviewees have a 'participant interview sheet' (which we have provided) and give them time to read it and ask questions before they decided whether or not to participate. The information sheet will provide information about the project, the interviewees' role, how their data will be stored and used, and will reassure them about confidentiality or anonymity.
- Cover the cost of interviewees' travelling expenses and subsistence expenses if appropriate and provide an incentive such as a store token to encourage participation.
- Once participants have agreed to take part, provide them with a copy of the topic guide and invite them to sign a consent form. The consent form needs to be signed by the interviewer and the interviewee and also a parent/guardian if the interviewee is under the age of 18 years. The interviewee should be given one copy and the original returned to the research team at NIACE.
- Remember that setting up interviews can be time-consuming. Sometimes agreed interviewees have to be rearranged at the last minute. Try to take account of this when planning your schedule.

The interview relationship

When you are interviewing someone, you are establishing a relationship with them, not just using them as a way of gathering data. What an interviewee tells you will be dependent upon:

- Their perception of you. Think how the way you dress and present yourself may affect interviewees' responses.
- The interviewees' perception of the research or project.
- Their interpretation of your questions.
- How they wish to present themselves.

Preparing for and conducting interviews

- Familiarise yourself with topic guide.
- Practise with a willing student or colleague to help you think through wording and flow, but remember that interviews will vary according to interviewee's responses.
- Find out about the interviewees in advance, paying particular attention to any cultural issues or support needs.
- When you meet the interviewee, try to put her/him at ease. Establishing rapport and trust is very important in enabling interviewees to open up to you. Starting with some social conversation before starting the interview may help to set interviewees at ease.
- Only ask sensitive questions once you have established rapport and gained the interviewee's trust.
- Only ask one question at a time
- Ensure that there is a logical flow from one section or topic to another. Let interviewees finish their sentences and explore their ideas fully: avoid interrupting them in mid flow.
- Ensure that you cover all of the topics, but be flexible about the order to ensure that the conversation flows.
- Keep to time as far as possible.
- Be aware of your own and the interviewee's body language.
- Look out for non-verbal cues that may indicate boredom, anger, tiredness, distress or embarrassment and respond appropriately.
- Show that you are listening and interested by maintaining appropriate eye contact, nodding, smiling and making encouraging noises such as 'uh-uh' or 'hmm'.
- Tolerate pauses and silences (unless the interviewee appears puzzled) as they are likely to be thinking and will continue talking once they have gathered their thoughts.
- At the end of a topic it can be helpful to summarise key points and check your understanding.
- Clarify anything you are unsure about. At the end of the interview, give the interviewee an opportunity to add anything they wish to say about the topic.
- Close the interview by thanking the interviewee and reminding them about what will happen next.

Appendix 7

Participant information

We would like to know more about you to help us understand your interview.

Name:

Interviewing organisation:

Are you currently involved in learning? Yes No

Please tell us how old you are:

Are you: Male Female

Which of the following best describes your ethnic group?

White British

White Irish

White and Black Caribbean

White and Black African

White and Asian

Indian

Pakistani

Bangladeshi

Caribbean

African

Chinese

Other (please specify)

Do you consider yourself a disabled person? (Including having a mobility impairment, sensory impairment, learning difficulty, disability or difference, long term health condition or mental health difficulty.)

Yes No

Is there any other information that would help us understand your interview?

Please give information below:

Thank you.

Appendix 8

Consent form

Thank you for helping us. We would like to hear of your experiences so that Colleges and other organisations that provide learning/training can design their courses better. For more information, please see the briefing sheet for participants.

We need your permission for us to use the information from this interview, as well as any other materials you provide us with, as part of your personal testimony.

Please read the following statements and sign below

I confirm that I give my permission for NIACE to use the information given during the interview for publicity purposes, including for use in publications and any other relevant materials.

I agree the information I provide – including photographs, diaries, scrapbooks, poems and stories, audio and video recordings, drawings and storyboards – can also be used in future publicity, the press and other promotional material. We will seek further permission from you if we would like to use a photograph that will identify you.

You may contact me if you have any further questions about my responses.

If we use your interview or other materials, we can either use your own first name or use another name for you. Please tick one of the following:

- I agree my first name can be used in any work produced by the researchers
- I would like you to use another name for me

Without your permission, we will not make any information available that will allow you or your family members to be personally identified.

Name of interviewee

Email address

Phone number

Signed

Name of Interviewer and organisation

Signed

Date

If under 18 years of age or over 18 years of age with a legal guardian/carer, the parent/guardian/carer needs to sign below

Parent/guardian/carer signature

Appendix 9

Online provider questionnaire

Question	Answer
Your name:	
Email address:	
Organisation:	
What type of organisation do you work for?	
Which interview package were you awarded?	
How many interviews did you complete in total?	
How many interviews were carried out with adults/young people who are currently not engaged in education, employment or training?	
How did you approach the adults/young people you interviewed, i.e. which partners did you work with and what approaches did you use?	
We would like to know what you have learned as a result of participating in the project. Please summarise what you learned about the research topic.	
We would like to know what you have gained from the process of this project. Please summarise what you have learned arising from the process and methodology.	
How do you plan to use what you have learnt to inform your work with those who are currently not engaged in education, employment or training?	
Can you highlight any transferrable lessons that other organisations could take on board?	

Question	Answer
We are hoping to do some further work in the next financial year to collect examples of good practice of providers working with people who are not engaged in education, employment or training. In order to help us do this, please complete the following information about your provision:	
Do you currently make specific provision for people who are not engaged in education, employment or training?	
Aims and objectives of provision How is it delivered and by whom?	
Is it targeted at specific groups of people?	
How are people recruited to the project?	
Which organisations do you work with and how?	
How is the work funded?	
Do you think your project is successful at engaging NEETs? Do you have any evidence or statistics on this? Please explain.	
What do you think are the main benefits gained by individuals who attend your project? (personal, social, economic, educational).	
What do you think it is, about your project, which makes it so effective in its work with people who are currently not engaged in education, employment or training?	

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