

Report to Policy Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Participation of Young People aged 16-18 in Education, Employment or Training (EET)

Portfolio Holder:

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Purpose of the Report

This report will update the Committee on current Participation and NEET rates together with a summary on activity during the past 12 months and planned in the future to ensure that we are shaping and influencing opportunities where possible for our 16-18 year olds.

Recommendations

Committee to note the current landscape and experiences of 16-18 year olds which is impacting on their Participation in education, employment or training.

Participation of Young People aged 16-18 in Education, Employment or Training (EET)

1 Background

The LA continues to fulfil its duties around encouraging, enabling and assisting young people to participate in education or training and tracking those aged 16 and 17 through the commission of the targeted support offer delivered by Positive Steps, this includes some dedicated resource for our SEND (EHC plans) and Children Looked After (CLA) cohort.

The effects of the pandemic on our young people are well reported with concerns still in place about the effect it had on their education over the past two years. Concerns about wellbeing, in particular loneliness, dissatisfaction with life, stress, anxiety, boredom and concerns about the future all continue to affect young people and their levels of engagement and motivation¹.

Our approach across partners in Oldham is to ensure that young people can access the advice and support they require; that we have opportunities available and to engage with our young people to hear their voices and respond as best we can.

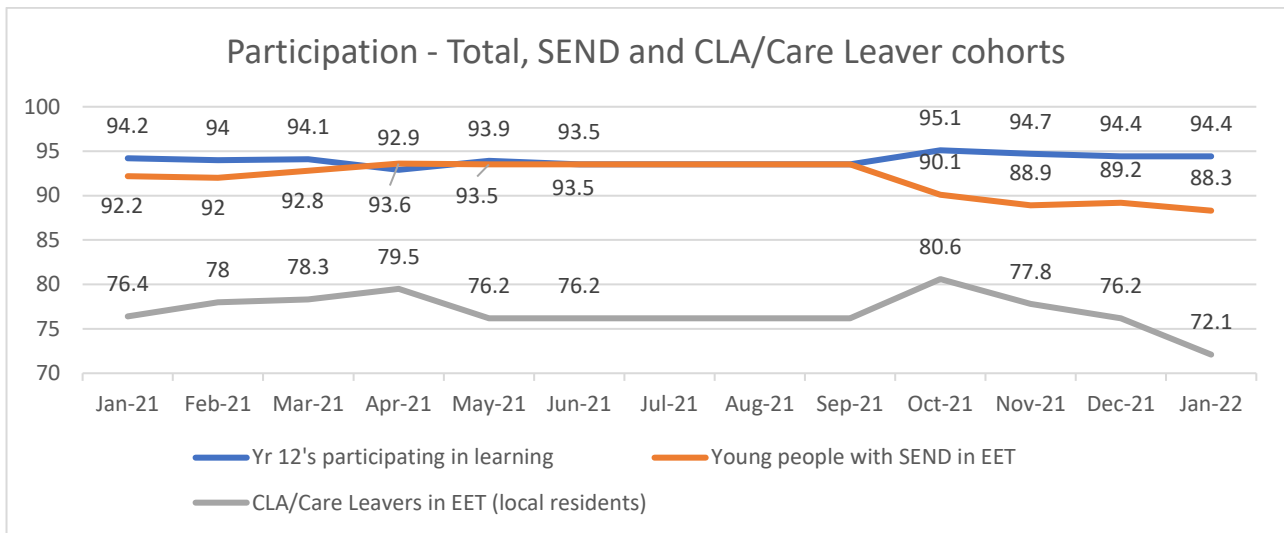
This report will update the Committee on current Participation and NEET rates together with a summary on activity planned in the future to ensure that we are shaping and influencing where possible for our 16-18 year olds.

2 Current Position

Currently 94.4% year 12s are participating in some form of EET, this rate has been consistently steady in the past 12 months, despite the additional challenges brought by the continuing effects the pandemic. The graph below shows the variations for the SEND and CLA cohort who have dedicated careers advisor resource available to them.

