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Motivation and Barriers to Learning for
Young People not in Education,
Employment or Training

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RESEARCH

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

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Introduction

In recent years there has been an increase in the number of young people (aged 18-24) who are not in education, employment or training (NEET). For some young people, this will be a temporary setback, while for others it will have a long term detrimental effect on their future life chances. In order to ensure that effective interventions are developed and targeted appropriately, it is necessary to develop an understanding of who is not in education, employment or training, and the particular circumstances in which they find themselves.

In order to contribute to the development of this understanding, the Department for Business Innovation and Skills (BIS) commissioned the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE) to undertake an analysis of data collected from interviews with young people, aged 18-24, conducted as part of the NEET National Research Project. This helps build on the more extensive evidence base focussed on 16-18 year olds.

The aim of this analysis was to develop a better understanding of the circumstances and motivations of young people who are not in education, employment or training (or have recently been in these circumstances) so that policies can be better targeted for this group within the funding available.

This summary report establishes a number of categories based on the barriers young people feel they face and the factors that would motivate them to engage in learning.

The NEET national research project

In early 2010, NIACE 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 being, not engaged in education, employment or training (NEET).

The aims of the research project were to:

- improve understanding of the aspirations, motivation and behaviours of young people and adults 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 for raising the participation age.

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

in these circumstances. In total, NIACE worked with 124 learning providers to collect interview data from over 2,000 adults and young people with current or recent experience of being not in education, employment or training¹².

For the purposes of this study 'NEETs' were defined 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. This included:

- those undertaking voluntary work or personal development opportunities;
- those seeking (or waiting to start) work or learning;
- those who were not active in the labour market (including those experiencing ill-health, caring for children, etc).

Further information about the research can be found at: <http://www.niace.org.uk/current-work/neet-national-research-project-0>

Methodology

As part of the NEET national research project, 806 qualitative interviews were conducted with young people age 18-24 with current or recent experience of being not in education, employment or training.

NIACE were commissioned to segment this sample of young people and to explore motivations and barriers to learning in relation to each group. While categorising and labelling young people is not a desirable process, identifying commonalities and differences in the motivations and barriers to learning of groups of individuals can be a useful strategy in enabling policy-makers and providers to identify and develop effective interventions in supporting young people back into education, training or employment.

Given the value to policy makers of previous segmented analyses of young people not in education, employment or training, particularly that first published by DCSF³, it was decided, in consultation with BIS, that a similar framework should be used in analysing the data from the NEET national research project.

¹ Young people were mainly identified by providers through their links with other agencies and organisations in their local area, such as Connexions, Job Centre Plus, youth clubs, housing associations, social services etc. Where young people 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). Some providers were already delivering projects with young people who were NEET and chose to interview those young people with whom they were already working. This sampling process is likely to have skewed the sample towards those young people with a more positive attitude towards learning.

² Interviews were undertaken by providers, resulting in a degree of inconsistency in how they were undertaken.

³ National Foundation for Educational Research (2009) *Increasing Participation: Understanding Young People Who Do Not Participate in Education or Training at 16 or 17*. Nottingham: DCSF.

As the research project was not originally designed with this in mind, it was not possible to create an exact match between the available attributes of the young people interviewed and the segments within the DCSF typology. Instead, the most suitable attribute by which the data could be segmented was considered to be 'Learning Status'⁴, which has the following 5 values: recent experience of being NEET; applied for a course; looking for learning opportunities; want to learn in future; and no plans regarding learning.

Figure 1: Learning Status segments



These five segments can be viewed as a scale, from those who are closest to participating in learning to those who were the furthest away (see Figure 1). Those with 'recent experience of being NEET' at the time of the interviews were clearly the interviewees closest to learning, but this proximity decreases as we move from the left to the right of the diagram, until we reach those with 'no plans regarding learning', who are furthest from education and training.

Membership of each segment is by no means permanent, and interviewees may have moved between them numerous times even in the last twelve months. The lines between the groups are dotted to demonstrate the permeable nature of the segments. It is worth noting that these groups are not all equally represented in the sample of 18-24 year olds. While the number of young people in the 'recent experience of being NEET', 'looking for learning opportunities' and 'want to learn in future' segments are all roughly equal, the segments of those who have 'applied for a course' and have 'no plans regarding learning' are significantly smaller than the others.

