

Report to CHILDREN'S SCRUTINY BOARD

Participation of Young People aged 16 – 18 in Education, Employment or Training

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Purpose of the report

This annual report is the result of previous requests from the former Overview and Scrutiny Committee to present annual reports to Members to keep them informed of relevant activities and initiatives.

Executive Summary

The Annual Report is for information and opportunity for members to scrutinise and challenge activities in the preceding year. This report will update the Board 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

The Board to note the current landscape and experiences of 16–18-year old's which is impacting on their participation in education, employment, or training.

The Board is asked to note the range of interventions currently in place to support young people into EET and prevent the incidence of NEET increasing, given the highlighted issue in relation to sufficiency. To comment and discuss accordingly.

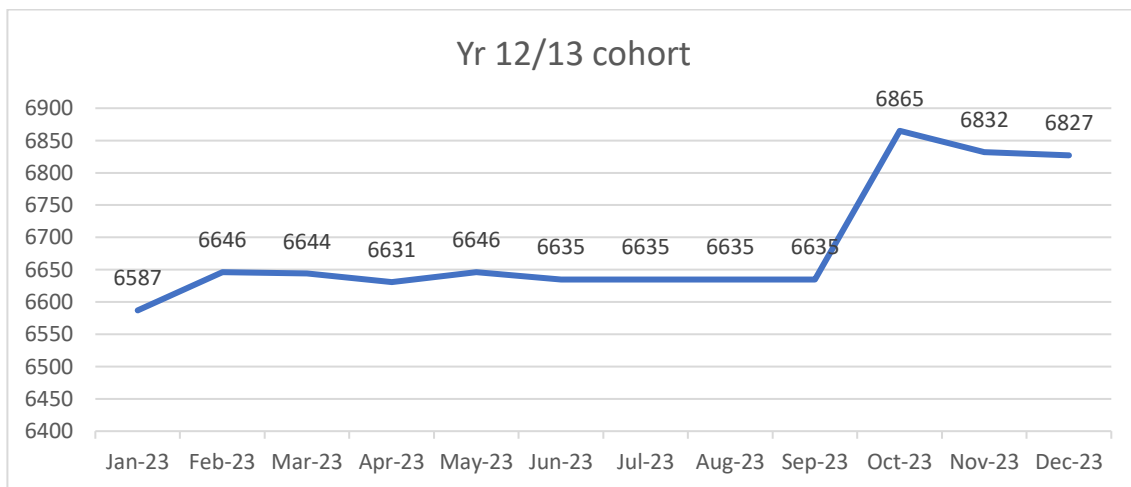
Participation of Young People aged 16 – 18 in Education, Employment and Training

1 Background

- 1.1 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 a small resource for our SEND (EHC plans) and Children Looked After (CLA) cohort. Due to the contract term coming to an end, the commissioning and procurement procedures are currently under review by the Children’s Commissioning Team.
- 1.2 Our approach across partners in Oldham is to ensure that young people are empowered to 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. We do this using a partnership approach engaging organisation’s who work with our 16 – 18-year-olds and support them to participate.
- 1.3 This report will update the Board on Participation, NEET (not in education, employment or training) and unknown rates across 2023, 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

