

Young People Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) – A Carmarthenshire Perspective

1.0 Background

The Department of Education and Children has a long-standing commitment to supporting young people aged 16-25 who are not in employment, education and training (NEET). This work dates back to a Big Lottery Fund Bid in 2000 and has been followed by two successful ESF projects (Youth First and Engage) and the use of both core and grant funding by the Youth Service, together with a wide range of partners, to reduce the number of young people in this category. This work has been closely linked to the implementation of 14-19 Learning Pathways in the county and has been co-ordinated by a dedicated NEET Strategy Group since 2008. This work pre-dates any co-ordinated Welsh Government policy initiative to address the needs of young people who are NEET.

2.0 Carmarthenshire Implementation of the Youth Engagement and Progression Framework

In October 2013, the Welsh Government launched the Youth Engagement and Progression Framework implementation plan setting out the Welsh Government's expectations for this policy in Wales at a local, national and regional level. This framework sets out the Welsh Government's expectations of local authorities in reducing the number of young people who are not in employment, education or training (NEET). The six areas of the framework are:

- Identifying young people most at risk of disengagement;
- Better brokerage and coordination of support;
- Stronger tracking and transitions of young people through the system;
- Ensuring provision meets the needs of young people;
- Strengthening employability skills and opportunities for employment;
- Greater accountability for better outcomes for young people.

All Welsh local authorities are required to develop an action plan to implement the Youth Engagement and Progression Framework. This action plan is to be developed in the context of other local authority plans and strategies such as school improvement schemes, Families First, Communities First and the Integrated Community Strategy. The Welsh Government believes that strong strategic leadership from local authorities is a critical part of the successful implementation of these plans.

The Welsh Government set out its on-going commitment to tackling poverty by prioritising the needs of the poorest and protecting those most at risk of poverty and exclusion in the 'Tackling Poverty Action Plan 2012-2016'. A key part of that plan was a commitment to reduce the number of young people who are NEET.

New targets were set out in the plan and re-affirmed in the role of the Youth Engagement and Progression Framework to:

- Reduce the numbers of NEET young people aged 16 - 18 to 9% by 2017;
- Reduce the proportion of young people aged 19-24 who are NEET in Wales relative to the UK as a whole by 2017.

Working closely with the Pembrokeshire 14-19 Network and Careers Wales, the Carmarthenshire 14-19 Network and the youth service have refocused a range of youth support services to meet the needs of young people and the requirements of the Welsh Government's YEPF. These actions have included:

- Restructuring of the youth service on a thematic basis to ensure greater consistency of support services for young people;
- The establishment of a principal youth officer role and three county wide senior youth officer roles (responsible for school and college based youth work, post 16 NEET reduction and positive activities);
- Gaining agreement that school and college based youth work together with post 16 youth work will be "made services" in Families First commissioning process and thus ensuring funding of these roles to 2016;
- Implementation of a Vulnerability Assessment Profile (VAP) programme to identify all young people in secondary schools at risk of becoming NEET at 16;
- Use of information gained from the VAP to identify pupils in need of support in schools and supporting the post 16 transition of young people likely to become NEET;
- Using monthly 5 Tier NEET data from Careers Wales and Job Centre Plus to follow up and support young people aged 16-19;
- Mapping of the learning provision (core and additional NEET related) available in the county to avoid duplication;
- Better sharing of information regarding job and training vacancies locally;
- Development of ESF bids with regional partners for submission to the EU 2014-2020 programme to support the young people most at risk of becoming NEET.
- Continued close working with Pembrokeshire on these developments via the shared Pembrokeshire/Carmarthenshire 14-19 & YEPF steering group and shared training events

As a result of these requirements, much of the Carmarthenshire youth service delivery is now focused on more targeted support for young people. Targeted youth work provision has an important contribution to make in supporting young people to succeed in education, stay safe, stay healthy, play a positive role in their communities and make informed life choices.

The targeted work of the youth service is ensuring better outcomes for young people by providing support strong and efficient connections with other forms of provision, wider support networks and relevant partnerships. This includes the role of youth work in supporting young people to progress into education, training and employment.

A key part of the implementation of the YEPF in Carmarthenshire is the implementation of a network of 'lead workers' providing continuity of support and contact to vulnerable young people and supporting them to engage with and access

wider support services. Carmarthenshire youth service staff are both suitably skilled and best positioned to provide the lead worker role for many of the young people identified as being in need of support to prevent their disengagement from education and training, or to support them to re-engage.

Full details of all the current activities linked to the Youth Engagement and Progression Framework are included in the YEPF action plan for 2014-2015.

