

Young Adults

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1) Introduction and summary

The purpose of this paper is to provide an overview of key education and labour market policies affecting young adult learners during the period 1997-2007. For the purpose of this paper, young adults are defined as aged 16-25. Particular attention is paid to those who are not in education, training or employment (NEET) and those who experience specific disadvantage that impacts upon their effective engagement in learning.

This review is not exhaustive, but provides a summary of key policies and initiatives and some analysis of their perceived impact upon young adult learners. The evidence in this review is largely limited to England; it does not refer to the administrations of Scotland and Wales unless specifically indicated.

Emerging Issues

Since 1997 young adult learners have been a high priority in government policy; a plethora of reports, papers and initiatives have been introduced to tackle the problems that have been identified and to improve provision. These have included New Deal for Young People, Connexions, Apprenticeships, Youth Matters and the 14-19 education and skills agenda. Such developments have been underpinned by four key drivers:

- The need to tackle youth unemployment.
- Increased participation rates.
- Improved achievement amongst the cohort.
- Skills development to meet the changing needs of the UK labour market.

Unfortunately, statistics from 2006 and 2007 indicate lack of progress in achieving many of the key objectives of government policy:

- Since 1997 the proportion of 16-18 year olds who do not engage in education, training or employment has not shifted, it has remained close to 10%.
- The proportion of 19 year olds with either no qualifications or very limited ones has changed very little over time. In 2005/6 one in four 19 year olds had not achieved a level 2 qualification and around one in 10 had no qualifications at all.

Enveloping the four policy drivers identified above has been an over-arching concern to address and tackle the social exclusion experienced by many of the most disadvantaged young adults.

Future Challenges

The period 1997-2007 has been characterised by fast-moving policy, which has significantly altered the map of provision and opportunities available to young adults. The current climate is one of transition; the emerging 14-19 reforms, the development

of Integrated Youth Support, skills-focussed developments and proposals to increase the statutory education age will present major challenges that are likely to re-shape the existing landscape.

2) Context

Since 1997 young adult learners have been a high priority in government policy; a plethora of reports, papers and initiatives have been introduced to tackle the problems that have been identified and to improve provision. The political agenda and emerging government policy has been underpinned by four key policy drivers:

- The need to tackle youth unemployment.
- Increased participation rates (particularly in relation to the NEET group).
- Improved achievement amongst the cohort.
- Skills development to meet the changing needs of the UK labour market.

Progress in achieving these outcomes is considered fundamental in addressing wider social issues linked to poverty, health, crime, social inclusion and community cohesion:

“Getting this right offers the prospect of a double dividend. A better life for young people themselves, saving them from the prospect of a lifetime of dead-end jobs, unemployment, poverty, ill-health and other kinds of exclusion. A better deal for society as a whole that has to pay a very high price in terms of welfare bills and crime for failing to help people make the transition to becoming independent adults. A few decades ago only a minority stayed in education until 18 or 21. But as we move into an economy based more on knowledge, there will be ever fewer unskilled jobs. For this generation, and for young people in the future, staying at school or in training until 18 is no longer a luxury. It is becoming a necessity.”¹

3) Statistics and Evidence

The fundamental objective of the unprecedented flurry of policy activity during the last 10 years has been to improve participation and achievement rates. However, much recent evidence suggests that despite such extensive activity, little progress has been made in overcoming key challenges in engaging some of the most disadvantaged young adults:

- Since 1997 the proportion of 16-18 year-olds who do not engage in education, training or employment has not shifted, it has remained close to 10%.²
- The proportion of 19 year-olds with either no qualifications or very limited ones has changed very little over time. In 2005/6 one in four 19 year-olds had not achieved a level 2 qualification and around one in ten had no qualifications at all.³

¹ Bridging the Gap: New Opportunities for 16-18 Year-olds Not in Education, Employment or Training, SEU, 1999.

² Nuffield Review of 14-19 Education and Training, Annual Report 2005-6, Geoff Hayward, Ann Hodgson, Jill Johnson, Alis Oancea, Richard Pring, Ken Spours, Stephanie Wilde and Susannah Wright. University of Oxford Department of Educational Studies, Oxford. 2006

- Additionally, most 19 year-olds without a level 2 qualification in 1999/2000 still lacked such qualifications at age 25 (in 2005/6).⁴

A 2007 report published by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation concluded that:

“The vast majority of those who achieve 5 GCSEs at age 16 go on to achieve further academic or vocational qualifications. By contrast, two-thirds of those who fail to achieve this standard at age 16 do not achieve it (or its vocational equivalent, NVQ2) by age 25. Furthermore, the one-third who do make progress appear to achieve it by age 19. In other words, failure to reach that level by 16, whilst important, is not decisive but it does become decisive if not rectified in the two or three years immediately afterwards.”