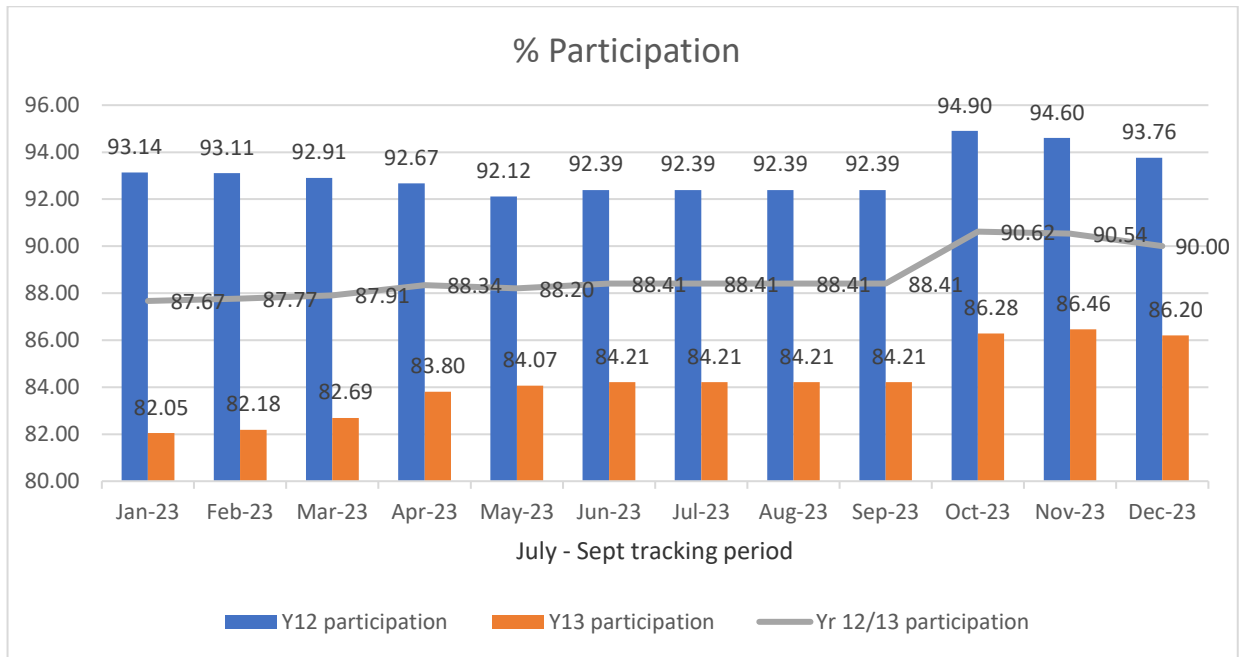
2.1 Cohort numbers



2.1.1 We have seen a notable increase in our cohort numbers for the academic year 23/24. The actual cohort numbers fluctuate month by month, but the average cohort number across 2023 for Y12/13 combined is 6685. 2022’s figure was 6401. This is an increase in actual young people of 284. This increase puts pressure on all service areas, including the LA in meeting its statutory duties, it increases competition for education placements, education providers need to offer more and differentiated places and increases caseloads for staff working to secure placements for young people.