3.0 The Youth Service Budget 2010-2015

Each year, the Welsh Government allocates a core budget to each county council via the Revenue Support Grant to be used to fund the local authority youth service. The Carmarthenshire Youth Service receives the lowest percentage of this funding of any authority in Wales, with only 28% of the amount allocated) to the Council for the Youth Service (£563k of £1.9M actually being received by the service in the 2013-2014 year. This percentage figure has declined year on year from 42% in 2010-2011. The average Welsh local authority core youth work budget as a percentage of local government revenue settlement was 70% in 2013-2014. The year on year cuts to the core amount received by the service have affected its ability to fully deliver youth support services, the Youth Engagement and Progression Framework and to provide funding to support voluntary sector youth organisations in Carmarthenshire. Full details of Youth Service funding in Wales can be found here: <http://gov.wales/docs/statistics/2014/141022-youth-work-2013-14-en.pdf>

The table below summarises the funding arrangements for the Youth Service in the period 2012-2016.

Funding Source	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16
Core Budget (via RSG)	£634,060	£563,975	£547,117	£415,565
		<i>Reduction of 11%</i>	<i>Reduction of 3%</i>	<i>Reduction of 24%</i>
Cymorth / Families First Grant	£985,699	£983,351	£935,433	£694,540
Other Grants / Income (inc ESF funding)	£328,533	£191,967	£214,030	£264,307
TOTAL BUDGET	£1,948,292	£1,739,293	£1,696,580	£1,374,412
OVERALL REDUCTION		10.7%	2.5%	19%

The longstanding shortfall in core funding for Carmarthenshire Youth Service has meant that officers have had to be pro-active in gaining funding from other sources. In the period 2010-2013, significant additional funding was gained from the regional Engage ESF project to reduce the number of young people becoming NEET.

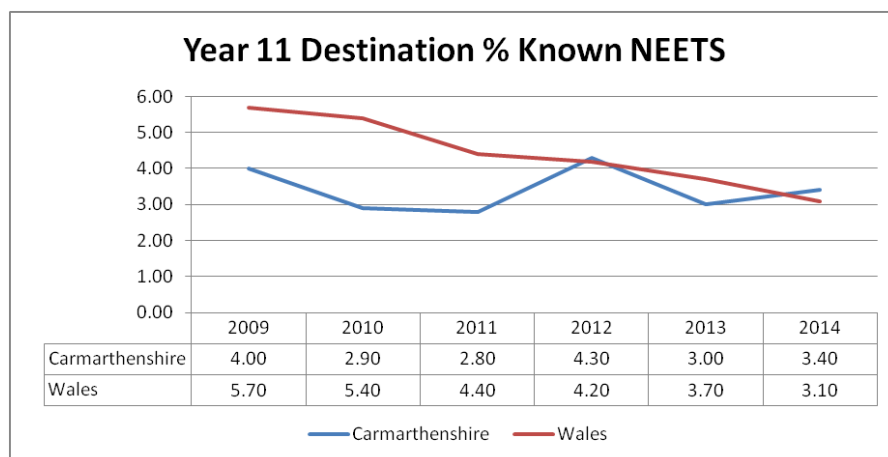
However, the closure of this project and Welsh Government delays in implementing a successor ESF programme for young people has meant a significant funding shortfall for the youth service in the period 2013-2015. Officers are currently (July 2015) preparing the Carmarthenshire elements of two regional ESF bids focussing on young people at risk of becoming NEET to be submitted to the Wales European Funding Office in September 2015. These bids will be led by Pembrokeshire CC on behalf of the 5 south west Wales authorities in the ESF area.

Additionally, officers secured Families First funding via the associated grant commissioning for school, college and Post 16 outreach youth work as “made services”, thus ensuring funding for these roles to 2016. However, the uncertainty generated by a combination of core budgets cuts and unconfirmed grant funding in the 2014-2015 financial year affected the ability of staff to fully deliver range of youth support services offered previously. Restructuring of the service during this period resulted in four youth workers leaving council employment in the financial year.

Despite the identified reductions in funding, the Youth Service provided support services for 29% of young people aged 11-19 and 19% of the 11-25 population in Carmarthenshire in 2014/15. The Youth Service is also responsible for delivering the best performing Duke of Edinburgh’s Award scheme in Wales, with more young people taking part, achieving awards and undertaking the scheme through the medium of Welsh than in any other county.

4.0 Careers Wales Pupil Destination Data – Carmarthenshire Context

School destination, and NEET “snapshot” data is captured by Careers Wales at the end of October each year for Year 11, 12 and 13 leavers and is published annually in the following April. Carmarthenshire Year 11 data reflects the current “mixed economy” for Post 16 provision, comprising of school Sixth Forms, Coleg Sir Gar FE delivery including an academic Tertiary system for the Llanelli area, vocational courses and work based learning provision. Data for Year 12 and Year 13 relates to Carmarthenshire school sixth form data only and does not include FE college destination data, which WG record this in a different way, making comparison of outcomes difficult.