Key findings

- Young people are motivated by a range of factors to engage in learning, but can face a wide array of barriers, both practical and attitudinal, to taking part. In particular, the role of education and training as a pathway to securing appropriate employment and gaining financial independence is a significant motivating factor for many young people.
- While some young people have very specific aspirations for the future and are able to recognise the role of learning in supporting these, the aspirations of those furthest away from learning tend to be more vague.
- Good quality, independent information, advice and guidance (IAG) is essential in supporting young people to identify and access appropriate education and training.

⁴ The learning status of an interviewee is based on their description of their activities, as provided in their interviews. Interviewees did not allocate themselves to these categories, but were assigned to them by the researcher analysing the interview data.

Those furthest away from learning, however, are least aware of the range of sources from which they could obtain support and IAG.

- Practical challenges, such as securing appropriate childcare and supporting themselves financially while learning can prove to be a major barrier for some young people. Many young people are operating in tight financial circumstances and place great value on receiving financial support.
- Many young people who are not in education, employment or training have had poor previous experiences of education. They will need to be convinced of the relevance and benefit of learning to their lives, if they are to be encouraged to engage in learning in the future.

Policy context

Recent figures show that 912,000 young people aged 18-24 are currently not in education, employment or training (NEET). LFS Q3 2012) In order to tackle this issue, the Government has introduced a range of measures to secure young peoples' participation in education and training, with a specific focus on moving them into work. These include:

- raising the participation age to 17 in 2013 and 18 in 2015;
- Apprenticeships to equip people of all ages with the skills employers need to prosper and compete, often in a global market;
- the Youth Contract to support unemployed 16 – 24 year olds worth almost £1 billion over 3 years;
- prioritised funding for FE and training for 19 – 24 year olds without English and maths and employability skills;
- the launch of the National Careers Service in April 2012; and
- personalised support through the Work Programme and Get Britain Working measures.

The Government published its cross-departmental strategy to maximise the number of 16-24 year olds taking part in education, training or employment, *Building Engagement, Building Futures*, in December 2011. Within the strategy, the government announced that:

- it expect skills and Work Programme providers to work together to develop a routeway into work for young people;
- It looks to local collaboration between employers, providers and Jobcentre Plus to form partnerships to respond together to local needs;
- it has introduced new freedoms for FE colleges and training providers from red tape and central control and labour market reforms to ensure that employers face no barriers in recruiting young people;
- and it is working with employers to encourage them to recruit young people and offer work experience as well as aligning the skills system to meet with employers' needs.

These measures are designed to provide a comprehensive and coherent approach to improving opportunities for young people to succeed in education and training, and to gain the skills they need to secure an Apprenticeship or employment.

Motivation to learn

One of the key differences between compulsory education and post-16 provision is that while those under 16 are required to spend time in education, for young people over 16, learning is a matter of personal choice. Understanding what motivates young adults to spend time engaged in education and training is therefore essential in seeking to encourage greater participation. Around three-quarters of the young people interviewed made reference to factors that had, or would, motivate them to engage in learning. These can be grouped into the following 14 categories⁵, beginning with those that were cited most frequently.

To achieve future career aspirations

Almost one half of 18-24-year olds interviewed made reference to being motivated to learn in order to achieve career aspirations. For young people with 'recent experience of being NEET', these aspirations were often very specific, while those furthest away from learning tended to have aspirations that were more vague and less specific.

To gain employment or increase employability

This was a major motivation to learn across all segments, and particularly for those 'looking for learning opportunities', demonstrating the strong association that young people have between learning and employment. This motivation differs from the previous one in that interviewees were focussed on learning as a route to becoming employed, rather than in accessing a particular career or occupation. Most interviewees expressed a preference for short courses, which they believed would result in them gaining employment immediately.

To gain qualifications

With the exception of those young people with 'no plans regarding learning', this was consistently one of the three main motivations to engage in education and training across the segments. Gaining a qualification was perceived to be both a gateway to employment and a measure of personal development.

To develop skills, experience and knowledge

The desire to develop skills and knowledge and to gain experience was a particularly strong motivator for those 'looking for learning opportunities'. Individuals wanting to gain skills and experience were generally focused on the employment advantages that learning can provide, while those more concerned with developing their knowledge tended to acknowledge the wider benefits of learning.