2.1.2 Y12/13 cohort numbers are projected to continue to rise until the academic year 28/29.

2.2 Y12/12 Participation Rates

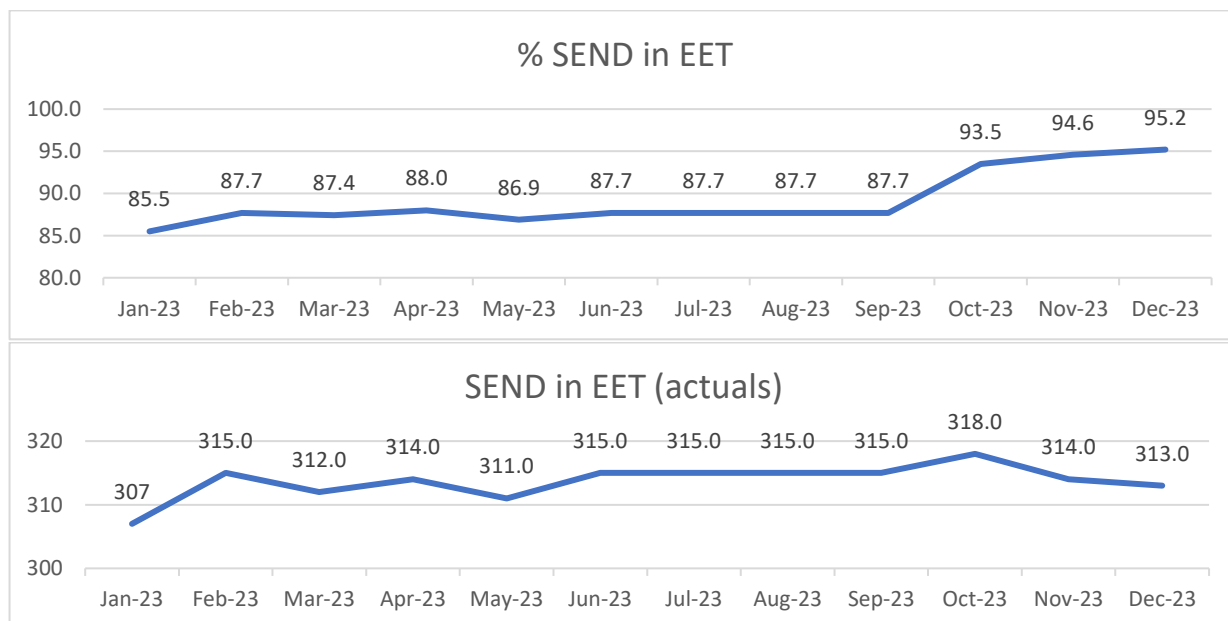


- 2.2.1 Latest reported data (December 2023) indicates that 93.76% of our year 12s are participating in some form of EET (education, employment or training) activity. This % rate of participation has been fairly static over the last twelve months, indicating that our year 12's were relatively settled in their destination following transition from school. Y12 average participation across 2023 was 93.06%.
- 2.2.2 However, following a similar trajectory to last year, participation rates in our year 13 cohort is much lower. Y13 average participation across 2023 was 84.21%. Please note that the Y13 cohort during January 2023 to July 2023 is the cohort most significantly affected by school closures during the pandemic, and its continued effects are still being felt. Professionals, parents, carers and peers demonstrate continuing 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 motivation.
- 2.2.3 From October 2023, the figures shown are the new Y13 cohort and is showing a 2.36% increase in participation on the previous Y13 cohort but shows a significant decrease from their own Y12 participation (6.89%).
- 2.2.4 Historically, there have always been young people that struggle with the transition from Y12 to Y13. This was identified as an issue in 22/23 academic year so for 23/24 we provided additional support at re-enrollment for those who needed to seek an alternative course for Y13. Information from Colleges on who would not be offered a Y13 place was requested so that young people could be contacted and offered support.
- 2.2.5 Whilst mitigations were put in place, it appears that a significant number of Y13 students did not return to the second year of their course. This requires further investigation with the Colleges and wider FE partners to understand the data and how we can work together to support these young people to return to EET activity.
- 2.2.6 The careers advisors supporting the NEET cohort work closely with young people and a range of providers to re-engage them in EET or any appropriate local engagement programs that support young people back on their journey to EET. We expect some positive

engagements during January as young people begin to wish to return to positive activity following the winter break which will be reflected in the February data.

2.2.7 The Connect to Your Future and Empower Oldham programs funded via GMCA have provided an additional support offer for these young people. Teams are able to refer young people to work with a careers coach or mentor. We have case studies of some excellent outcomes, providing us with evidence that if capacity is available to undertake the work and a young person is willing to engage and take on the practical and emotional support that a mentor can offer, they are able to re-engage in positive activity.

2.3 SEND Participation Rates



2.3.1 The actual cohort numbers fluctuate month by month across the year, but the average annual cohort number for Y12/13 SEND is 314, and the % participation is steady across the academic year, showing a rise in participation from September of 5.8%.

2.3.2 The SEND Team co-ordinates education provision for young people aged 16 – 25 with an EHC plan to ensure they are accessing an education provision that meets the educational outcomes in their EHC plan and supports them to achieve their aspirations.

2.3.4 The PfA Steering Group works in partnership with a wide variety of partners (and feeds into the SEND Programme Board) to improve outcomes for young people with SEND, including employment.

2.3.5 Oldham was successful in securing additional funding from the DfE to work on a Supported Internship program. The aims of the project are to increase the number and quality of Supported Internships available to young people in Oldham and we are currently in year 2 of the 3-year project. Oldham Council works closely with the two local delivery providers, DfE, Oldham Youth Service and Oldham Theatre Workshop to achieve project aims.

2.3.6 SEND Services recently held a Young Person's Voice SEND and Inclusion Conference. The conference was an opportunity for children and young people with additional needs from Key Stage 3 and above to come together to have their opinions heard, and to speak to key decision makers about priorities in the SEND and Inclusion Strategy. Approximately 65

