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Archwilydd Cyffredinol Cymru
Auditor General for Wales

Young people not in education, employment or training

Findings from a review of councils in Wales



WALES AUDIT OFFICE
SWYDDFA ARCHWILIO CYMRU



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with the Public Audit (Wales) Act 2004.

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Introduction

- 1 Councils in Wales recognise the importance of reducing the number of young people who are not in education, employment or training (NEET). The Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) noted in evidence to the National Assembly Enterprise and Learning Committee inquiry on NEETs in 2010 that the issue ‘impacts not only on the life chances of individual young people, their families and their children in the future, but it is also a serious issue for the continued economic prosperity in Wales’¹.
- 2 Councils have an important role to play in reducing the number of young people NEET. The Welsh Government set out its expectations for councils’ support for young people in 2000 in its guidance *Extending Entitlement: supporting young people in Wales* and subsequently in *Extending Entitlement: support for 11-15 year olds in Wales (2002)*. In these documents, the Welsh Government set out its expectation that councils should provide, secure or participate in the provision of youth support services that will encourage, enable or assist young persons (directly or indirectly) to:
 - a participate effectively in education and training;
 - b take advantage of opportunities for employment; or
 - c participate effectively and responsibly in the life of their communities.
- 3 The guidance forms the basis of the local authority’s responsibilities and leadership role in reducing the numbers and risk of young people being NEET. However, there are significant variations between councils in the proportion of year 11 leavers who are NEET after three months, ranging between 4.9 and 1.3 per cent of year 11 leavers (**Figure 1**).
- 4 The proportion of young people who are NEET at 16 has fallen between 2009 and 2013, from 4.9 per cent in Cardiff and Newport to 1.3 per cent in Ceredigion. Torfaen, Merthyr Tydfil and Bridgend saw the biggest falls. The proportion in Powys increased slightly, albeit from a low base and remains below the Welsh average. The proportion of young people leaving school after year 13 (aged 18) who are known to be NEET also reduced (from 6.6 per cent in 2009 to 4.7 per cent in 2012). However, figures for year 13 leavers do not include those leaving further education colleges, independent schools or other training providers and so is not comparable with the figures for 16 year olds.

¹ WLGA evidence to the National Assembly for Wales Enquiry by the Enterprise and Learning Committee 2010, www.assemblywales.org

Figure 1 – The proportion of year 11 leavers from schools in Wales known to be NEET has fallen in Wales between 2009 and 2013 although the degree of improvement varies between councils

Council	Percentage Year 11 leavers known to be NEET		
	2009	2013	% change
Torfaen	8.2	2.5	-70%
Merthyr Tydfil	4.6	1.9	-59%
Bridgend	7.6	3.7	-51%
Newport	9.1	4.9	-46%
Cardiff	8.9	4.9	-45%
Monmouthshire	5	2.8	-44%
Gwynedd	4.2	2.4	-43%
Ceredigion	2.3	1.3	-43%
Swansea	6.4	3.9	-39%
Neath Port Talbot	7.1	4.4	-38%
Wrexham	5.0	3.2	-36%
Vale of Glamorgan	5.6	3.8	-32%
Blaenau Gwent	6.6	4.6	-30%
Isle of Anglesey	5.2	3.7	-29%
Pembrokeshire	4.8	3.4	-29%
Conwy	4.8	3.6	-25%
Carmarthenshire	4.0	3.0	-25%
Rhondda Cynon Taff	4.9	4.1	-16%
Caerphilly	5.0	4.4	-12%
Denbighshire	4.4	4.1	-7%
Flintshire	3.7	3.6	-3%
Powys	2.1	2.7	29%
Wales	5.7	3.7	-35%

Source: Careers Wales, Pupil Destinations from Schools in Wales Survey

5 In this study, we reviewed councils' work to reduce the numbers of young people not in education, employment or training (NEET) and considered if they are well placed to enable better outcomes for young people who are, or are at risk of becoming, NEET. We considered the latest data and key strategic documents² of all 22 councils in Wales as well as the outputs of a self-assessment exercise that councils undertook for the Welsh Government in Spring 2013. We visited eight councils³ between May and July 2013 and spoke to councillors, officials and partner organisations as well as reviewing a range of council documents, organisational plans and strategies. At the same time, we undertook work in Swansea and Wrexham Councils to follow up the findings of research conducted in 2011 to examine whether the good practice identified had been sustainable. We also reviewed the Welsh Government's Youth Engagement and Progression Framework and Implementation Plan (the Framework) published in October 2013 and considered its implications for local authorities.

6 We concluded that **councils are clearly committed to further reducing the proportion of young people who are NEET, especially those aged 16 to 18, but planning is variable and councils have made less progress in understanding the costs or evaluating the effectiveness of interventions.**

Councils are clearly committed to improving outcomes for young people and understand the social costs of not doing so, but their understanding of the financial cost of achieving their goals is weak

7 Councils have a clear commitment to reducing the numbers of young people who are NEET, especially for young people aged 16 to 18. Councils welcomed the publication of the Welsh Government's Youth Engagement and Progression Framework and the Welsh Government's general approach.

8 Generally, councils have a good understanding of the social and economic impact of young people becoming NEET, including poorer health outcomes, crime and antisocial behaviour. However, whilst most plans note the financial cost to society of a high NEET population, plans rarely refer to the cost of achieving their objectives including the opportunity costs, or calculate the costs to the councils themselves.

Despite a relatively good evidence base, the quality of councils' strategic planning is variable and accountability arrangements are sometimes unclear

9 Council planning is supported by a good and improving evidence base on the needs and whereabouts of young people who are NEET or at risk of becoming so and the range of provision available for them. However, some councils lack detail on the local profile of young people who are NEET. Some are developing processes to track the destinations of young people in year 11 although, for some, difficulties in sharing data

² We reviewed a range of strategic documents including councils' Improvement Plans, Single Integrated Plans, Strategic Equality Plans and their NEETs Strategies where available.

³ Fieldwork took place in Caerphilly, Cardiff, Vale of Glamorgan, Carmarthenshire, Conwy, Rhondda Cynon Taf, Torfaen and Flintshire Councils between May and July 2013. Fieldwork was also undertaken in Ceredigion County Council in Autumn 2013.

between organisations are a barrier to effective tracking, particularly for young people over 19. Councils are developing a variety of approaches with schools to identify pupils at risk of becoming NEET but few have evaluated the effectiveness of their approaches.

- 10 Councils have a strategic responsibility for co-ordinating and developing local services to reduce the number of young people who are NEET. But we found that some councils and their partners were unclear about the councils' responsibilities, especially for young people aged 19 to 24. Many councils have not set quantifiable targets and performance measures against which they can monitor progress. In some councils, the arrangements for holding partners to account are unclear.
- 11 The degree to which councils include their partners in planning varies. The ability of councils to hold all partners and providers to account was sometimes limited by the large numbers of providers working with young people who are, or are at risk of becoming, NEET, and by a lack of information from some providers on the outcomes of their work. The relatively rapid turnover in some providers has implications for the development of local partnerships, which may take some time to develop into effective working relationships.
- 12 Dependence on short-term grants and contracts often leads to provision that is not necessarily related to locally identified needs. Some councils expressed concerns that the level of current provision is not sustainable in the face of cuts in grants and EU funding.