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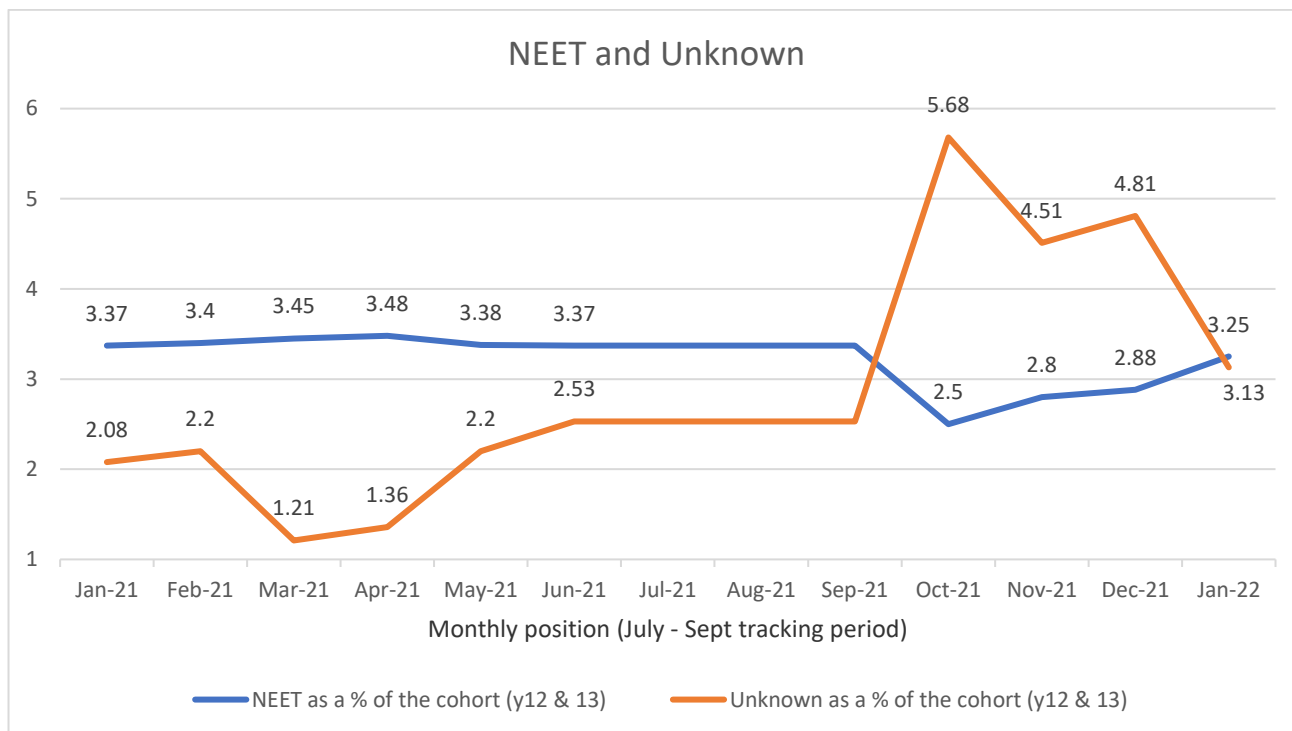
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It is not unusual for us to see Participation drop following the autumn term and this year is no different. The drop appears to be because of young people continuing to struggle to re-engage following the pandemic and re-adjust to a return to participation in person, some struggling with their mental health. The advisors working with the NEET cohort work closely to re-engage them in EET or local engagement programmes and we expect some positive engagements during January will be reflected in the Feb data.

The impact of the pandemic has been disproportionate on our CLA and Care Leaver young people and this presents as a larger drop in EET on the above graph. The smaller cohort also impacts the data, therefore is not unusual to see a bigger drop in EET. The struggle to re-engage and re-adjust to a return to in person participation in addition to the further barriers these young people face requires a higher level of support and our dedicated Careers Advisor support working with PA's is essential to ensuring these young people are encouraged and supported to re-engage.

The NEET rate currently sits at 3.25% and has been relatively steady over the past 12 months, with January 2022 position lower than January 2021. We receive monthly starter leaver information from providers to ensure that an advisor can contact young people and re-engage, ultimately reducing the amount of time potentially spent NEET. There are currently 205 young people recorded as NEET with 191 actively seeking EET opportunities – some have been waiting until the most recent restrictions have lifted, some due to health reasons are a little further from EET.



The offer available from post 16 settings is returning to a mostly face to face model, some providers still offer a blended learning model, a different way of working which is positive for some but not for others. Positive Steps careers advisors are continuing to engage with young people and report a number of reasons for withdrawal, including:

- Course doesn't suit, plans to return to a different course in September
- Preference to try and get an apprenticeship as an alternative
- Physical and mental health issues

The unknown figure has also risen slightly against January 2021 figures, again, on account of leaver lists where we have tried several and varied attempts at contact but have had to make the young person unknown as we cannot ascertain a certain destination. Follow up of these young people continues, although they are categorised as unknown. Given this rise, we intend to explore the reasons for this and work with partners to ensure young people access the support they need to participate.