For personal development

Young people motivated by a desire to improve their situation, progress in life or boost their confidence were included in this category, as were those who had developed a more positive attitude towards learning as a result of having matured since leaving initial

⁵ These categories are not mutually exclusive and do overlap.

education. This was a particularly important motivator for those who have 'applied for a course', although many of those with 'no plans regarding learning' made specific references to the role of learning in boosting confidence.

By receiving professional support, information, advice and guidance (IAG)

This category includes those young people who have engaged in learning, or felt more inclined to do so, as a result of receiving support or IAG from a range of professionals. This was a particularly strong motivator among those who had 'applied for a course', highlighting the importance that IAG can play in initiating the application process, both in terms of identifying and applying for relevant courses and in removing barriers to education and training that had previously been encountered. Interviewees in segments closer to learning were much more aware of the range of sources from which they could obtain support and IAG. Those further away from learning were less able to identify appropriate sources, despite maintaining a clear understanding of the types of support and IAG they would require.

By receiving support from partners, family members and peers

Support from a partner, family members or peers was a particularly significant motivator for those who had 'applied for a course' and least important for those with 'no plans regarding learning'. The influence of each of these types of relationship varied across segments, with parents and peers particularly important for those with 'recent experience of being NEET', and peer support most influential among those who had 'applied for a course'. Those 'looking for learning opportunities' were also motivated by peer support, as well as being motivated to learn as a result of having their own children. Both parents and children were a key motivator for those who 'want to learn in the future'.

For enjoyment and interest

An interest in, or enjoyment of, a particular subject or of learning in general was a particularly effective motivator for those with 'recent experience of being NEET' and was strongly associated with the style of learning or learning environment in which young people were, or had been, engaged.

By a style of learning or learning environment

In particular young people made reference to being motivated by vocational and practical styles of learning, although positive references were also made to a relaxed learning environment, shorter courses and provision where teachers treated learners as adults. Interviewees talked about these aspects of learning in relation to what they enjoyed about their current learning experience, as well as in relation to what they would value in future learning opportunities. This was a particularly strong motivator for young people 'looking for learning opportunities'.

As a productive use of time

One fifth of young people with 'recent experience of being NEET' had been motivated to engage in learning in order to get them out of the house and provide structure for their day. Young people citing this motivation considered learning to be a productive use of their time and a way of keeping out of trouble.

By financial support and incentives

As many of the young people interviewed faced financial barriers to learning, the provision of financial support acted as an important enabler to participation in learning – particularly for those ‘looking for learning opportunities’. This category also included those people for whom the potential monetary benefits of learning, such as receiving a higher wage, acted as an incentive to take up learning.

By previous or current learning experiences

For some young people, particularly those with ‘recent experience of being NEET’ – where one fifth of those interviewed cited this motivation – their previous or current experience of learning had encouraged them to take up, or continue with, learning in the future. This was usually as a result of interviewees having a more positive attitude towards learning, an increased confidence in their ability to learn, or a better understanding of the potential benefits of education and training.

In order to widen options and increase opportunities

Around one in ten of all young people interviewed acknowledged that taking part in learning can open up a greater range of options and opportunities in life, citing this as a reason why they might become involved in learning.

As an employer requirement

A small proportion of interviewees reflected that they had become engaged in learning because their employer had required them to do so, or had made opportunities available for them. While this did not apply to a large number of those interviewed, it was particularly influential among those who made reference to it.

Barriers to learning

Around two-thirds of young people interviewed made reference to barriers to learning that they had either encountered in the past, or were currently experiencing, in relation to education or training. These can be grouped into the following 12 categories⁶, beginning with those that were cited most frequently.

Family, partner and peers

One in five young people interviewed cited this barrier to learning. In particular, family members and peers can be a significant obstacle to engaging in learning. Women were more likely than men to make reference to this barrier; a characteristic supported by previous research⁷ which has found that women are more likely to believe that parenthood holds them back from engaging in education, employment or training. This was also a particularly significant issue for those who have 'applied for learning'.