Although outcomes for young people have improved, a lack of routine evaluation means that the contribution of individual interventions is often unclear, the contribution of partners is variable and the views of young people have relatively little influence on councils' work

- 13 Councils do not have a common approach to evaluating the large number of projects and programmes provided by organisations working with young people in their areas, so it is difficult to assess effectiveness and value for money. Councils have limited evidence on the effectiveness of interventions for the target group in their area. Evaluation is not undertaken routinely and some councils had difficulty obtaining information on the outcomes of programmes and interventions from partners.
- 14 Councils have worked with schools, further education colleges, work-based learning providers and other partners to identify and support young people at risk of becoming NEET. However, overall interviewees believed that partners' competition for learners was sometimes a barrier to effective joint working.
- 15 Generally, councils reported difficulty engaging with employers to develop employment and training opportunities, including apprenticeships and work experience. However, we found positive examples of councils working with local businesses and also developing their own apprenticeship programmes targeted at young people as well as training and employment support programmes for vulnerable young people.

- 16 Some councils have developed innovative ways to use the internet and social media to engage with and contact young people. We found examples of councils consulting young people about the services they use and taking additional steps to engage with hard-to-reach groups of young people. However, all councils recognised that they could do more to incorporate young people's views more systematically into service planning and delivery.

Recommendations

The Welsh Government's Youth Engagement and Progression Framework and Implementation Plan requires councils to map services, establish early identification arrangements, establish lead worker provision and to develop and discuss their plans for reducing NEETS with the Welsh Government. In addition, councils should:

- R1 Together with partners, map and review expenditure on NEETS services to better understand the resources required to deliver the Framework.
- R2 Clarify their strategic approach to reducing the proportion of 19 to 24 year olds who are NEET as well as their approach for 16 to 18 year olds.
- R3 Focus on young people with significant or multiple barriers to engaging with education, employment or training rather than those who are more likely to re-engage without significant additional support.
- R4 Develop their objectives and targets for reducing the number of young people NEET so that they can be held to account and their work aligns with the Welsh Government's targets and objectives.
- R5 Ensure that elected members and partners fully understand that councils have a clear responsibility for leading and co-ordinating youth services for 16 to 24 year olds.
- R6 Improve the evaluation of the effectiveness and relative value for money of the services and interventions in their area that are intended to reduce the proportion of young people who are NEET.
- 17 Additional suggestions to help councils implement these recommendations are included in [Appendix 2](#).

Part 1

Councils are clearly committed to improving outcomes for young people and understand the social costs of not doing so, but their understanding of the financial cost of achieving their goals is weak



Councils are clearly committed to reducing the numbers of young people who are NEET, especially at 16 and 18, and generally welcomed the Welsh Government's 2013 Youth Engagement and Progression Framework

- 1.1 In our fieldwork, we found that generally councillors and officials expressed a clear commitment to reducing the numbers of young people who are NEET, especially among 16 to 18 year olds. For example, the new administration elected in Cardiff in 2012 pledged to make Cardiff a 'NEET free city'⁴. This commitment, although pre-dating the Council's Youth Engagement, Transition and Progression Strategy, has been described as driving the policy and is reflected in a range of strategic documents, including the Single Integrated Plan, Strategic Equality Plan and the Corporate Plan. Cardiff has seen substantial falls in the proportion of 16 to 18 year olds who are NEET in recent years, which officials attributed to activities including: raising standards at Key Stage 4; a wider curriculum offer with more vocational options and progression routes; and the deployment of Learning Coaches. However, the Council's 2013 strategy recognises that any reduction will need to be more rapid to meet its vision of all young people being in education, employment or training.
- 1.2 Elsewhere, we observed that some councils' commitment to reduce the proportion of young people who are NEET had gained pace recently. In Torfaen, for example, we observed a growing awareness of the urgency attached to reducing the proportion of young people who are NEET and most interviewees reported a step-change in activity in the past 18 months. This commitment is recognised in Torfaen Council's Education to Employment Strategy 2012-16.
- 1.3 Some councils reported that the appointment of a lead official had been an important step, focusing and giving impetus to the councils' work to reduce the proportion of young people who are NEET. For example, in Rhondda Cynon Taf, officials described how the pace of activity to reduce the numbers of young people NEET increased after the Council created a 'Strategy Co-ordinator' post to support their *Supporting Engagement in Education, Employment and Training* (SEET) strategy. Cardiff Council plans to emphasise the priority of this policy area by including 'achieving the NEETs vision' in the job descriptions for a number of new directors appointed after a restructure.
- 1.4 Most councils' planning and activity to date has focused on young people aged 16 to 18. Most were also able to demonstrate some work to identify those pupils aged under 16 who were most likely to make a poor transition at 16 and are offering support and guidance in year 11 and sometimes earlier. However most of the councils we visited are beginning to look at improving outcomes for young people aged 19 to 24:

⁴ This has now been amended to 'Cardiff's ambition is to be a city where all young people are engaged in education, employment or training', reflecting in part concerns about the pejorative nature of the term 'NEET'.

- a Swansea Council is developing a NEETs Strategy for 18 to 24 year olds with key partners in Careers Wales, Job Centre Plus, further education institutions and work-based learning providers. The Strategy is based on a series of workshops delivered by Kafka Brigade UK to understand key issues affecting this cohort. Early indications are that the Strategy will develop the '5 tier model' approach to identify at risk individuals aged 18 to 24. It is also likely to include a pilot project to target high priority groups.
 - b Conwy and Denbighshire Councils have jointly begun work to map the particular needs of disengaged young people 19 to 24 in the area.
 - c Flintshire Council has worked with its Local Service Board partners to design a project to improve the education, training and employment prospects of young people aged 16 to 24. The project will: review existing programmes in the area; develop an 'Employer Promise' to encourage employers provide work experience; and increase opportunities in the public and private sector.
 - d Caerphilly Council in conjunction with Local Service Board partners has developed the PASSPORT programme aimed at addressing local skills gaps by providing employment opportunities for young people. The programme targets young people aged between 16 and 24 and who are not in education, employment or training.
 - e Wrexham County Borough Council has introduced the STAR project for vulnerable young people aged 16 to 25 including young offenders and looked after children. The project supports young people to access and maintain education, employment and training opportunities.
- 1.5 Estyn reviewed the NEETs strategies in councils that were inspected in 2012-13 and in their recent annual report for 2012-13 Estyn commented that 'in a minority of authorities, strategies to reduce the proportion of young people who are not in education employment and training post-16 are not good enough'.⁵
- 1.6 We did not undertake a detailed assessment of NEETs strategies in place across Wales. We reviewed their focus and the degree to which they referred to NEETS. We also reviewed the content of the strategies in the councils that we visited. We found that not all councils had a specific 'NEETs strategy' although all had references to young people who are NEET in at least one of their strategic plans. All councils have set targets or statements relating to improving outcomes for 16 to 18 year olds that cut across a range of strategic documents (Figure 2). Five of the councils we visited have specific improvement objectives focused on reducing the numbers of young people not in employment, education or training. The majority of councils also included objectives relating to improving outcomes for young people who are, or are at risk of becoming, NEET, in their Single Integrated Plans. The plans include a range of performance measures, although we noted that none were the same as the Welsh Government's national targets⁶. These plans and/or improvement objectives also differ substantially in their focus:

⁵ Estyn (2014), The Annual report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education and Training in Wales 2012-13, page 113 www.estyn.gov.uk/english/annual-report/annual-report-2012-2013/

⁶ Ceredigion Council does not specify an age group in its Single Integrated Plan although officials told us that the intended age range is 16 to 24.

- a Young people aged 18 or over (Swansea and Wrexham).
- b 14 to 19 year olds (Carmarthenshire and Vale of Glamorgan).
- c 16 to 18 year olds (Rhondda Cynon Taf and Torfaen).
- d 16 to 24 year olds (Caerphilly, Cardiff, Conwy and Flintshire).
- e Caerphilly, Cardiff and Flintshire have set targets for care leavers and looked after children including: attendance of looked after children at primary and secondary schools; the percentage of care leavers aged 16 to 19 not in education, employment or training; and the number of pupils in local authority care in any local authority maintained learning setting who attain the age of 16 during the school year and leave full time education, training or work-based learning without an approved qualification.