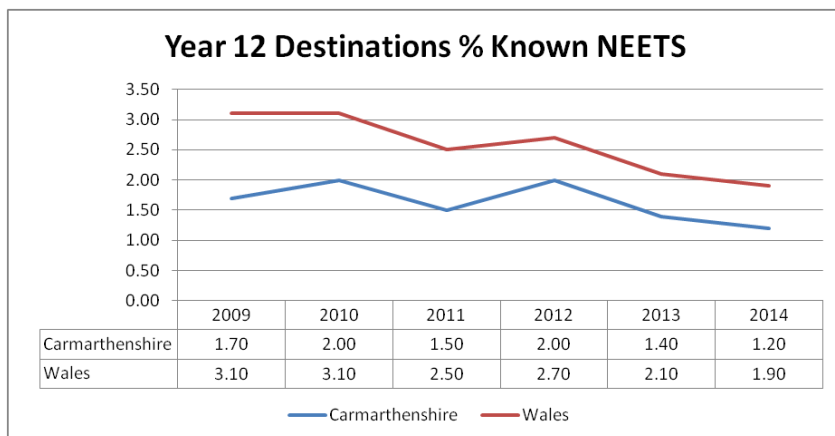


The percentage of Carmarthenshire Year 11 pupils becoming NEET has risen from 3.0% (65 yp) in 2013 to 3.4% (69 yp) in 2014 – Wales av 3.1%. In 2014, Carmarthenshire ranked 14th of 22 local authorities in Wales for this key performance indicator.

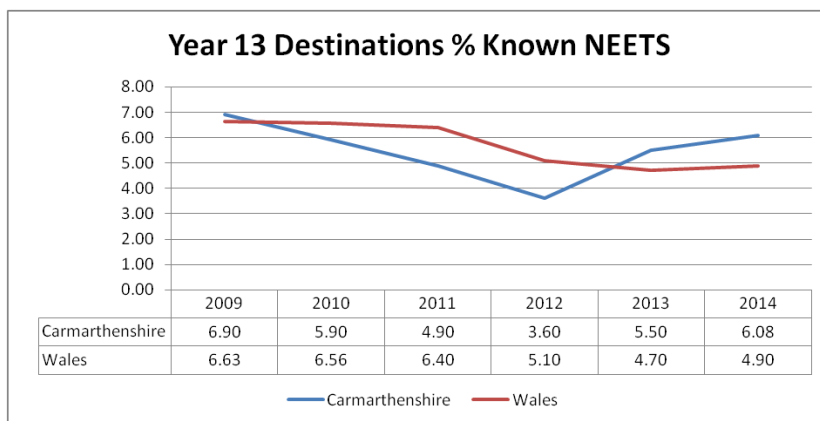
This small increase is a function of the effects of the following factors:

- The high level of dependency on grant funding to support the Youth Service and YEPF;
- Restructuring of the Youth Service linked to the required departmental budgetary savings, with the resulting effects on staff morale, performance and numbers of staff employed;
- An increased focus on pupil attendance leading to more young people being educated at home (given parents are concerned about fines if pupils do not attend school and thus are withdrawing their children to avoid this) and where this happens in Years 10 and 11, the likelihood of these young people becoming NEET increases significantly.
- The Welsh Government and Wales European Funding Unit delays in implementing the 2015 -2020 ESF programme which offers opportunities for targeted project work with this cohort of young people.

Additionally, the percentages of pupils progressing to 6th Form (41%) and FE college – primarily Coleg Sir Gâr (45%) -have remained fairly static over the last three years. This is a reflection of the strength of local educational partnership working which is acknowledged as sector leading. Consequently, there is not great “competition” locally for Post 16 pupils.



In 2014, Carmarthenshire schools retained 84% of their Year 12 leavers, ranking 6th of 22 Welsh Authorities for this KPI (Wales average 82%). This suggests a high degree of pupil satisfaction with the Sixth Form experience on offer in schools. The percentage of young people becoming NEET at the end of Year 12 was 1.2% (Wales average 1.9%) with Carmarthenshire ranking 6th of 22 Welsh Local Authorities for this KPI. The percentage of young people becoming NEET varied across the schools from 0% to 4%. However, focus on this cohort of young people remains a priority since levels of pupil drop out from Year 12 can be an indicator of dissatisfaction with the curriculum on offer, particularly for those pupils who return to the Sixth Form without a clear focus for progression and/or weak GCSE grades.



The percentage of Year 13 pupils becoming NEET has risen from 5.5% (40 yp in 2013 to 6.0% - 46 yp) in 2014. Carmarthenshire ranks 17 of 22 Welsh authorities, with the Wales average being 4.9%. Initial analysis suggests that this trend is linked to particular schools where the levels of progression from Sixth Form to University are low, and there is significant variation in the outcomes here at an individual school level. For example, the highest rate of progression by pupils from a Carmarthenshire school to Higher Education is 74.5%, while the lowest is 38%. And the school with the lowest rate of progression to HE also has both the highest rate of Year 13 progression to FE (24%) and the highest rate of Year 13 pupils becoming NEET (16%), with the lowest Carmarthenshire school having 1.2% of pupils in this NEET category.