Course content and format

One in six young people made reference to examples of where the format or content of a particular course had acted as a barrier to them taking up learning, or had resulted in them dropping out of a course. Interviewees identified factors such as the style of learning, relationships with teachers, the learning environment, and a lack of enjoyment or interest in the content of the course, as being particularly unhelpful. Previous research has found that young people often find academic styles of learning to be repetitive and uninteresting, resulting in a lack of motivation and a cynical view of the value of learning⁸. Similar views were expressed by the interviewees in this study. The issues related to this barrier are fairly consistent across the segments, although are more prevalent among those 'looking for learning opportunities'.

Cost and finances

One in six young people interviewed faced financial barriers to learning, associated directly with the cost of the course as well as with their wider financial situation. Key issues identified included course fees, being able to afford to live while learning, losing entitlements to benefits and transport costs. The interview data support the findings of the Learning Gateway evaluation⁹, whereby many young people were struggling to live on the money they received and had turned down learning opportunities because it would result in their families losing their entitlement to benefits. This barrier was most significant for those 'looking for learning opportunities', although the cost of course fees was a particular issue for those who 'want to learn in the future, in part due to their older age profile.

⁶ These categories are not mutually exclusive and do overlap.

⁷ The Prince's Trust (2004) *Reaching the Hardest to Reach*. London: The Prince's Trust.

⁸ McLarty, L and Moran, R. (2009) *Engaging all young people in meaningful learning after 16: A qualitative study*. Manchester: EHRC.

⁹ Sims, D., Nelson, J., Golden, S. and Spielhofer, T. (2001) *Young People's Experiences of the Learning Gateway*. London: DfEE.

Behaviour, attendance or attitude

For one in six of all young people interviewed, behavioural problems or low attendance resulted in them being asked to leave courses. For others a negative attitude towards learning or towards themselves acted as a barrier to taking part in education and training. The relative significance of each of these elements varied across the segments. For those with 'recent experience of being NEET' their behaviour was more problematic than their attitude towards learning, but this was gradually reversed as the segments moved away from learning, until interviewees with 'no plans regarding learning' referred to a negative attitude towards learning as being a far more significant barrier than their behaviour. Those with 'no plans regarding learning' were most likely to cite this barrier to learning.

Accessibility and availability of courses

Some young people, particularly those who had 'applied for a course' or who were 'looking for learning opportunities', spoke about being prevented from taking part in learning because of issues associated with accessibility and availability of provision. The most significant aspects of this barrier, for young people across all segments, were problems with the application process and the location of the course or college. Other issues included courses being cancelled and a lack of provision relevant to the interviewees' career aims.

Lack of professional support, information, advice and guidance (IAG)

A lack of support and IAG, either when looking for courses, or when on-course, acted as a barrier to learning for one in ten young people. Young people made references to three main ways in which this has impacted upon them. Firstly, where interviewees had found it difficult to obtain information about courses; secondly, where inaccurate information had resulted in provision not meeting the expectations of young people, who had subsequently dropped out of provision; thirdly, where a lack of on-course support from teachers and support staff had also resulted in young people dropping out. This barrier was particularly significant for those 'looking for learning opportunities'.

Lack of skills or qualifications

A lack of skills, particularly literacy and numeracy, or formal qualifications often acts as a barrier to engaging in education and training. Here the interview data supports wider research^{10,11} which has consistently found that young people who underachieve at school are more likely to be outside of education, employment or training or to be in a job without training. This barrier was most significant for interviewees 'looking for learning opportunities'.

Personal circumstances

Young people facing challenging personal circumstances problems associated with offending, homelessness, substance misuse or a lack of confidence, often find that these

¹⁰ Department for Communities, Schools and Families (2009) *Pupils with Declining Attainment at Key Stages 3 and 4: Profiles, Experiences and Impacts of Underachievement and Disengagement*. London: DCSF

¹¹ EHRC (2009) *Staying On: Making the Extra Years in Education Count for All Young People*. London: EHRC

act as barriers to successfully engaging in learning. This barrier was particularly problematic for those 'looking for learning opportunities'.

Health and disability

Six per cent of young people interviewed made reference to health or disability issues that had acted as a barrier to engaging in education and training. In particular, interviewees cited mental health problems as being particularly challenging, although references were also made to long-term physical health conditions and to sensory impairments. Young people who had 'applied for a course' were most likely to cite health and disability issues as a barrier.