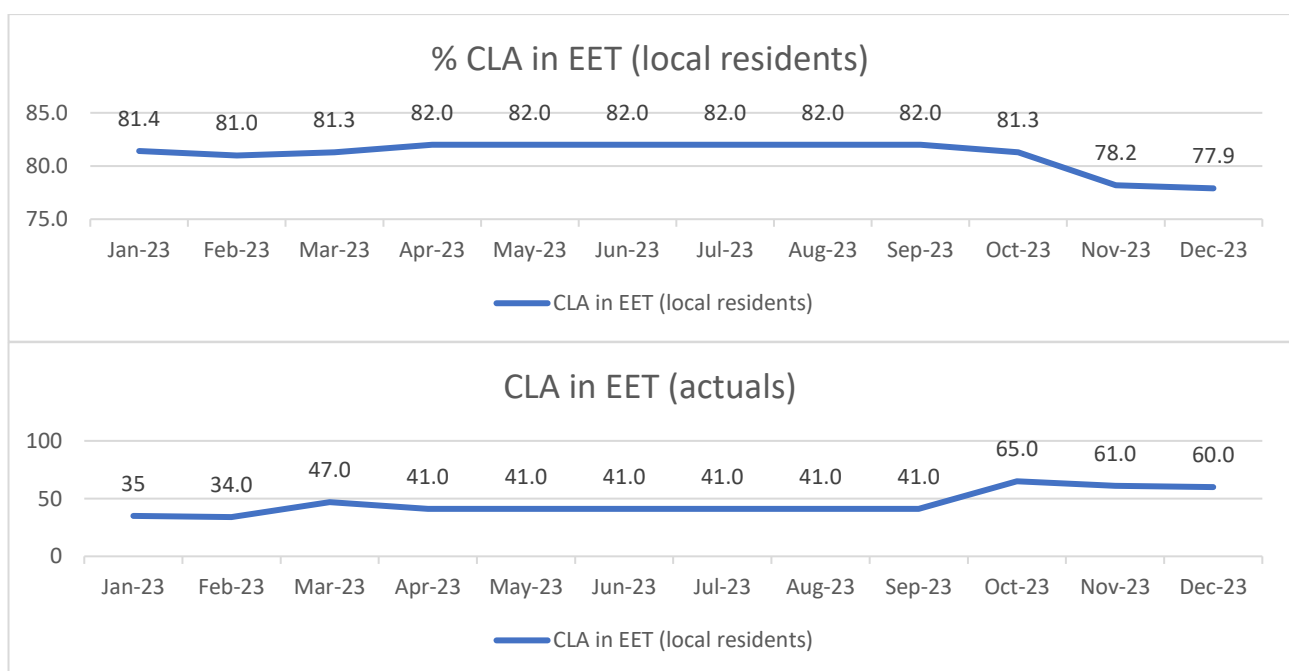
young people attended from 9 Oldham mainstream secondary schools and 2 special secondary schools.

2.3.7 A series of activities were facilitated to support young people to express their views on what is and is not working for them. Barrier Breakers selected the four areas that were most important to them, which included:

1. Education and training.
2. Positive health and wellbeing.
3. Community and social inclusion.
4. Planning/preparing for adulthood.

2.3.8 The conference feedback specifically linked to participation highlighted that young people feel they would like more support around their education, employment, preparing for adulthood, including money management, volunteering opportunities to enhance employability skills and safe independent travel.

2.4 CLA Participation (local residents)



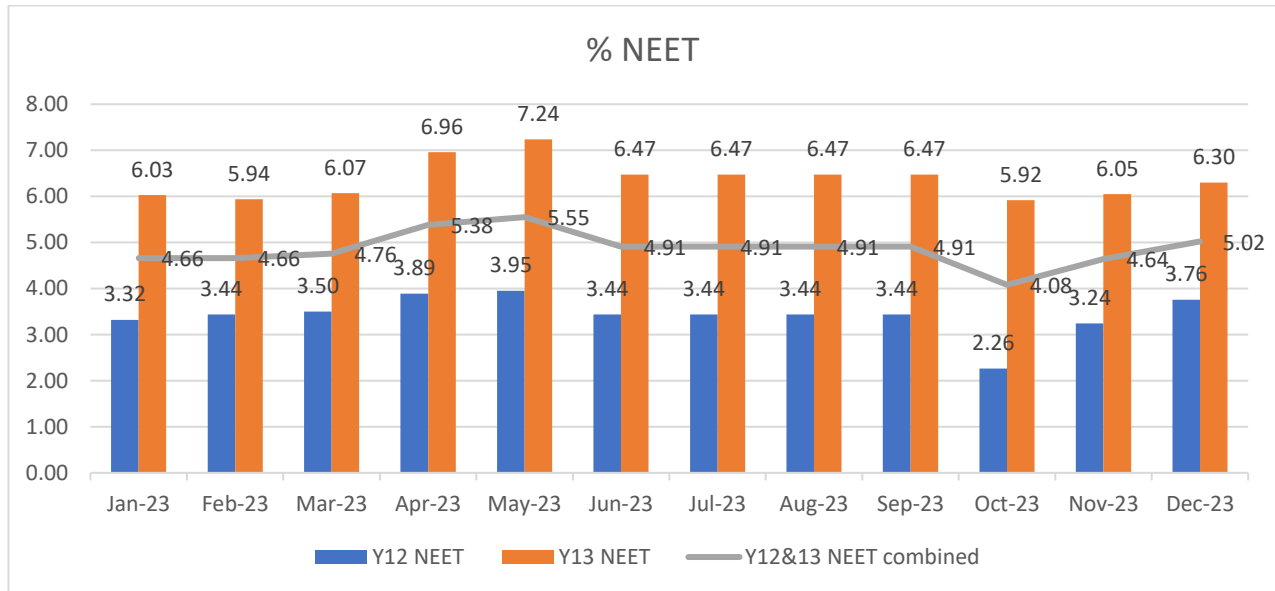
2.4.1 The average annual cohort number for CLA (16 – 18) in 2023 is 45. The smaller cohort impacts the data, but is not unusual to see a bigger statistical drop in EET whilst our most vulnerable young people transition in the autumn term.