1.7 Generally, councils welcomed the Welsh Government's recent development of the Youth Engagement and Progression Framework⁷. Some of our fieldwork councils were involved in the Welsh Government's trials for the framework and had already begun to update their strategies in the light of the Welsh Government's requirements: Caerphilly Council had incorporated the lead worker role into seven new learning coach posts. Cardiff and the Vale of Glamorgan Councils redesigned their NEETs strategies in advance of the Framework's publication while Carmarthenshire and Pembrokeshire Councils developed a joint NEETs Action Plan in response to the Framework.

⁷ At the time of the fieldwork, some reported confusion about its status but this pre-dated the Ministers announcement of the Framework on 1 October 2013, which is likely to have clarified councils' roles in relation to the framework.

Figure 2 – All councils had some form of strategic objectives relating to reducing the numbers of young people who are, or are at risk of becoming, NEET, in Autumn 2013

Council	Does the authority have a 'NEETs Strategy'?	Do Improvement Objective(s) make specific reference to reducing NEETs?	Is reducing the proportion of young people NEET included in documents?		
			Elsewhere in the Improvement Plan	Single Integrated Plan	Strategic Equality Plan
Blaenau Gwent	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Bridgend	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Caerphilly	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Cardiff	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Carmarthenshire	Developing a joint strategy with Pembrokeshire	No	Yes	Yes	No
Ceredigion	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No
Conwy	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No
Denbighshire	No	No	Yes	Yes	No
Flintshire	Yes – within the Children and Young People's Partnership Implementation and Delivery Plans	No	Yes	Currently drafted for consultation	Yes
Gwynedd	No	Yes	Not specifically	Not yet published	Yes
Isle of Anglesey	No	No	N/A	Yes	No
Merthyr Tydfil	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Not known
Monmouthshire	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No
Neath Port Talbot	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes

Council	Does the authority have a 'NEETs Strategy'?	Do Improvement Objective(s) make specific reference to reducing NEETs?	Is reducing the proportion of young people NEET included in documents?		
			Elsewhere in the Improvement Plan	Single Integrated Plan	Strategic Equality Plan
Newport	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Pembrokeshire	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Powys	Yes ('Keeping in touch strategy')	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Rhondda Cynon Taf	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Swansea	Developing strategy for 18 to 24 year olds	No	Nothing specific	Yes	No
Torfaen	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Vale of Glamorgan	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Wrexham	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No

Source: Wales Audit Office analysis of councils' Improvement Plans and other strategic documents including the single integrated plans and strategic equality plan in Autumn 2013

While most plans for reducing the numbers of young people NEET refer to the lifetime cost to the public purse of having a large NEET population, plans rarely make reference to the financial costs of achieving the council's objectives and none include estimates of the costs to the councils

- 1.8 In meetings with us, councillors and officials demonstrated an understanding of the general social and economic impact of young people becoming disengaged including poorer health outcomes, increased crime and antisocial behaviour over the short and long term.
- 1.9 The economic costs of young people being NEET for a sustained period were also referenced in a range of council assessments, mapping exercises and sometimes in Single Integrated Plans. The economic consequences of a high NEET population influenced the development of projects including the Caerphilly Council Passport Scheme; initiatives with local businesses to address skills gaps in Cardiff; and the development of social impact clauses in procurement contracts in Cardiff, Rhondda Cynon Taf and Swansea. However, these references tended to be to a general global cost of being NEET. Councils had not calculated the cost of young people who are NEET to them directly nor mapped and reviewed their expenditure on services for these young people. This lack of financial analysis limits their ability to balance NEETs services with other non-statutory priorities in the face of financial challenges.
- 1.10 Some councils have set out the costs of administering some initiatives, particularly 14 to 19 provision, but had not made a thorough assessment of the resources required to achieve improved outcomes for young people who are NEET or at risk of becoming so. Key documents lacked detail on the resources required to meet strategic priorities and did not consider the cost of implementing the Welsh Government's framework. Flintshire council has identified the resources required to achieve their ambitions in its strategic documents in terms of staff time, training and with some reference to funding. In Cardiff, the council has identified the cost of the brokerage element of its Youth Engagement, Transition and Progression strategy.
- 1.11 Several councils have already built identification and tracking processes around Career Wales's 'Five-tier model' for engagement and progression. This enables staff to identify support needs for each group, and the risk assessment is supported by regular meetings to share information and plan intervention on a case-by-case basis. At least two councils (Cardiff and Swansea) are developing plans to use this same model to track, identify and support young people aged 19 to 24. This is more difficult than with the 16 to 18 year olds, as there is less data available from the Department of Work and Pensions to identify and track their progress. In summer 2013, neither council had been able to estimate the resources that would be required to support this model of working for the much larger numbers of 19 to 24 year olds who are NEET.

Part 2

Despite a relatively good evidence base, the quality of councils' strategic planning is variable and accountability arrangements are sometimes unclear



Councils' planning is mostly supported by good and improving evidence although tracking young people after 16 is hampered by difficulties sharing data, and the effectiveness of various approaches for identifying young people is not known

Most councils have undertaken exercises to understand the needs and whereabouts of young people 16 to 18 who are NEET although some lacked necessary detail

- 2.1 The evidence base on the support needs of young people who are, or are at risk of becoming, NEET, is improving. For example, Conwy and Denbighshire Councils undertook a joint exercise in 2012 that highlighted the potential impact of a high NEETs population in the area on crime, health and welfare. They profiled the young people aged 16 to 18 who were NEET against the Career Wales 'five tier model' in order to better understand the demand for services. Several councils have also mapped the location of young people who are NEET to identify 'NEET hotspots' for targeting services.
- 2.2 However, we found that a few councils still lack detail on the profile of young people who were NEET in their area, for example, they were unable to distinguish those on a gap year from those who are sustained NEETs. In the Vale of Glamorgan, officials told us that the Council had a good general understanding of the number of young people who are NEET. However, they lacked a detailed breakdown of their barriers to engaging in education, employment or training and recognised that consultation with young people and more

consistent collection and analysis of data on young people who are NEET would better inform service delivery.

- 2.3 Similarly, Carmarthenshire's NEETs Action Plan recognises that more could be done to use data analysis to inform strategic planning and sets out plans for regular scrutiny by the Children and Young People's Executive Committee of data showing key trends and outcomes. Areas where councils reported some weakness in their evidence base included information about young people with a disability who are at known to be at a high risk of becoming NEET especially after 19; migrant populations; gypsy and traveller young people; and unaccompanied minors.

Councils have also undertaken exercises to map the large number and range of organisations working with young people who are NEET and those at risk of becoming so

- 2.4 Several councils have already mapped the full range of provision for young people who are NEET in their area to include not only that funded by the council but also by the Welsh Government, European Social Fund, the Big Lottery Fund and a range of charitable organisations. In some areas, this exercise revealed large numbers of organisations working with young people who are NEET or at risk of becoming so. While councils should have a full picture of post-16 school and further education opportunities, some told us that it was difficult to keep up to date with the full range of work-based learning, apprenticeships, job vacancies and opportunities through Jobs Growth Wales for 16 to 24 year olds as well as programmes provided by the third sector, some of which are relatively short-lived.

2.5 The mapping exercises provided a picture of the volume and type of provision available in the area and revealed both gaps and also some duplication of provision. Conversely, there were also gaps in provision for some groups. In Cardiff, officials were concerned about the lack of availability of spaces on courses in English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) and in Wrexham the demand for IT and practical courses outstrips supply.