Lack of motivation or direction

Some young people struggled with a lack of motivation to engage in learning, either resulting from a lack of direction or confidence, poor previous learning experiences, or associated with their wider circumstances, such as unemployment. This barrier was most significant for those who 'want to learn in the future'.

Poor previous learning experiences

Previous negative learning experiences, either at school or in further education, can act as a powerful deterrent to taking up learning in the future. This barrier was particularly significant among those with 'no plans regarding learning'.

Offers of employment without training

Finally, a small proportion of young people explained that they had chosen to enter employment rather than pursue further learning, or had left a course when offered a job elsewhere. While not a particularly significant barrier for any of the segments, this did have a powerful impact on some young people who were then in jobs without any prospect of further development.

Young people with ‘recent experience of being NEET’

Who are they?

Young people in this segment include those who have been out of education, training or employment at some point during the past 12 months, but who were participating in some form of education or training at the time of the interview. The learning with which young people were engaged varied widely from full-time formal education and training to part-time informal learning.

This segment has the youngest age profile, with almost two-thirds of interviewees aged 18-19. Over ten percent of young people in this segment have a learning difficulty, a higher proportion than the overall sample. These young people are more likely than the overall sample to have qualifications, although their experiences of school are still more likely to have been negative than positive. A smaller proportion of young people in this segment are parents than in the overall sample.

More completed compulsory schooling and left with 11 GCSEs, all A*-B. He went straight on to complete one year of sixth form and gained 3 AS levels. He then left sixth form to get a job but was unsuccessful. After a period of inactivity Moe felt bored and wanted to get some money so he enrolled onto a college course to do web design. At the time of the interview he was attending college two full days a week. (Male from London, aged 18)

Luke has ADHD, and as a result his behaviour at school was not good. He was permanently excluded at the age of 14 and went to a specialist education provider. He attended post-compulsory education to improve his maths and English and got his level 2s. He is currently training to be a HGV driver while looking after his young daughter as a single parent. (Male from the South West, aged 22)

Motivation

More than nine in ten young people with ‘recent experience of being NEET’ spoke about their motivation to engage in learning.

The most frequently cited motivations to learn were associated with ‘future career aspirations’, gaining employment or increase employability’; and ‘gaining qualifications’.

Young people in this segment were more likely to cite ‘enjoyment and interest’, ‘previous or current learning experiences’, and ‘productive use of time’ as a motivator, than young people in other segments.

Barriers

Just over one half of young people with 'recent experience of being NEET' discussed barriers to learning. As they were all currently participating in some form of education and training, the barriers they spoke about related either to difficulties faced in the past, or those they believed they might encounter in the future.

The most frequently cited barriers to learning among these young people were associated with 'family, partner and peers', 'course content and format' and 'cost and finances'.

Implications

As would be expected, those young people who are currently learning, but with 'recent experience of being NEET' are most strongly motivated to learn. Taking part in education and training is seen as being a gateway to securing employment and a long-term career, with qualifications perceived as being a vital stepping stone in this process. Although many young people have had negative experiences of school, their attitude towards learning has been turned around by positive post-school opportunities. As a result, they are keen to continue to engage in learning that is enjoyable and fits with their interests.

Despite being currently engaged in learning, these young people are able to anticipate barriers to learning that they may encounter in the future. Childcare responsibilities are a major consideration for young people in this segment; many are already finding it difficult to balance family and learning commitments. Paying course fees and transport costs whilst also covering the cost of living is an ongoing struggle, especially for those who are older and therefore not entitled to financial support. There are some concerns about provision which is too academic in its nature, as well as about potential difficult relationships with teachers. Both could deter these young people from engaging in education and training beyond their current learning experience.

Young people who have ‘applied for a course’

Who are they?

Young people in this segment include those who were applying for courses at the time of the interview, and were either waiting to hear from learning providers about the success of their application or were waiting to start a course. It includes a wide range of young people in different circumstances, from those who were starting a course within a few days or weeks, to those who were actively applying for courses but with no assurance that they would be accepted.