2.4.2 Given the additional barriers CLA young people face this requires a higher level of support and our dedicated Careers Advisor support working with social care teams is essential to ensuring these young people are encouraged and supported to re-engage. We continue to provide the additional resource dedicated to this cohort.

2.4.3 Our Virtual School (VS) coordinates further support for the young people in our care to assist them to transition successfully into Post 16 provision. This is provided through a dedicated Post 16 Education Officer. The VS deliver a range of targeted activities and programmes to raise aspirations and participation, utilising information/data in Personal Education Plans (PEPs) on careers advice and guidance. Ongoing liaison with the VS and Positive Steps ensures that there is oversight of Oldham CLA and the careers advice and guidance they have received or require.

2.4.5 Whilst the program is outside of the Y12/13 age range, we have recently received funding to deliver a Care Leaver Multiply (numeracy program) to support care leavers aged 19+ to gain additional maths skills. Although the courses can only be delivered to 19+, the fund can be used to engage CLA young people who may benefit from this type of support in the months leading up to their 19th birthday. These young people will be identified at the Care Leaver NEET monthly meeting and support put in place.

2.5 Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET)



2.5.1 The latest reported (December) Y12/13 combined NEET rate currently sits at 5.02% with December 2023 position higher than January 2023. We continue to receive monthly starter leaver information from providers to ensure that an advisor can contact young people who become NEET mid-year to re-engage, reducing the amount of time potentially spent NEET. There are currently 343 young people recorded as NEET with 288 actively seeking EET opportunities. Reasons for NEET are varied some are waiting for the right opportunity (e.g. apprenticeships), some due to health, some are new to Oldham and the UK and are a little further from EET. These young people are offered engagement programs to support them.

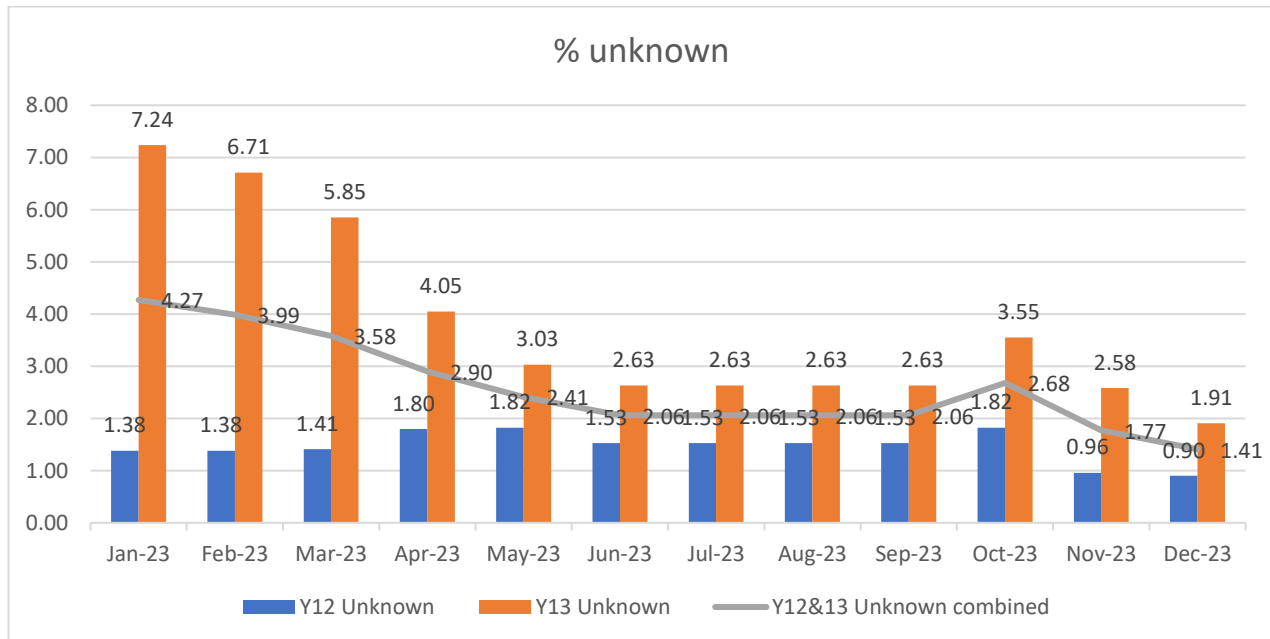
2.5.2 The 55 young people not available to the labour market again are in this position for a number of reasons, mainly illness (mental health a significant contributor), teenage parents and pregnancy and young carers. Our Careers Advisors continue to offer support to these young people, but the intensity is reduced.

