

4.6 Young people

Young people aged 16-18 who do not participate in any form of employment or learning are popularly referred to as 'Not in Education, Employment and Training' - NEET. In Walsall, 6.4% of 16-18 year olds are NEET, equating to 630 young people¹. Some of the key factors that contribute to a young person becoming NEET include disadvantage, poor educational attainment and educational disaffection. A key preventative focus (covered in previous chapters) should be related to high quality education and training aimed at increasing the number of young people succeeding in education, thereby reducing the number who are disaffected.

Evidence suggests that a young person being NEET is a major predictor of unemployment, low income, depression, poor mental health, and living in poverty as an adult. The individuals are at greater risk of experiencing intergenerational poverty: suffering from low aspirations and poor life chances which they in turn can pass on to their own children. All of these factors are linked to poor lifestyle choices and are likely to result in health inequalities amongst this group. The challenging economic conditions being experienced across the country, and to an even greater extent in Walsall, pose a significant challenge to supporting this particular group.

In June 2013, 2,610 young people aged 18-24 were claiming JSA in Walsall. This means that 10.7% of 18-24 year olds in the borough are actively seeking work, compared with only 6.2% nationally. This is almost double the rate of unemployment in Walsall's working age population overall.

At the same time, long-term unemployment in the 18-24 age group remains an issue, with 1 in 4 young people who claim JSA having done so for more than 12 months. However, the numbers of young unemployed people in Walsall has fallen significantly over the past two years, with improvements above those seen in the rest of the Black Country; so although youth unemployment remains an issue for the borough, there is emerging evidence that work to tackle this priority in Walsall is having a positive impact.

The areas of Walsall experiencing the highest rates of 18-24 claimants mirror those with the highest number of NEETs, and teenagers who are disengaged as 16 and 17 year olds are much more vulnerable to becoming young adults who remain outside the labour market.

Indicators:

Walsall currently has around 630 16-18 year olds who are not in education, employment or training (NEET) (Prospects Services, May 2012). It should be noted that this number fluctuates on a daily basis. The proportion of young people classed as NEET has fallen every year in the borough from 10.3% in 2005/6 to 6.4% in 2011/12. However, despite this achievement, this still remains slightly above the average for England (5.8%) and the West Midlands (6.2%).

¹ Department for Education, 2012 local authority NEET figures

There remain concentrations of NEETs in certain parts of the borough, with particularly high numbers in the West and North: in Birchills Leamore, Blakenall, Palfrey, Brownhills, Darlaston South and St Matthews (see Figure 1 below).

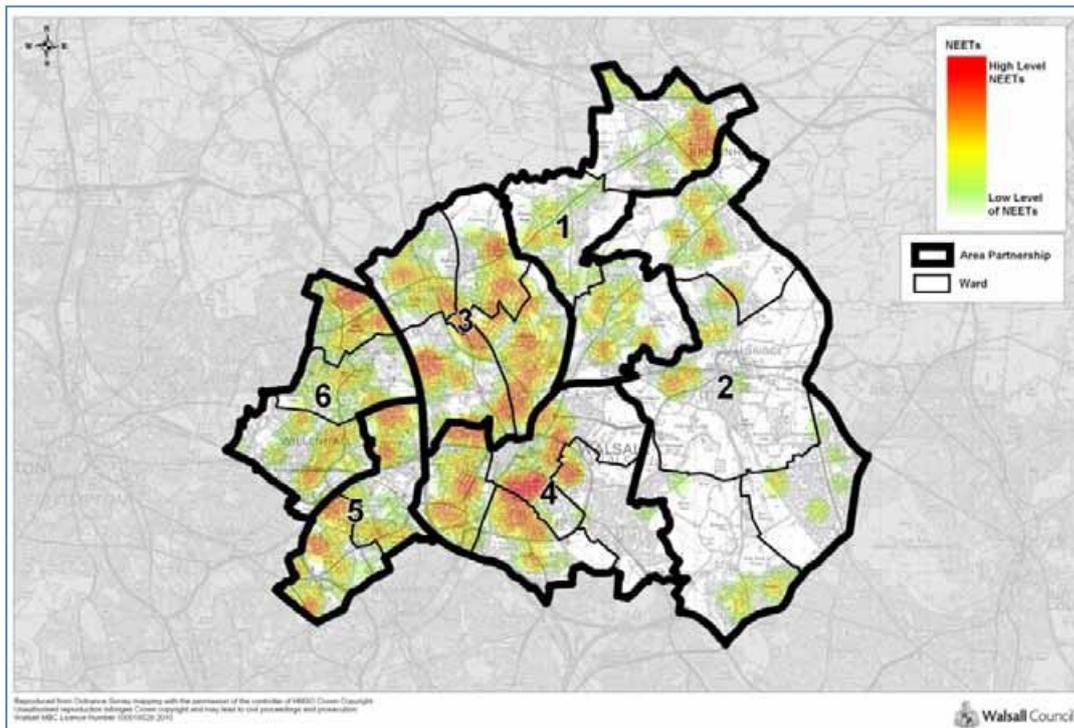


Figure 1 Walsall NEET 'hotspots' November 2010 (from Prospects 2010)

Young people who are NEET are not a homogenous group; some are much more prepared to take up the opportunities on offer to them, while some require much more intensive support. Prospects have identified 5 groups of 16-18 year olds, with particular characteristics and the type of provision potentially available to them. These groups (detailed in Figure) range from those who are 'opportunity ready' – competent in the labour market, or, given the chance, willing to enter training or work – to those who have a particularly complex and challenging set of needs that must first be addressed before they can access opportunities.