This segment also has a young age profile, though with a smaller proportion of 18-19-year-olds than those with ‘recent experience of being NEET’. Females are over-represented in the segment, while interviewees with a disability are under-represented. The majority of young people have some form of qualification, with around one in ten having A-levels. Interviewees are again more likely to have had a negative, rather than a positive experience of school, although a greater proportion of interviewees have had a positive experience than in the overall sample. Young people who have been out of education, employment or training for less than 6 months or for between 6-12 months are over-represented in this segment, while those excluded on a longer-term basis are under-represented. A greater proportion of young people in this segment have children and are single and/or teenage parents, than in the overall sample.

Sue truanted a lot at school and had a baby at the age of 16. She completed her compulsory schooling at a specialist baby centre and got 2 GCSEs. Sue* was due to start a course at the YMCA the week after her interview took place. She was motivated to learn by her son; she wants to get a better job so that she can provide for him in the future. (Female from North West, aged 18)

Tony had a very positive time at school and left with 11 GCSEs, all A*-C. He decided not to go to sixth form and chose instead to take a more practical-based training route into an IT job, gaining NVQ levels 2, 3 and 4 on the way. He is currently unemployed, but is applying for law courses at university as he wants to become a barrister. (Male from Yorkshire and the Humber, aged 23)

Motivation

Nine in ten young people who have ‘applied for a course’ spoke about their motivation to engage in learning.

The most frequently cited motivations to learn were associated with ‘future career aspirations’. Other commonly cited motivations included ‘professional support and IAG’, ‘qualifications’ and the need to ‘gain employment or increase employability’.

Young people in this segment were more likely to cite 'future career aspirations', 'support from partners, family members and peers', 'personal development' and 'qualifications' as a motivator, than young people in other segments.

Barriers

Over three quarters of young people who have 'applied for a course' discussed barriers to learning.

The most frequently cited barriers were associated with 'family, partner and peers' and 'course content and format'. The former was cited by over a third of young people in this segment.

Young people in this segment were more likely to cite 'family, partner and peers' and 'health and disability' as a barrier than young people in other segments.

'Accessibility and availability of courses' was most likely to be cited as a barrier to learning among young people who have 'applied for a course' and those 'looking for learning opportunities'.

Implications

Young people who have 'applied for a course' have often done so in order to establish a long-term career and a secure future. Gaining qualifications are often seen as providing an essential pathway to this. Although many young people left school with a negative attitude towards learning, they have now begun to see the benefits of taking part in education and training, as well as the negative consequences of not doing so. Many have been supported by parents and inspired by siblings, however the timely and appropriate IAG and support provided by professionals has been critical in turning good intentions into action.

For some, a lack of support for learning from both parents and peers poses a real risk, and many young women have also struggled to retain their commitment to learning upon becoming pregnant. A higher proportion than in other segments, face issues around poor health and disability and will be unable to engage and succeed in education and training if they do not receive appropriate support. Based on their previous experiences of education, they have concerns about the academic and theoretical elements of learning, and are unlikely to continue to engage with provision that they do not enjoy or see as fulfilling their needs to gain employment and develop a career.

Young people ‘looking for learning opportunities’

Who are they?

Young people in this segment include those who are actively looking for opportunities to learn but have not yet started applying for courses. These young people are likely to become engaged in learning in the short term, and have already started accessing information, advice and guidance (IAG) in relation to courses.

This segment has a slightly older age profile than the previous two, with a lower proportion of 18-year-olds and a higher proportion of 19-21 year-olds than in the overall sample. Men are over-represented. Interviewees in this segment are least likely to have left school without any qualifications; with one third qualified to A-level. Young people who have been out of education, employment or training for over 12 months are also under-represented in this segment.

Stan has learning difficulties and was bullied a lot at secondary school. This affected his GCSE results but did not put him off learning. He went on to college and got a distinction in animation and games design and a pass in art and design. He is motivated to learn by his interest in these subjects and his desire to get into the animation industry. He is currently looking for university courses in animation and is building up his portfolio for his application. (Male from London, aged 21)

Zainab had a very positive time at school and was involved in a lot of extracurricular activities. She stayed until the end of sixth form and got her A-levels before moving on to university to study adult nursing. However, she found the transition to university difficult and dropped out after a few months. She would rather have done a more practical course but was pushed down the academic route by the careers advisors at her sixth form. She is currently looking for diploma-level courses or work-based training in healthcare. (Female from London, aged 19)

Motivation

Almost all young people ‘looking for learning opportunities’ spoke about their motivation to engage in learning.