2.5.3 In line with the participation data, the NEET data highlights the difficulties our Y13 cohort is experiencing with successfully accessing EET, with Y13's levels 2.94% higher than our Y12 cohort (on average across 2023).

2.5.4 The offer available from post 16 settings is not dissimilar to last year, although the landscape is beginning to change to meet the requirements of the Skills and Post 16 Act. The continued roll out of wider T-Level courses is providing another option for young people to consider, and the T-Level results from both Colleges were encouraging.

2.5.5 Providers have adjusted their offers following the de-funding of traineeships, but await further information on the plan to defund a large number of level 2 and below course, re-shape level 3 (removal of BTEC's) and introduce the Advanced British Standard, a new Baccalaureate-style qualifications for 16 – 19 year olds.

2.6 Unknown (or “not known”)



2.6.1 Work to identify the unknown cohort has been a priority across 2023, and this targeted focus has seen a significant drop in the numbers of unknown young people. As the graph demonstrates, we have reduced the Y12/13 combined % rate from 4.27% in January 2023 down to 1.41% in December 2023. This equates to 191 young people.

2.6.2 This means these young people are now known to us, we know they are safe and we can offer services.

2.6.3 It is difficult to ascertain the reasons for young people becoming unknown, and we will continue to use lived experience, research, peer to peer shared good practice to explore the reasons and work with partners to ensure young people access support.

2.6.4 Positive Steps try several and varied attempts at continued contact but have been required to make the young person unknown as we cannot ascertain a positive EET destination. Follow-up of these young people continues, but some cases can become a strain on resources. Due to the guidance set out by the DfE, although we may have evidence that a young person no longer lives in Oldham, as we are unable to obtain a positive EET destination, we are required to continue to a) keep this young person on Oldham’s database and b) mark them as unknown in our data returns. Work is currently being undertaken to assess what % of young people fall into this category so we can report this.

2.7 Key activity to support participation

2.7.1 Whilst our commissioned service continues to meet our statutory duties in relation to participation, it is acknowledged at a regional level that this cohort requires additional support to enable them to participate successfully.

2.7.2 “Connect to Your Future”, an ESF/GMCA funded project that supported young people aged 15 – 19 ended in September. This project offered enhanced support to young people who were either at risk of or were NEET.