Some councils have developed processes for tracking young people after age 16 although this is sometimes hampered by difficulties sharing information across organisations

2.6 Swansea Council has successfully tracked all young people in the Pupil Level Annual School Census (PLASC)⁸ year 11 cohort for the last three years and Rhondda Cynon Taf reported similar success identifying the destinations of young people in the borough. Here and elsewhere, local arrangements and trusting relationships developed over several years supported local tracking of young people who are NEET and sharing information between organisations. However, in some other councils officials said concerns about sharing data were a barrier to their effectively tracking young people after year 11. Some councils were working to develop local protocols for sharing data but told us that they would benefit from guidance from the Welsh Government on effective data sharing. Some officials reported problems getting reliable information on destinations and drop outs from work-based learning providers and further education institutions. As a result, we concluded that councils are likely to benefit from Welsh Government plans to require providers to share information on destinations and those dropping out of courses more readily with Careers Wales.

2.7 The Department for Work and Pensions holds information on 19 to 24 year olds who are unemployed. However, it is unable to share personal details that would facilitate tracking with councils because of data protection legislation that restricts the sharing of personal data from claimants. In Ceredigion, for example, although the protocol for data sharing is well developed, the Department for Work and Pensions does not take part in local data sharing and tracking. This limits the Council's ability to build a profile of 19 to 24 year olds locally who are NEET to support planning and evaluate the effectiveness of intervention work. Swansea Council is developing data sharing agreements with the Department for Work and Pensions locally to enable tracking progress whereby young people would be asked to consent to the Job Centre Plus sharing their details with the Council when they make their initial benefit claim.

Councils are developing approaches to identifying pupils at risk of becoming NEET although the effectiveness of the varying approaches has not yet been evaluated

2.8 Councils and schools have developed a variety of approaches to identifying pupils at risk of becoming NEET. These prediction tools are based on a combination of factors, including attainment, attendance, behaviour and other indicators. Wrexham and Carmarthenshire have plans to begin identification as early as year six (age 11), whereas other approaches focus on pupils in years 10 and 11 (ages 15 to 16).

⁸ The Pupil Level Annual School Census (PLASC) includes pupil details for state funded nursery, primary, secondary and special schools. The census does not include children educated other than at school or independent schools.

2.9 However, few councils have evaluated the effectiveness of their developing processes for identifying pupils at risk of becoming NEET or the variety of assessment tools being used. Swansea Council produces an annual report on year 11 destinations which includes analysis of the cohort data by age, ward, ethnicity and the red, amber or green status they were given during their vulnerability assessment. This has been used to identify trends and review the effectiveness of the vulnerability assessment tool. Their 2012 report found that 16 per cent of the cohort were identified as 'red'. A further 17 per cent were identified as 'amber' and offered light touch support and monitoring. Follow-up work found that, of the just over 900 learners identified as 'red' or amber' in year 11, only seven per cent of those identified as red or amber in year 11 were subsequently known to be NEET. Only 10 of those known to be NEET after year 11 had not been identified as being at risk in year 11.

2.10 The Welsh Government published research looking at the factors that best predict becoming NEET in September 2013 and effective practice guidance for councils on developing identification mechanisms in January 2014⁹. The Welsh Government recognises that early identification approaches will not be standardised over Wales as some councils have already developed their own methods and approaches. It required all councils to implement processes to identify young people at risk of becoming NEET in Key Stage 4 by September 2013. It expects that councils will be able to identify young people at risk in Key Stage 3 by September 2016.

Councils have strategic responsibility for co-ordinating and developing local services to reduce the number of young people who are NEET but some do not fully understand their responsibilities and accountability mechanisms are sometimes unclear

2.11 Most councils had reasonably clear arrangements for holding officials to account for progress reducing the number of young people who are NEET although there were sometimes concerns about the level and frequency of reporting to scrutiny committees or cabinet. In Rhondda Cynon Taf, for example, the Council's progress against the NEET improvement objective was monitored under their existing performance management arrangements but there was no specific monitoring or reporting on its NEETs targets and the developing action plan to support the delivery of the Supporting Education, Employment or Training strategy did not ascribe responsibility for actions.

2.12 In some councils however, the level of challenge and accountability was weak. For example, in Caerphilly, a 2012 Estyn report concluded that generally the scrutiny process was not used to hold partners to account for work to improve outcomes for children and young people and, at the time of the fieldwork, no report specifically on NEETs related activity or progress had been considered by scrutiny committees or Cabinet.

⁹ Welsh Government (2014), *Early identification: Effective practice guidance*, www.wales.gov.uk

- 2.13 Some councils have not set any targets and performance measures for work with young people who are NEET, which reduces their ability to hold officials and partners to account. In Cardiff, for example, although officials and partners were committed to achieving the Council's aim to be 'NEET free', we observed that accountability and performance management were stronger in some departments than others. The Council has set no overall target for reducing the numbers of young people who are NEET to measure progress towards its stated desire to be 'NEET free'. Within the Council, Families First and Communities First have developed scorecards to measure progress and there is a range of performance measures used to monitor the progress of learning coaches, training and enterprise centres and the Careers Wales team. Similarly, in Rhondda Cynon Taf, the 'Supporting Engagement in Education, Employment and Training Strategy 2012-15', Single Integrated Plan and Corporate Plan lack clear targets and focus on actions to reduce the number of young people NEET.
- 2.14 Some councils recognised that more could be done internally and with partners to raise awareness of their statutory responsibilities towards 16 to 24 year olds generally and, in particular, for care leavers. Cardiff Council plans to address this through a 'care-leaver and looked after children pledge' that makes the legal responsibilities more explicit. This pledge will be developed with partners as well as children and young people and aims to raise awareness of statutory obligations in the hope that they become a more routine part of service planning.
- 2.15 There were other positive examples of individual council departments meeting their statutory requirements:
- a Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council's Looked After Children's Outcome Board which monitors and scrutinises looked after children data from relevant agencies. The Council also won an award from the Centre for Public Scrutiny for the work its child poverty scrutiny task and finish group did to raise awareness amongst councillors of the impact of child poverty.
 - b An Estyn Inspection in 2012 judged that Caerphilly County Borough Council met its statutory duties well in relation to children and young people with additional learning needs, and had a clear safeguarding policy and procedures.
 - c The Vale of Glamorgan Council sets out its legal position in its NEETs Strategy including an equalities assessment.
- 2.16 However, it is not clear that there is an overall understanding among councillors and officials of responsibilities for co-ordinating youth services, especially for young people aged 19 to 24. Some councillors at Cardiff Council said that they had not received training setting out these statutory responsibilities. Several councils were unable to demonstrate whether they are regularly monitoring compliance with their legal responsibilities. In some areas, officials and council partners recognised the council's legal responsibilities for co-ordinating and leading youth services. Elsewhere, while officials and councillors recognised the responsibilities of the council for young people up to the age of 24, they raised operational concerns about the limitations

of their involvement with the age group, compared to 16 to 18 year olds where they had many levers through the 14 to 19 partnership and other service areas. With the older age group, the Department for Work and Pensions plays a major role through the requirements placed on young people by the benefits system and the provision of training.