The most frequently cited motivations to learn were associated with ‘future career and aspirations’ the need to ‘gain employment or increase employability’, ‘qualifications’ and ‘skills, experience and knowledge’.

Young people in this segment were more likely to cite ‘financial support and incentives’, ‘skills, experience and knowledge’, ‘style of learning and learning environment’, and the need to ‘gain employment or increase employability as a motivator than young people in other segments.

Barriers

More than seven in ten young people 'looking for learning opportunities' discussed barriers to learning.

The most frequently cited barriers were associated with 'cost and finances', 'family, partner and peers' and 'course content and format'.

Young people in this segment were more likely to cite 'cost and finances', 'course content and format', 'lack of professional support and IAG', 'lack of skills or qualifications' and 'personal circumstances' as a barrier than young people in other segments.

'Accessibility and availability of courses' was most likely to be cited as a barrier to learning among young people who are 'looking for learning opportunities' and those who have 'applied for a course'.

Implications

Young people 'looking for learning opportunities' often have quite specific career aspirations and perceive taking part in education and training as a way of achieving these. They are keen to find work and recognise the need to meet skills and knowledge gaps in order to do this. In the light of this, non-academic learning, with a clear vocational focus, is particularly valued. Many young people are operating in tight financial circumstances and therefore place great value on receiving financial support. They are also motivated by the prospect of improving their income through learning.

Although they are 'looking for learning opportunities', many young people need to overcome significant barriers before engaging in education and training. These can be associated with challenging personal circumstances, a lack of basic skills or formal qualifications, the difficulties of balancing learning with family commitments, and the financial pressures of meeting the everyday costs of living whilst also covering the cost of courses. Many young people who are 'looking for learning opportunities' have encountered difficulties in the past in finding out information about appropriate provision and in applying for courses, both of which can now deter them from taking part in learning. Good quality, independent information, advice and guidance is essential in enabling these young people to move forwards.

Young people who ‘want to learn in the future’

Who are they?

Young people in this segment include those who expressed a desire or interest in learning, but had not, at the time of the interview, started actively looking for learning opportunities. These young people are likely to engage in learning in the medium- or long-term, although in the immediate future, they face a wide range of barriers preventing them engaging in education or training.

This segment has an older age profile, with the greatest proportion of young people aged 19+. Males are over-represented, as are those with a disability and those who have been out of education, employment or training for over 12 months. Young people in this segment are three times more likely to be qualified to degree level as those in other segments. Young people in this segment are also more likely than those in the overall sample to be parents.

John has a visual impairment, and often did not get the support he needed at school. After issues with a particular teacher, he left his course at sixth form after the first year and has not been in education since. He has been looking for a job and at the time of the interview was volunteering at a local charity shop. John’s real passion is for drama and he hopes to get into an acting school in the future. (Male from the South West, aged 20)

Joshua* lost interest towards the end of school and did not take his exams. Since leaving, he has struggled to find permanent employment because of his lack of qualifications. He has previously taken part in courses such as E2E which he has found helpful and he wants to get some qualifications which will help him in his job hunt. However, he is unsure how to go about this at the moment and feels stuck at a “dead-end”. (Male from the South East, aged 23)

Motivation

Over four-fifths of young people who ‘want to learn in the future’ spoke about their motivation to learn.

The most frequently cited motivations to learn were associated with ‘future career and aspirations’ the need to ‘gain employment or increase employability’, ‘qualifications’ and ‘skills, experience and knowledge’.

In addition, ‘financial support and incentives’ was a stronger motivator for young people in this segment, relative to those in most other segments.

Barriers

Over three-fifths of young people 'who want to learn in the future' discussed barriers to learning.

The most frequently cited barriers were associated with 'course content and format', 'cost and finances' and 'family, partner and peers'.

Young people in this segment were more likely to cite 'lack of motivation or direction' as a barrier than young people in other segments.

Implications

Though fewer young people who 'want to learn' have well defined career aspirations, learning is seen as a useful way of exploring what might be possible. In the short-term, they are concerned with finding a job and are willing to engage in learning and undertake qualifications to achieve this. Frustrated at not being able to find employment, they are keen to plug the gaps in their skills, knowledge and experience. Many young people in these circumstances exist on low incomes and therefore financial support is essential in encouraging them to participate.