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- 2.7.3 Following the end of “Connect to Your Future” GMCA identified that this group continued to be a high risk group that required continued additional support, therefore funded a program via UKSPF funding. Locally known as “Empower Oldham”, the offer will be for 15 – 19-year-olds (up to 25 with SEN and 21 if care experienced) who are at risk of or NEET, and will provide bespoke enhanced support, either individually or in groups to move them into a positive EET destination. Delivery of the program officially commenced in early December and our January return to GMCA indicated we have 21 young people on program.
- 2.7.4 Engagement programs are essential for young people and provide an essential part of the pathway from NEET to EET. We currently have a number of organisation’s offering provision in Oldham or GM that young people can access that will support young people to engage and obtain skills for education, employment or training. Due to the number of funded projects available for young people in Oldham, it became increasingly difficult to navigate what is available for young people. Use of the padlet; [Positive Steps \(padlet.com\)](https://www.padlet.com) which provides a visual of what’s currently available to young people to support them to become EET continues to be used widely. The padlet is continually updated and is available for young people, parents and professionals to use.
- 2.7.5 Oldham’s Post 16 Team, Get Oldham Working, Job Centre Plus and Positive Steps continue to work together to deliver Oldham’s Youth Hub, finding ways to work collaboratively to expand the offer in place. The initiative works in a supportive, young person focused and positive outcome-based way that supports young people aged 16 – 25 years old to access support to enable them to participate in activity that will lead to an employment opportunity. The Youth Hub hosts our Youth Hub Collaborative, which is a network of agencies sharing information and service offerings to support young people to achieve.
- 2.7.6 We have recently seen an increase in young people returning to the physical spaces to discuss re-engaging, but Digital IAG is a mechanism we continue to enhance so further choice is available. 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.
- 2.7.7 The Employment and Skills Partnership Board has been established and the strategy and action plan developed. Work with our Comms Team on production of the strategy document with a view to a public launch in late February/early March. Our strategy has 4 priorities, with young people’s employment being priority one.
- 2.7.8 Following the success of the Young Person’s Careers Event in September 2023, Leaders have agreed it will run again. We aim to be more ambitious with the scope of the event for 2024, with a wider representation of employers across the GM region being requested to attend. The Employment and Skills Board will be the oversight body for the development of the event, which is agreed to take place in late September 2024.
- 2.7.9 Post 16 Service and the Business Team are developing a Comms Plan to keep Oldham Businesses better informed of the activity in relation to young person’s employment and skills with a view to engaging more businesses in the agenda, including update on the Integrated Technical City Region.
- 2.7.10 Oldham has successfully been awarded a grant to deliver a GM Care Leaver Multiply (bespoke maths course) Offer. The first program is due to commence at the end of March 2024 and aims to increase confidence, maths skills, increase employment skills and serve as a pathway to further education, training or employment for Care Leavers aged 19+. The fund can work with 18 year olds to prepare them for the course.
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2.7.11 To enhance Oldham's offer to young people, we have collaborated with three secondary schools and Oldham Sixth Form College and Oldham College to design a small pilot to develop a model of transition for identified young people that may benefit from a different approach. The pilot consists of three strands of activity:

- Refine information sharing processes between schools and Colleges to improve the support put in place by both school and College to enable students to successfully transition to post 16 placements.
- A small, appropriate group of young people in secondary school to benefit from an offer from Oldham College (term-time) and "Empower Oldham"¹ (summer break). The purpose would be to introduce the College environment and keep young people engaged and empower them to thrive in their future environment.
- Increased awareness of post 16 education for students and enhanced visibility in schools.

Upon completion of the pilot, dependent on success and following a thorough evaluation and possible adaptations, we plan to grow the pilot at a steady pace. This growth is very much dependent on all parties working to ensure the success of the project.

2.7.12 Within the statutory guidance on duties relating to the participation of young people in EET, local authorities have broad duties to encourage, enable and assist young people to participate in education or training.

One of these duties is to:

- Secure sufficient suitable education and training provision for all young people in their area who are over compulsory school age but under 19 or aged 19 to 25 and for whom an Education, Health and care plan is maintained. This is a duty under the Education Action 1996. To fulfil this, local authorities need to have a strategic overview of the provision available in their area and to identify and resolve gaps in provision.

Oldham is experiencing a gap in its offer for 16 –18-year-olds, namely Entry Level/Level 1 study programmes. Work is ongoing to address this gap and Oldham College have indicated a strong intention to support us to close this gap and we are working closely with them on a plan. In addition, a request for external providers to deliver in Oldham has been issued, and we currently have six providers initially expressing an interest in possible delivery. There are some barriers in relation to funding and building availability and this may prevent some providers entering the marketplace.

2.7.13 In addition to 2.7.12, there are a number of contributing factors to sufficiency being an issue, and it must be noted that currently sufficiency is being discussed across all 10 GM local authorities as an issue. There is work ongoing to submit a paper to the GM Education, Skills, and Employment Support Joint Oversight Board (JOB) to highlight the issue and lobby government to support us to address the sufficiency issues we are facing regionally.