This data suggests that pupils who were not well suited to A levels stayed on at school when they would have been better served progressing to FE College or work-based training. These pupils did not achieve good grades at A Level in school and thus either went to FE post A Level (in effect wasting two years in school) and/or did not progress and became NEET. This area is a particular focus for the new Post 16 Planning and Funding System and will be a key area of study in the current 11-19 Education & Training review.

5.0 Departmental Actions to Reduce the Number of Young People Becoming NEET

There are a range of actions on-going to reduce the number of young people becoming NEET. These actions are linked to the local authority's responsibilities via the YEPF and other departmental and partnership work to access additional resources to support this group of young people. In addition to the YEPF actions identified elsewhere in this briefing paper, Post 16 progression and retention during the 2015-2016 year will be supported by:

- **Year 11 Information Advice and Guidance** – Young people in Year 11 receive assemblies from Job Centre Plus staff that provides them with information about the local labour market. These are timed to coincide with them beginning their post-16 options choices. This compliments the work undertaken by Careers Wales.

- **Careers Events** – All Year KS4 young people in compulsory education have the opportunity to meet Carmarthenshire Post-16 education providers face at a Careers Event. This enables them to get a better understanding of their potential learning pathways and they are further signposted onto options evenings.
- **Year 11 AS level entry requirements** – Each school needs to be confident that all learners have the appropriate ability to complete their courses. From September 2015, all pupils entering Sixth Forms without GCSE Maths and English will be required to resit these qualifications.
- **Common Area Prospectus and Application Process (CAP)** – All Year 11 learners will apply for their post-16 education and training through the Welsh Government's new CAP system from September 2016. This system will allow learners to view the full range of educational opportunities in the county, and will greatly contribute to tracking their progression through the post-16 transition process. This is similar to the UCAS university application process.
- **A review of 11-19 Education in Carmarthenshire** – This work is being undertaken in partnership with Coleg Sir Gar and will include the development of a Carmarthenshire curriculum offer and clear links to the economic regeneration of the County and region. This will be underpinned by the development of an inclusive curriculum for learners in all settings. This will be underpinned by a revised departmental structure including a new head of Inclusion post.
- **Closer links with CCC Regeneration colleagues** – To ensure that all opportunities to promote work related education, entrepreneurship, apprenticeships and traineeships locally are utilised and links to Swansea Bay City Region developments;

It is possible that additional resources for NEET preventative work will be available from early 2016 via the regional ESF *Cynnydd* project (for 11-19s at risk of becoming NEET) and the *Cam Nesa* Project (for 16-25s who are NEET). These projects will include the potential for direct funding for CCC delivery and procurement of a range of support and enhancement services. Both of these regional projects are being led by Pembrokeshire County Council.

6.0 Future Challenges to Reducing the Number of Young People Becoming NEET

While the Carmarthenshire NEET steering group has overseen a largely successful and joined-up approach to reducing the number of young people who become NEET in the county over the period 2006-2015, there will be very significant challenges to further work in this area in the period to 2020.

These challenges include:

- Reducing WG budgets for 14-19 collaboration work which will reduce the opportunity for young people to take vocational courses at KS4;
- A focus on teaching and learning to deliver school improvement that does not consider how the wider local authority support services contribute to improving outcomes for young people and families experiencing poverty;

- The withdrawal of universal advice, guidance and work experience services by Careers Wales, placing additional responsibility for these areas on the local authority without any associated budget to fund this work;
- An increasingly academic 11-16 curriculum that many pupils will not find interesting or engaging;
- A reduced “alternative curriculum” offer for young people in Key Stage 4 who are disaffected with school;
- Reducing Welsh Government Post 16 budgets (predicted to be a minimum of 5% p.a. to 2020) that will limit the potential for secondary schools and Coleg Sir Gâr to offer a broad A Level curriculum;
- Reducing youth service budgets and a focus on WG grant funding that does not enable the flexible approaches required to engage with young people;
- New models of youth service delivery currently being considered by the Welsh Government and likely to feature in political party manifestos for the 2016 Welsh Assembly election;
- Welfare cuts by the Westminster Government that will significantly affect the ability of young people to stay in education and find employment (e.g. the removal of Housing Benefit for 18-21 year olds).

Given this context, and despite the on-going commitment of Council staff and the wider partnership to supporting young people at risk of becoming NEET, there is a very significant risk that the number of young people aged 16-25 in Carmarthenshire becoming NEET and/or experiencing poverty will increase in the next 5 years.

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