Many young people who 'want to learn in the future' are currently struggling with a lack of motivation or direction. They are discouraged from learning by previous experiences of learning and face domestic challenges around securing appropriate childcare and supporting themselves financially while learning. Given these circumstances, it is important that the provision on which they engage is right for them and will support them to meet their aspirations. They will need to receive effective information, advice and guidance before they are ready to proceed into education and training.

Young people with ‘no plans regarding learning’

Who are they?

Young people in this segment include those who stated, at the time of interview, that they had no intention of learning in the future. Though the segment is small in size¹², the young people included have a wide variety of reasons for not having plans to engage in learning.

This segment has the oldest age profile, with a high proportion of 22-24 year olds. Men, those with a disability and those who have been out of education, employment or training for over 12 months, are over-represented in this segment. While interviewees in this segment are most likely to have left school without qualifications, there is also a higher proportion qualified to A-level or first degree than in other segments. Young people in this segment are less likely than those in the overall sample to be parents.

Chris had a lot of behavioural problems when he was young and was permanently excluded from three separate schools. After a period of inactivity he got himself a carpentry job but was laid off 3 months prior to the interview. He was signing on at the job centre and was hoping to go back to his old company if more work came through. Chris found that he got agitated in a learning environment and felt that it would be more beneficial for him to continue working on sites. (Male from the South East, aged 18)

Jamie has a visual impairment but had excellent support at school, helping him to achieve nine GCSEs. He started doing business studies at sixth form but his real interest lay in media and radio, so he left and went to study a BTEC National in radio broadcasting at a local RNIB college. At the time of the interview Jamie spent most of his time volunteering for a hospital radio, and was hoping to get a full time job as a radio broadcaster. Although he was positive about learning, Jamie felt that he had all the skills he needed to pursue his ideal career and so had no plans to engage in education or training in the future. (Male from the South West, aged 24)

Motivation

Around one half of young people with ‘no plans regarding learning’ spoke about their motivation to learn.

¹² Because of the sampling method for the original project this segment is quite small, although it still provides an interesting comparison with the other segments.

The most frequently cited motivation to learn was associated with a need to 'gain employment or increase employability'. Young people in this segment also made particular reference to the role of learning in boosting confidence.

Barriers

Seven in ten young people with 'no plans regarding learning' discussed barriers to learning.

The most frequently cited barriers were associated with 'behaviour, attendance or attitude' and 'poor previous learning experiences'. Young people in this segment were more likely to make reference to these two barriers than young people in any other segment.

Implications

Young people with 'no plans regarding learning' are least able to articulate what might motivate them to engage in learning. They are not particularly motivated by the prospect of gaining a qualification, although would do so if it secured them a job. Many do however, recognise the role that learning might play in boosting their confidence.

Many young people with 'no plans regarding learning' have been deterred from learning by previous negative experiences and do not believe that they have anything to gain by taking part in education and training. In order to participate, they would need to be convinced of the relevance and benefit of learning to their lives.

Conclusion

The large number of young people currently not in education, employment or training is a significant challenge, not only from a macro perspective, but also in terms of its impact upon individual life chances. The analysis presented within this report seeks to help develop a better understanding of the motivations and barriers affecting different groups of young people, as a means to offering better support to access education and employment.

While a significant body of research already exists around the issues facing young people not in education, employment or training, the value of using young peoples' voices to improve our understanding of their aspirations and their attempts to realise them, is a key underpinning principle of this unique study. The qualitative nature of the data provides a rich insight into the perspectives of young people, while the size of the sample enables an analysis of the experiences of different groups of young people.

The analysis presented within this report identifies a wide range of factors that motivate young people to engage in learning, as well as the array of practical and attitudinal challenges faced in actually taking part.

In particular, our analysis has highlighted the essential role of good quality, independent information, advice and guidance in supporting young people to identify and access appropriate education and training.

When this is coupled with appropriate support in addressing some of the practical challenges to taking part, such as those associated with securing childcare or financial support, the evidence from many of those interviewed shows that a positive experience of learning as a young adult, can transform negative experiences of schooling, opening the way for them to continue to engage in learning throughout their adult lives

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