2.7.14 As mentioned Oldham's sufficiency issue is multi-faceted, we have many factors impacting us here in Oldham, some are listed below;

- Post 16 Curriculum Reform
- Defunding of traineeships
- Providers changing strategic direction of their service delivery.
- Providers ceasing to deliver in Local Authority areas.
- Providers being more selective in the students they accept onto courses.
- Increases in cohort numbers for Y12/Y13
- International new arrivals.
- FE staff recruitment issues

¹ Empower Oldham is a NEET prevention offer for 15 – 19 year olds, delivered by Positive Steps.

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- Colleges implementing increased behaviour standards policies.
 - Young person resilience impacting on ability to sustain placements.
 - Qualifications criteria being inflated by colleges due to increased competition
 - % of young people not gaining GCSE Maths and English at an appropriate level.
 - Basic, soft skills specific to the sustaining Post 16 placements or apprenticeships.
 - DfE funding arrangements.

2.7.15 Over recent years, Oldham had a number of training providers delivering both study programs across Oldham which supported our sufficiency duty. Unfortunately, these providers have been reducing steadily over time, both in their offer for young people, or leaving the borough completely.

2.7.16 Although the proposed Eton/Star Free School will deliver 240 post 16 placements from September 2026, the provision is very different to the offer training providers deliver and services a completely different cohort of young people. Therefore, Eton/Star doesn't replace our training provision and enable us to provide the appropriate provision this cohort of young people need.

2.7.17 In addition to the reputational risk our gap in provision identifies, it also highlights a potential risk to families. The lack of placements, particularly for activity that has multiple start dates during the academic year, may impact family household budgets via the ceasing of child benefit if a young person is NEET.

2.7.18 If a young person is NEET but engaged with services, the family can apply for a child benefit extension of 20 weeks, providing evidence the young person is working with a TIAG provider to the DWP. If an appropriate placement is not identified, there is no mechanism we are aware of, for extending this benefit. This could impact household budgets as it would trigger the loss of child benefit and potentially associated tax credits.

3 Priorities over the next 12 months and plans

3.1 Whilst item 2.7 highlights our key activity for the next 12 months, some of the issues we are currently facing require prioritisation due to the risk factors they present to young people's participation. We believe the following three items are the priorities we need to focus on for the next 12 months.

3.2 Sufficiency

3.2.1 Oldham's current sufficiency gap is our highest priority for us to address over the next 12 months. If the sufficiency issue is not addressed, we will not have appropriate provision to move young people into when they are ready, which will increase our NEET rate. In addition, Empower Oldham will work with young people to support them to move into destinations successfully. However, our sufficiency gap presents us with potentially nowhere to move these young people onto, which will disappoint young people and risk them becoming disengaged.

3.2.2 We are addressing this issue via a number of routes which are described in more detail at items 2.7.12 to 2.7.18.

3.3 Employment and Skills Strategy and Partnership Board

3.3.1 The public launch of the strategy and communication of the Board, its members and the programme of work to be undertaken by the Board will be priority for the next 12 months.

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- 3.3.2 The partnership board has an action plan of work across the four priority areas (young people, economic inactivity, securing skills for the future economy and employers role in the curriculum). Ensuring the work across the four areas of the action plan is delivered will be a key focus for our team over the next 12 months.
 - 3.4 Transitions pilot
 - 3.4.1 Our young person priority has identified young people's difficulties with engaging in Post 16 provision. Perceived issues with poor behaviour - impacting on post 16 sustainability of mainstream further education progressions.
 - 3.4.1 Working with our partners, Oldham College, Oldham Sixth Form College and Positive Steps, we are developing a small pilot which will support approximately 15 young people with an enhanced package of support to transition to Post 16 provision successfully. More detail is provided at 2.7.11. Feedback and the growth of the pilot over the next 12 months will be a key priority for our service.
 - 3.4.2 The refining of information sharing between pre and post 16 providers the pilot includes will ensure providers are better informed and therefore able to put in place the correct support mechanisms both pre and post transition.
 - 3.4.3 The enhanced offer of "Empower Oldham" as part of the transitions pilot will strengthen the offer, and ensure young people continue to be engaged with their post 16 provider over the long summer break.

4. **Co-operative Values**

- 4.1 **#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
- 4.2 The work links closely with the Council's Corporate outcome on an inclusive economy which includes strong links via the Employments and Skills Strategy to the Economy Board.