	Characteristics	Provision Accessed
Group 1 'Opportunity ready' 10%	Competent in the labour market Main characteristics are poor employability, basic skills, confidence and self-esteem issues. Some will have sustainability issues. Able to enter learning programmes at level 2 and above.	Apprenticeship programmes Jobs with training School/further education provision at level 2/3
Group 2 'Opportunity ready' 20%	Willing to enter training or work Relatively low qualification/ skill base – qualifications at level 1 or less Those 17/18 years of age will have some experience May lack sustainability skills	Foundation learning Lower level entry Apprenticeship programmes. Jobs without training School/further education provision at level 1/2
Group 3 15%	Not ready to make vocational choices Or may need some help to develop confidence, employability and basic skills	Accelerate/Foundation learning School/further education provision at Entry level/level 1
Group 4 30%	Very low skill base and aspirations - Entry level at most	Accelerate/foundation learning Jobs without training

	Many from areas of social, economic disadvantage Are likely to remain NEET for substantial amounts of time Many will have vulnerability characteristics. Many have Learning Difficulties or Disabilities	School/further education provision at Entry level/specialist provision
Group 5 25%	Most complex/challenging young people May not be able to enter opportunities in short/medium term	Intensive support from multi agency support teams

Figure 2 'Work ready' characteristics of NEETS

A quarter of NEETs have been identified as 'Group 5', which represents the most complex and challenging young people to place into suitable opportunities. Many of these fall into a particularly vulnerable group, which include:

- *Teenage mothers*
- *Looked after children and care leavers*
- *Young offenders*
- *Those with learning difficulties and disabilities*

Employment and training places often break down due to the young person's inability to meet the demands of the course as a consequence of their limited educational, personal, social and emotional skills or the detrimental impact of their personal life; housing disruption, care of a baby, family and financial issues, or criminal record.

Young people with learning issues leaving special schools have had specialist teaching input, but this is generally not replicated in the work/training place as is the case in Further Education. Withdrawal of Educational Maintenance Allowance has also had a significant impact on the leavers from lower income families, most of whom would have relied on some form of financial incentive.

Priorities for action:

Young people who are outside education and employment have a complex range of needs where a 'one size fits all' approach is unlikely to reach many of them. Difficulties will remain for many of the vulnerable groups despite plans to raise the participation age to 18 by 2015. Given the large number of 18-24 year olds out of work, the opportunities for progression are likely to remain challenging for some time to come. There are, however, areas where we need to focus our efforts:

- *Greater diversity of choice for learning, training and employment for young people (see Appendix 3, CYP Plan Priority 4)*
- *Supporting the transition into adulthood for children and young people with Special Educational Needs or Disabilities by creating single 'through life' plans (see Appendix 3, CYP Plan Priority 5)*
- **Links with Business** – *All education providers from primary schools through to further education need to be working closely with businesses in the borough to understand the qualities, attitudes and skills – besides formal qualifications - that young people*

require to be successful in the labour market and to introduce them as early as possible to the world of work.

- ***Apprenticeships and/or supported work placements*** – *Apprenticeship schemes for young people who are ‘opportunity ready’ need to be expanded as well as other placements to enable young people to experience what it is like to do a particular job and gain the relevant skills to help them become more employable. One example of good practice is the extensive apprenticeship scheme that Walsall Council is delivering called ‘Walsall Works’. As well as incorporating full apprenticeship opportunities, there are also a number of pre-apprenticeship placements. These embed work preparation skills into those who lack the confidence, experience, qualifications or employability skills to sustain a traditional placement without some initial preparation and guidance.*
- ***Intensive Support for Vulnerable Young People*** – *Traditional formal education or apprenticeship schemes are often unsuitable for these groups as they require much more tailored and intensive support. Using teenage mothers and those with learning difficulties as examples, teenage parents often need up to date knowledge and information about benefits and housing advice and support. For those with learning difficulties or disabilities, twelve week classroom -based programmes do not give enough developmental learning time and a six month to one year structured programme which allows the young person to learn at their own pace and offers practical, workshop-based training in an informal setting would be far more beneficial.*

There is currently also a gap in the provision of training that offers real hands- on work experience for young people with any sort of additional need, who would further benefit from mentoring and more 1:1 support. All employers from the statutory, independent and voluntary/community sectors need to play their part in providing the opportunities described above.

It must be acknowledged however, that the public sector in Walsall employs the largest number of people and should provide an exemplar for employment support.