The degree to which councils include partners in planning varies and the relatively rapid turnover in providers has implications for the effectiveness of local partnerships

- 2.17 In some councils, strategic planning to date has focused on the local authority rather than recognising the contribution of its local partners. In Caerphilly, the Council recognised it needed to address the lack of co-ordination between the Council and its partners. To achieve a more co-ordinated approach to reducing the numbers of young people NEET, the Council established a Core Planning Group as a mechanism for engaging with its partners. A head teacher chairs the group attended by representatives of youth services, Careers Wales, colleges and other partners. Conwy and Denbighshire Councils worked with Careers Wales, Coleg Llandrillo and Job Centre Plus to obtain European funding for a strategic officer hosted by Careers Wales at Coleg Llandrillo to identify and coordinate resources and services for young people aged 19 to 25 across the counties. In some areas, strategic planning extended to local partnerships and clearly set out responsibilities. For example, in Conwy relevant partners are represented on the strategy group that oversees NEETs work. Partners told us that the group supported an
- effective partnership with lead agencies for each action (eg, Careers Wales leads on information sharing). Currently, the Department of Work and Pensions is not represented in the group because of its focus on 16 to 18 year olds but the council recognises that membership would need to change if the focus widened to include those who are 19 plus. Partners in Ceredigion described the multi-agency NEET practitioners group as an effective mechanism for identifying and assessing young people at risk of becoming NEET. The agendas for the group's monthly meetings clearly distinguish between under 16s and 16 to 18 year olds.
- 2.18 Councils told us that the difficulty of obtaining information on outcomes of work from some partners not funded by the Council is a barrier to their being able to hold partners to account. For example, Wrexham Council experienced problems getting progression data on young people from a new work-based learning provider unused to local information sharing agreements. Others told us that it was difficult to obtain more detailed information from work-based learning providers to inform their local planning and development.
- 2.19 In some areas, officials told us that the high level of turnover in training providers as a result of their dependence on short-term grants and contracts made local partnership working more difficult. Not only do councils have to keep reviewing the range of organisations working in their areas but they also need to reinvent working relationships. Local partnership arrangements take time to become established. For example, respondents in Wrexham told us that they had to put time and resources into developing new relationships when the contract for work-based learning

provision was awarded to a provider with a limited knowledge of local partnerships. Carmarthenshire reported that the nature of work-based learning contracts means that the local partnerships are not always aware of the full extent of work-based learning provision if this is offered by providers based outside the local area.

- 2.20 Respondents in several areas commented on the difference between the levels of support offered by project workers to young people who are NEET or at risk of becoming so. Many of these young people experience many barriers to their participation in the labour market and receive a high level of support, sometimes from multiple agencies. However, respondents recognised that young people often found that the levels of support dropped sharply once the young person reached 18. As a result, some young people who remained NEET over a long period experience a very abrupt transition when they became 18.
- 2.21 Many respondents were concerned that young people will need to be better prepared for the requirements that they will face as young adults if they remain NEET, including engaging with the Department of Work and Pensions through Job Centre Plus. Swansea Council is developing an 'ethical standards approach' to examine this issue and develop a more consistent approach across all of the organisations working with young people. Multi-agency workshops have taken place to agree the knowledge, skills and attitudes that young people need in order to successfully navigate their future as well as the approach that frontline support staff should take to encourage these qualities. The Council is now discussing ways to embed these principles in service delivery for young people.

Dependence on grant funding leads to provision not necessarily related to needs and may not be sustainable in the face of cuts in grants and EU funding

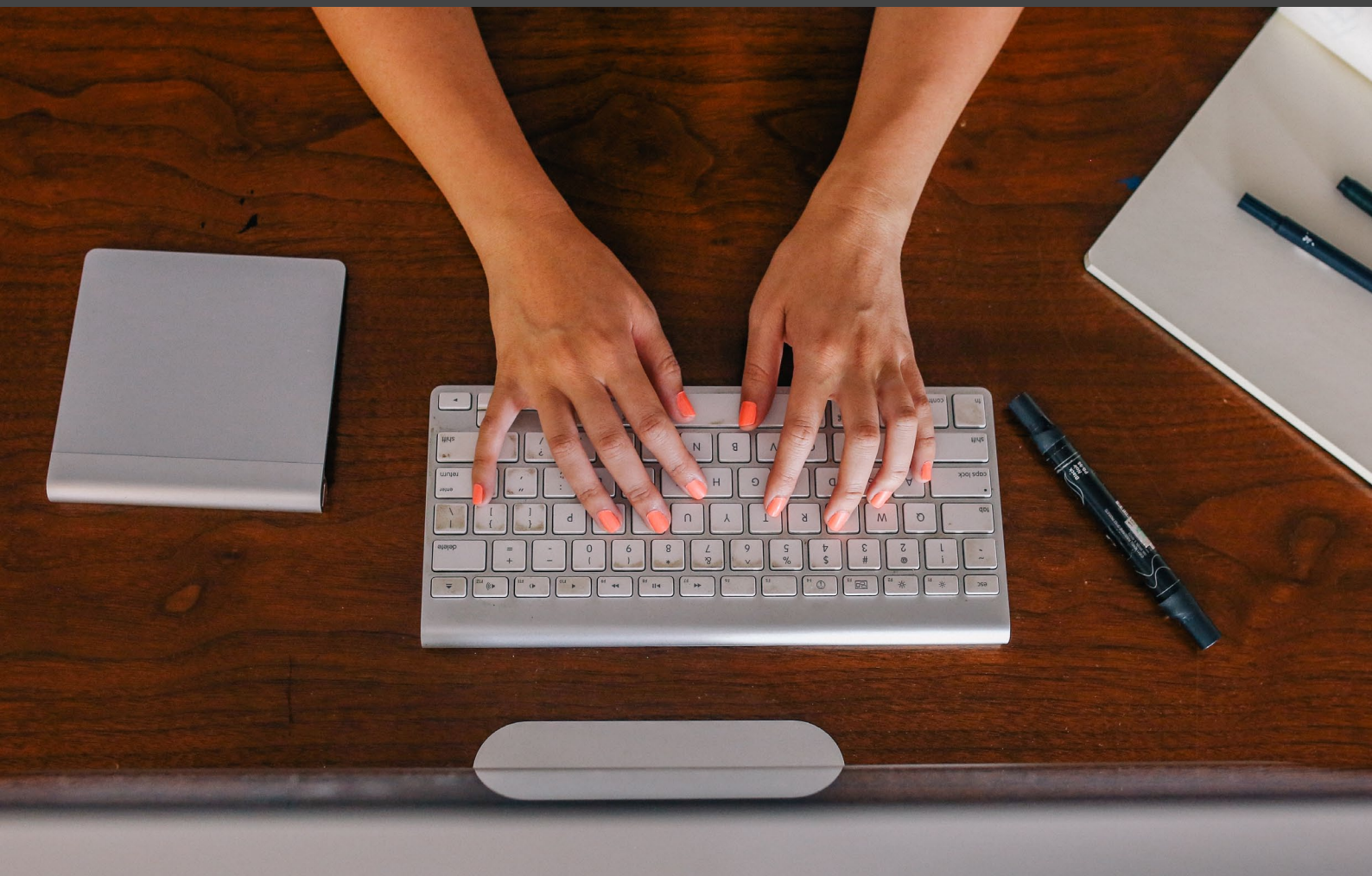
- 2.22 We observed that the type of provision available in areas tended to reflect both the availability of grants for certain types of work with young people and also the relative success of some providers in applying for grants. As a result, some areas had a very high level of provision and some duplication of services.
- 2.23 There were some examples of councils working with partners to develop exit strategies to ensure that services valued by the council and young people continued when grant funding ceased. In particular, two programmes funded by the European Social Fund – 'Engage' and 'Potential' – were mentioned in several areas as projects particularly valued by councils and young people¹⁰. In Swansea schools had provided funding to continue some of the work undertaken by these projects. In Conwy, schools and the Council have provide funding to continue the work of the Potential project. This will include setting up on-site Inclusion Centres at each Secondary School. Following an evaluation of the Engage Project in Ceredigion, the Council made changes to local services to continue successful initiatives and fill gaps in provision.