3. Activity to Support Participation

Engagement programmes are essential for young people, never more so than now. We currently have a number of organisations offering provision in Oldham or GM that Oldham young people can access that will support young people to engage and obtain skills for education, employment or training:

- The Growth Company - ESF Skills Support for Growth ongoing
- Positive Steps – ESF NEET programme
- Ingeous – ESF NEET (18+)
- Groundwork – Re-connect programme ongoing
- Groundwork – Princes Trust TEAMS Programme (18+)
- Princes Trust – variety of online courses, updated monthly
- Reconnect at Mahdlo

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- Keyring – AdVenture programme (LD & Autism) 11 week programme
 - Step Into Your Future
 - OA NEET Project
 - Hidden Talent
 - Stepping Into NHS
 - Step Into Care (GM Health and Social Care Careers Hub)
 - Roots to Opportunity (Green Steps and Skill Mill (YJ))

Due to the rise in the number of funded projects available for young people in Oldham, we felt it is becoming increasingly difficult to navigate what's available for young people. We are working to create a visual of what's currently available to young people to support them to become EET. We are in the process of mapping out what's available and how this will support young people to re-engage and will be available for young people, parents and professionals to refer to.

The successful Stepping into NHS programme continues. It was originally funded by GMCA, but this phase of funding ceased in December 21. The partners involved (Northern Care Alliance, Positive Steps and Oldham Council) were successful in securing further funding via the Sustainable Futures Fund from the Princes Trust. The programme can now continue with re-focus on care experienced young people (and those with barriers) and increased cohort numbers. The project provides essential mentor activity and classroom learning to young people interested in working with the Northern Care Alliance in a variety of roles, predominately at Royal Oldham Hospital.

Oldham Training Provider and Personal Development Network met to discuss how we can support young people become EET in Oldham. All providers identified young people are struggling to engage with the variety of offers across the network. Addressing this will be an ongoing piece of work the network will address over the coming 12 months.

As adults working with young people we acknowledge the need for us to adapt our communication channels so we are available to young people on the platforms they choose to engage with and allow us to be a part of. We are experiencing a significant drop in young people accessing the physical spaces available to them to discuss re-engaging and returning to participation. With this in mind, we are beginning scope out a potential digital IAG offer, and what this could look like in the future, to see if young people begin to engage with this as a first step to participation.

We will continue to build on our activity to support Participation, in particular for our yr 11s who face uncertainty over the coming months. A few key areas include:

- Revised year 11 survey – with a greater focus on social and wellbeing needs.
- NEET survey – exploring aspirations and barriers to engagement.
- Mapping of local provision to identify any gaps.
- Explore rise in unknowns, reasons for this and seek options to reduce barriers
- Scoping of a potential digital IAG offer
- Continue to explore how we can grow engagement provision locally and also influence existing providers to flex in order to meet the needs of our young people.

4. Key Issues for Policy Overview and Scrutiny Committee to Discuss

Increasing youth unemployment is an area of concern nationally which has been exacerbated by the pandemic. The societal impact of unemployment is well-documented, as is the negative impact on life chances for the long-term unemployed. Supporting young people to encourage participation in EET and to prevent an increase in 16 to 18 year olds becoming NEET, is therefore central to our strategies for addressing disadvantage in Oldham and to prevent longer term disengagement. This will continue to be an area of significant focus in our plans to shape recovery from the pandemic.

5. Key Questions for Policy Overview and Scrutiny Committee to Consider

The Committee is asked to note the range of interventions currently in place to support young people into EET and prevent the incidence of NEET increasing, and to comment and discuss accordingly.

6. Links to Corporate Outcomes – An Inclusive Economy

#ourbit: Working with partners to create quality work prospects - and ensuring all residents can access new skills and opportunities and be work-ready

#yourbit: Making the most of the education and skills offer and aiming to better yourself

#result: An ambitious and socially mobile borough

7. Additional Supporting Information – n/a

8. Consultation – n/a

The voice of young people and engagement of a wide range of providers / stakeholders has been and will continue to be central to this agenda.

9. Appendices – n/a