¹⁰ 'Engage' provided intensive support to young people aged 14 to 19 who were NEET or at risk of dropping out. The 'Potential' programme was aimed at pupils aged 14 to 16 with problems of attendance and behaviour as well as 16 to 19 year olds in further education at risk of dropping out.

2.24 Some councils expressed concerns about the sustainability of provision in the face of cuts in public spending and the reduced value of European funds. For example, officials in Carmarthenshire reported that the percentage of year 11 leavers becoming NEET increased in 2012-13 partly because of the end of European funding for the 'Engage' project. Wrexham Council told us that funding reductions meant that its well-regarded STEPS programme could no longer provide full time courses. Respondents in Wrexham were concerned about future sustainability; one commented that 'we know where the young people are and who they are but we might not have any projects to support them'. In Flintshire, officials expressed concern that supporting young people up to the age of 25 will be challenging given diminishing resources available within the Council for non-statutory services.

Part 3

Although outcomes for young people have improved, a lack of routine evaluation means that the contribution of individual interventions is often unclear, the contribution of partners is variable and the views of young people have relatively little influence on councils' work



Councils do not have a common approach to evaluating the large number of projects and programmes provided by organisations working with young people in their areas, so it is difficult to assess their effectiveness and value for money

3.1 Councils generally had limited evidence on the effectiveness of the full range of work undertaken with young people in their areas who are NEET or at risk of becoming so. In Carmarthenshire, the Council conducted a review of provision through a series of sessions with organisations operating in the area. Sessions focused on progress towards NEETs reduction targets, potential for innovative projects and further partnership working. Feedback from the review has informed the development of the NEETs action plan such as the early identification approach. Some councils have evaluated specific projects, for example:

- a Cardiff Council has evaluated the effectiveness of some interventions such as pre and post-16 learning coach provision and is developing a team of young inspectors to monitor the progress of Families First projects;
- b Conwy Youth Council has evaluated the effectiveness of work experience placements and will participate in the Conwy Council's review of its NEETs strategy in 2013-14;

- c Rhondda Cynon Taf Council has reviewed Families First services against outcomes to address the imbalance between family support initiatives and education, employment and training initiatives; and
- d Ceredigion County Council commissioned an independent evaluation of the Engage project to identify priorities for future funding.

3.2 However evaluation is not generally undertaken routinely. Combined with the difficulty that some councils experience in obtaining outcome measures from partners, this results in most councils lacking a clear picture of 'what works' in their area to inform service planning and delivery. This also means that councils are not well placed to judge the value for money of interventions. Some councils told us that they are planning steps to address this gap:

- a the Vale of Glamorgan aims to embed evaluation into service development;
- b Cardiff aims to develop a monitoring and evaluation framework and use pilots including the vulnerability assessment to learn lessons and develop future provision; and
- c Flintshire reviewed existing provision as part of its 'Time for Change' programme for reducing the number of young people aged 16 and over who are NEET.

Councils have worked with schools, further education colleges and other partners to improve outcomes for young people who are NEET but competition between partners for learners can hinder effective local work

- 3.3 The councils that we visited are working with their schools to identify and offer support to young people at risk of becoming NEET. Officials reported that schools are increasingly involved in this work and are increasingly reporting and monitoring post-16 outcomes. Ongoing work includes implementing a range of vulnerability assessments, work to improve attendance and behaviour, developing an alternative curriculum, and identifying potential risk factors for becoming disengaged.
- 3.4 Councils are also working closely with their sixth forms and further education institutions to reduce disengagement and dropping out. For example, in several councils learning coaches work with schools to support young people at risk of disengaging with education. Cardiff Council has recently begun work with Careers Wales to provide support for young people at risk of disengaging from school sixth forms. Cardiff Council is also putting on workshops to bring foster carers, teachers and social workers together to raise awareness of the educational issues of looked after children.
- 3.5 Many councils have put arrangements in place to support young people during the transition period at year 11. In Rhondda Cynon Taf, post-16 transitional workers have recently been appointed to work with schools and Careers Wales and young people at risk of becoming NEET. Schools in Wrexham told us that close working relationships with social workers, careers advisors and the youth service are crucial in reducing the number of young people NEET. One of its schools told us that employing a behaviour mentor funded by the Pupil Deprivation Grant had been a valuable intervention that enabled learners to remain engaged in school.
- 3.6 Councils also work closely with further education colleges and, in some cases, work-based learning providers to prevent drop-outs and improve retention rates:
- a In Carmarthenshire, Coleg Sir Gâr provides support for young people at risk of dropping out of college courses through a dedicated learning services team and work with year 10 and 11 pupils through its Youth Access programme.
 - b Yale College in Wrexham provides 'Winter College' as a taste of college life for young people at risk of becoming NEET in Key Stage 4.
 - c In Cardiff, work-based learning providers also provide taster sessions for young people.
 - d Several councils – including Rhondda Cynon Taf, Caerphilly and Cardiff – have regular meetings with further education institutions to discuss attendance and drop-outs. In Cardiff, at least one work-based learning provider (ACT Training) has asked to be part of this process.

- 3.7 Research has pointed to the importance of flexible learning opportunities for those at risk of disengaging¹¹. Several further education institutions and work-based learning providers have worked with councils to provide flexible learning opportunities to improve retention and encourage young people to take part in further education:
- a Cardiff Council has worked with further education institutions to provide A-Level courses at a local school for young people who are put off attending the further education college because of the travelling involved. The Council has also worked with Cardiff and Vale College to provide courses that provide practical learning in fashion and auto-mechanics that reflect local employment opportunities. The College has developed courses in English for speakers with other languages to fill a gap in provision. A course specifically for the growing number of unaccompanied minors arriving in the City has continuous enrolment so young people do not have to wait to start learning. Cardiff Council is continuing to work with the College to develop post-16 pathways for these young people, including support to participate in entry-level vocational courses.
 - b In Wrexham, work-based learning provider ITEC works closely with the Council to provide and support placement opportunities. They also support care leavers and plan to work with pupil referral units in the near future to identify those at risk of dropping out early and keep them engaged.
- 3.8 Despite this activity, competition between schools, work-based learning providers and further education institutions for learners can cause tension and hinder partnership working. Wrexham Council reached an agreement with its schools that sixth forms no longer provide level one and two courses. This reduces duplication and enhances provision because the further education college is seen as a more relevant environment for these learners.
- 3.9 Several work-based learning providers told us that they believed schools did not promote their provision as a viable option to their learners and one work-based learning provider told us that they had been actively prevented from marketing their courses in local schools. In Swansea, the UCAS online application system presents young people in year 11 with the full range of options available in their area. This ensures that all school pupils can find out about the full range of options available to them locally. The Welsh Government is piloting a common application process for post-16 learning closely modelled on the Swansea approach from September 2013.

¹¹ Nelson, J and O'Donnell, L. (2012). *Approaches to Supporting Young People Not in Education, Employment or Training: a Review* (NFER Research Programme: From Education to Employment) Slough, NFER

Generally, councils reported difficulty engaging with employers to develop opportunities such as apprenticeships and work experience and to educate young people about the opportunities available in the labour market

3.10 Several councils admitted to difficulties engaging with employers to encourage labour market opportunities and also to influence education and training. Some employers also told us that they had found some schools were reluctant to engage with them. In Rhondda Cynon Taf for example, officials told us that employers have had limited involvement in the development of the Rhondda Cynon Taf SEET (Supporting Education, Employment or Training) Strategy. The SEETs group that oversees the Council's work in this area does not include any representatives of local businesses are not represented. Torfaen Council officials told us that they wanted to do more work with employers to publicise the support available to employers taking on young people and also with young people to promote work opportunities available across the authority. Research suggests a lack of engagement with employers is a common problem in the UK: a review by Ofsted also found employers had insufficient involvement in the development of councils' strategies to reduce the number of young people not in education, employment or training¹².

- 3.11 Some councils, however, reported success in their work with employers to identifying opportunities for their young people:
- a Cardiff Council has a team working with local businesses to gather regular intelligence on business needs and skills gaps. This work informs initiatives with local universities to design courses to address these gaps. The Council also develop links with local businesses through employer engagement events, job fayres and a working group to understand relevant issues affecting businesses across the city. The group identified the need for pre-employment training and SWALEC has developed the 'Learn to Earn' project to provide this support in the new Eastern High School.
 - b Rhondda Cynon Taf Council is also running a pilot project to bring local businesses to schools to raise awareness of opportunities available and provide job search skills and Conwy Council has worked with employers to improve work placement opportunities.
 - c The Vale of Glamorgan Council has identified new opportunities for its young people as a result of new employers locating in the area in the foreseeable future.

¹² Ofsted (2010) *Reducing the numbers of young people not in education, employment or training: what works and why*, page 6

3.12 Councils are major employers in their own right and a number have developed apprenticeship schemes, some of which target young people who are NEET. Not all are aimed at young people specifically nor at those most likely to be disengaged. Rhondda Cynon Taf for example established an apprenticeship programme offering 30 places combining practical training and studies across the Council in 2012. Although the apprenticeship programme does not feature within the Council's SEETs strategy, young people may apply. The Council plans to evaluate the scheme in 2013-14. RCT Homes also run a successful apprenticeship programme although this also does not feature strongly in the SEETs strategy and is open to people of all ages. In Wrexham, however, the Council's apprenticeship scheme is aimed at 16 to 17 year olds and, after a review, the Council also removed its initial entry requirement of five GCSEs at grades A*-C to provide opportunities for a wider group of young people, including those most likely to be NEET. Similarly, the Caerphilly Passport Scheme aims to reduce levels of unemployment amongst young people aged 16 to 24.

3.13 Some councils have developed training and employment programmes for young people with specific needs. Flintshire County Council provides work placements for vulnerable young people. Rhondda Cynon Taf Council has developed a work-based traineeship programme at Vision Products in partnership with Ysgol Hen Felin and Elite Support Employment Agency to encourage young adults with disabilities into work.

3.14 Respondents in several areas commented that, in their experience, young people's aspirations do not always match local opportunities. They told us that many young people were not interested in retail as a career route although this sector made up a large proportion of the opportunities available and included routes into retail management. Conversely, in some areas demand for ICT, hair and beauty courses outstripped the supply of job opportunities locally in these fields. Again, this mirrors the finding of other research that the curriculum could improve to increase young people's understanding of the world of work and the opportunities available to them (Ofsted, 2010:6, NFER 2012).

Some councils have developed innovative ways to use the internet and social media to engage with young people but all recognise that they could do more to use young people's views and experiences to influence the design of local services

3.15 We found several examples of councils using the internet and social media innovatively to inform and engage with young people. Several councils have websites, often linked to Twitter or Facebook accounts, that aim to inform young people about services and encourage participation. Young people are involved in editing the websites at several councils:

- a the Vale of Glamorgan's Swoosh website gives advice on education, employment and training and information on the Council's mobile service provided in partnership with Job Centre Plus and Careers Wales to provide information, advice and guidance in this area;

- b Caerphilly County Borough Council uses social media to advertise its Passport Scheme;
 - c in Flintshire, the Council worked with a local artist, film company and young people to develop an accessible DVD version of the Children and Young People's Plan (2011-14); and
 - d Cardiff Council ran a 'Hackathon' in August 2013, aimed at bringing together young people, youth workers, businesses and employers with programmers and developers to co-design digital products and services that enable young people to make better decisions about their future.
- 3.16 Fewer examples, however, emerged of councils developing the internet or social media for education and learning, although Cardiff Council currently uses an online skills tracking programme in schools from key stage 2 onwards. The software is designed to look similar to Facebook and gives young people the opportunity to upload details of activities and answer a series of questions about the types of skills they have used.
- 3.17 Officials in some councils were cautious about the use of social media and there appear to be different approaches to the use of social media by front line staff. For example, officials in Rhondda Cynon Taf expressed concerns about safeguarding and data protection issues and would like more guidance on the appropriate use of social media. In Cardiff, frontline staff said that they felt that internal bureaucracy limits their use of social media as they have to use the Council's communications department to send a message.
- 3.18 There were many examples of councils consulting young people about the services they use and their experience of education, employment and training. Councils used youth forums, school councils, working groups or one-to-one engagement by frontline staff (youth workers and learning coaches) to understand and respond to the needs of individuals. For example:
- a Cardiff's Youth Council took a list of its priorities to the Cardiff Partnership, which raised concerns about the high cost of public transport for 16 and 17 year olds which was believed to be a barrier to attending education, employment or training, with the result that Cardiff Bus changed the fare structure for young people;
 - b Conwy's Youth Council recently investigated the quality of work experience placements, which resulted in developing a prospectus that aims to improve both the quality of and access to work experience;
 - c young people were involved in the commissioning process for Families First with Barnardos as part of Cardiff's Young Commissioners Programme which subsequently won a national procurement award; and
 - d Ceredigion County Council consulted young people on the alternative curriculum and as part of the evaluation of the Engage project.

- 3.19 Councils recognise that young people who are NEET or at risk of becoming NEET are amongst those hardest to reach and some have taken additional steps to engage with them:
- a Cardiff Council employed a youth worker with the skills and knowledge to engage with young people in black and minority ethnic communities;
 - b in the Vale of Glamorgan, a 'Difficult to Engage' group considers the needs of hard to reach young people; and
 - c Conwy's Youth Council undertook an investigation of the experience of care-leavers that resulted in a video presentation in which care-leavers discussed their experience, including their transition to education, employment or training.
- 3.20 However, we found that most councils do not systematically incorporate young people's views and experiences into service planning and delivery.

Appendices

Appendix 1 - Methodology

Appendix 2 - Detailed recommendations



Appendix 1

Methodology

Visits to councils

We visited eight councils across Wales between May and July 2013¹³:

- Caerphilly
- Cardiff
- Carmarthenshire
- Conwy
- Flintshire
- Rhonda Cynon Taf
- Torfaen
- Vale of Glamorgan

We spoke to councillors and senior officials responsible for setting the councils' strategic approach to reducing young people who are NEET during these visits. We also spoke to other staff responsible for working with young people directly, both those employed by the councils and other service providers.

We also spoke to partners in the local areas including Careers Wales, the Department for Work and Pensions, schools and further education college staff, and work-based learning providers, to obtain a full picture of services in the area. We spoke to staff from some third-sector projects where these operated in the areas.

We also visited Swansea and Wrexham councils that were the subjects of research in 2011 which identified factors associated with successful implementation of initiatives for young people NEET. We examined the extent to which the councils have been able to sustain services and develop them further since 2011.

Review of strategic documents

To inform the study we considered key strategic documents of all 22 local authorities in Wales including councils' Improvement Plans, Single Integrated Plans, Strategic Equality Plans and their NEETs Strategies where available. We also analysed the outputs of a self-assessment exercise that councils undertook for the Welsh Government in spring 2013.

We conducted a more thorough investigation of council documents as part of the evidence collected for the eight councils we chose to visit. This included a range of information from organisational plans, strategies, consultation reports and evaluations to gain an insight into local service provision for each area.

¹³ Ceredigion Council requested that we review their work with young people who are NEET as part of our programme of assessment work. This took place in October and November 2013 and we refer to some findings in this report.

Appendix 2

Detailed recommendations

The Welsh Government's Youth Engagement and Progression Framework and Implementation Plan requires councils to map services, establish early identification arrangements, establish lead worker provision and to develop and discuss their plans for reducing NEETs with the Welsh Government. In addition, councils should:

- R1 Together with partners, map and review expenditure on NEETs services to better understand expenditure required to deliver the Framework.
- R2 Clarify their strategic approach to reducing the proportion of 19 to 24 year olds who are NEET as well as their approach for 16 to 18 year olds.
- R3 Focus on young people with significant or multiple barriers to engaging in education, employment or training rather than those who are more likely to re-engage without significant additional support.
- R4 Develop their objectives and targets for reducing the proportion of young people NEET so that they can be held to account and their work aligns with the Welsh Government's targets and objectives.
- R5 Ensure that elected members and partners fully understand that councils have clear responsibility for leading and co-ordinating youth services for 16 to 24 year olds.
- R6 Improve the evaluation of the effectiveness and relative value for money of the services and interventions in their area that are intended to reduce the numbers of young people who are NEET.

To assist councils to implement these recommendations specific suggestions are included below.

To develop a more thorough understanding of expenditure on youth services generally and NEETs services in particular

- R1 Generally, councils have not assessed the full extent of their own or their partners' expenditure on youth services and employment support. This knowledge gap means that they have no basis for assessing the resources required to implement the Framework or monitor the cost effectiveness of their current expenditure. To provide a firmer basis for future policy making:
 - councils and their partners should map and review their expenditure across youth services to be better placed to judge the cost effectiveness of this expenditure; and
 - councils should more systematically assess the resources required to implement the Welsh Government's Framework to provide an informed basis to their biannual discussions with Welsh Government officials on the implementation of its Framework.

To achieve national targets to reduce the proportion of 19 to 24 year olds who are NEET.

R2 The Welsh Government has set a target in its *Tackling Poverty Action Plan 2012-2016* to reduce the proportion of young people 19 to 24 years old who are NEET. Councils' work to date has concentrated on 16 to 18 year olds although some are beginning to develop services for 19 to 24 year olds. This is made more complicated by the fact that the majority of 19 to 24 year olds are usually no longer in contact with schools and further education colleges and by the fact that their main contact is often with the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), responsible for welfare and employment support for the long-term unemployed. The Framework focuses on 16 to 18 year olds and the Welsh Government believes that improving progression at this age will lead to improved outcomes later. However, work elsewhere has found that councils need to continue support for disengaged young people after the age of 18. We found that many councils are beginning to consider how the approach with 16 to 18 can be adapted for the greater number of 19 to 24 year olds who are NEET. This includes developing links with the DWP locally which plays a more important role with the age group. To achieve its targets to reduce the proportion of 19 to 24 year olds NEET:

- councils need to clarify their strategic approaches to reducing disengagement among 19 to 24 year olds;
- councils should consider whether the approach taken to identifying and support 16 to 18 year olds who are NEET is appropriate for the older age group given the much greater numbers of 19 to 24 year olds who are NEET and taking into account that the barriers they face in engaging in education, employment or training;
- councils should work with the Welsh Government to develop their work with young people 19 to 24 to share emerging learning and good practice and ensure that their work and planning align with national priorities and targets; and
- councils should review the expenditure on support for 19 to 24 year olds in their area and if external funding streams are not adequately co-ordinated and aligned with their strategies this should be raised with the Welsh Government in their regular meetings.

To achieve long-term improvements in outcomes for those currently most likely to be NEET.

- R3 Young people who are NEET face a range of different barriers to participating in education, employment or training. Young people who are disabled, chronically ill, have special educational needs, attend poorly at school and attain poorly as well those from some ethnic minority groups are more likely to become NEET. Young parents have a high rate of disengagement. However, most councils do not distinguish between those who are sustained or core NEETs and those who are only temporarily out of education, employment or training in their strategic objectives or in any target set. Focusing on young people who are sustained NEETs will result in the greatest savings to the public purse. To achieve successful outcomes for those young people hardest to engage in education, employment or training, councils should:
- Differentiate their work on reducing disengagement to clearly focus on young people who are sustained NEET, to avoid the risk that councils could achieve their objectives without impacting on those furthest from the labour market.
 - Councils' strategic documents should make specific reference to the work with young people at high risk of being NEET, including those young people with protected characteristics under the Single Equality Act 2010 and teenage parents; and councils should consider their arrangements for specifically reporting outcomes for these groups.

To ensure that councils, their partners and the Welsh Government are working towards shared targets and objectives for reducing the number of young people who are NEET.

- R4 Councillors and local government officials generally demonstrate a high level of commitment to reducing the number of young people who are NEET. There is a high level of understanding of the risk factors and the social costs of being NEET. However, we found that councils had not all developed targets for reducing the number of young people NEET against which their performance could be scrutinised. Where targets have been set, they are inconsistent in their focus and do not always align with the Welsh Government's targets. To establish targets and ensure that councils and partners can be held accountable for performance:
- councils need to develop SMART targets that demonstrate progress towards the goals and enable both the council and their delivery partners to be held to account for their performance; and
 - councils should ensure that their targets clearly align with national measures and targets and action plans to ensure that local objectives and targets reflect national priorities sufficiently.

To exercise their responsibility for leading youth services for 16 to 24 year olds.

R5 Under *Extending Entitlement: supporting young people in Wales (2000)* and subsequent guidance, councils have clear responsibility for leading and co-ordinating youth services for 16 to 24 year olds. As such, the Welsh Government's Framework makes it clear that councils are accountable for delivery of services for reducing the proportion of young people NEET. However, we found that councils were not always clear about their responsibilities, especially for young people 19 to 24. While officials and members recognised that councils have many opportunities to shape policies and outcomes for 16 to 18 year olds, some expressed concerns about councils' ability to influence improvements for 19 to 24 year olds where other organisations have a greater role, including the Welsh Government, and the DWP. To better exercise their responsibility for youth services for 16 to 24 year olds, councils should:

- provide training for Members to enable them to more fully understand and exercise their responsibility under *Extending Entitlement* for leading and being accountable for youth services for 16 to 24 year olds; and
- clarify the range of providers and organisations engaging with 19 to 24 year olds - including the DWP - to better placed to develop effective approaches to reducing the number who are NEET locally and ensure that effective local youth services are available for the age group.

To evaluate the impact of the framework and spread good practice

R6 There has been a lot of research on the causes of young people becoming disengaged from education, employment or training. However, there is less clear evidence on the effectiveness of particular interventions and, in particular on the value for money of the large number of projects and programmes working with the young people who are NEET or at risk of becoming so. Few councils systematically review the effectiveness of their work with young people who are NEET or at risk of becoming so. To provide evidence on the effectiveness work being undertaken and its value for money, councils should:

- evaluate the effectiveness of their approach to identifying those at risk of becoming NEET, taking account of good practice guidance published by the Welsh Government in January 2014;
- discuss plans for local evaluations of projects and programmes funded by the council and the third sector with the aim of establishing comparable outcomes and outputs so that councils can assess the relative effectiveness of interventions with young people;
- work with the Welsh Government, the Welsh European Funding Office and other partners to develop a methodology for assessing the value for money of projects and programmes, including the social and economic costs, which councils and their partners can use in their own evaluations; and
- incorporate an assessment of interventions on subgroups of young people with the NEET population in monitoring data and evaluations.