*“Failure to make any serious progress in reducing the number of older teenagers lacking minimum qualifications suggests that one of the root causes of tomorrow’s poverty, namely worklessness and/or low paid, low productivity work, is not yet being addressed.”*⁵

Such evidence and statistics have led many to question the likely effectiveness and impact of current government targets, as outlined through the 14-19 agenda, which include:

- To increase attainment by age 19 at level 2 (equivalent to 5 GCSEs at A*-C grade) from 67% in 2004 to at least 70% in 2006 and by a further 2% by 2008; and at level 3.
- To increase the number of young adults completing apprenticeships by 75% by 2007/8 as compared to 2002/3.
- To increase the number of young adults participating in education at 18 from 75% now to 90% by 2015 and reducing the proportion of young adults not in education, employment or training by 2% by 2010.⁶

4) Government Policy – 1997-2007

This section provides a chronological overview of key government policy and initiatives in relation to young adult learners and where appropriate, includes an assessment of the associated drivers, impact and critique.

In 1997 and 1998 the government launched two key initiatives; New Start and New Deal for Young People. These initiatives were driven by concern about long-term youth unemployment; in Spring 1997 over 170,000 young adults had claimed Jobseeker’s Allowance for a period of more than six months. Of this figure,

³ Monitoring Poverty and Social Exclusion 2006, Guy Plamer, Tom MacInnes and Peter Kenway, Joseph Rowntree Foundation/New Policy Institute, York, 2007.

⁴ Monitoring Poverty and Social Exclusion 2006, Guy Plamer, Tom MacInnes and Peter Kenway, Joseph Rowntree Foundation/New Policy Institute, York, 2007.

⁵ Monitoring Poverty and Social Exclusion 2006, Guy Plamer, Tom MacInnes and Peter Kenway, Joseph Rowntree Foundation/New Policy Institute, York, 2007.

⁶ www.dfes.gov.uk/14-19/

approximately 25% (42,000) had been claiming for more than twelve months. Through the overarching Welfare to Work Strategy, New Start was designed to engage and motivate young adults before they entered the benefits system, whilst New Deal for Young People was designed to re-engage 18-24 year-olds who had already become NEET, by improving their employability and hence moving them off of benefits and into work. A more detailed overview of New Start and New Deal for Young People is provided below.

New Start

The first 17 New Start Partnerships were launched in September 1997. The purpose of New Start was to increase motivation, participation in learning and achievement among 14-17 year-olds, with a particular focus on young people not in learning or at risk of dropping out of the system.

The findings of a 2001 inspection report⁷ indicated that New Start had made a vital contribution to the government's social inclusion agenda. Further, a number of factors were identified as valuable in the planning and development of the emerging Connexions service, particularly the effectiveness of the Personal Adviser role.

New Deal for Young People

Launched in January 1998 and targeted at young people aged 18-24, New Deal for Young People (NDYP) was a key initiative of the government's welfare to work strategy. The fundamental aim of the initiative was to enable young unemployed people to gain work and improve their employability. Upon initial entry to NDYP participants embarked on the Gateway, a period of up to four months of intensive and personalised support. For young people who did not immediately secure paid employment, a range of follow-up options were available, including subsidised work, full-time education and voluntary work. The final phase of the initiative was known as 'follow-through', a further period of intensive support, similar to the Gateway.

Analyses of the effectiveness of NDYP estimate that without it, long-term youth unemployment would have been almost twice as high in March 2000. In 1997 those unemployed for twelve months or more formed a quarter of those unemployed in the age cohort, but by spring 2003 this number had been more than halved. Similarly the number of young adults claiming Jobseeker's Allowance for more than six months fell from 177,500 in Spring 1997 to 41,500 in January 2004⁸. Until recently there had been a long-term downward trend in unemployment among the cohort from 1993, falling to 13.1 per cent in 1997 and then to 10.9 per cent in 2005. However, most recent statistics indicate an increase to 12.7% for 18-24 year-olds during the period February to April 2007⁹.

Despite widespread official claims of the success of NDYP in achieving its objectives, the findings of independently commissioned research have resulted in some criticism of the initiative. For example, a report by Sunley, Martin and

⁷ New Start Partnerships 1999-2000: learning to connect, OFSTED, London, 2001.

⁸ Learning from the Edge, Merton B., NIACE/NYA, Leicester, 1995.

⁹ First Release – Labour Market Statistics June 2007, National Statistics, London, 2007.

Natal¹⁰ suggested that official evaluations overlooked substantial regional variations in the impact of NDYP on participants. The report concluded that the initiative was far less effective in many inner urban and depressed industrial labour markets and refers to the 'recycling and churning' of participants. These findings have significant implications for national welfare to work initiatives that take little account of the local labour market conditions and regional opportunities available to young people.

In 1999 and 2000 three seminal papers were published:

- Learning to Succeed: a New Framework for Post-16 Learning (June 1999)
- Bridging the Gap: New Opportunities for 16-8 year-olds Not in Education, Employment or Training (July 1999).
- Report of Policy Action Team 12: Young People (March 2000).

These papers were precursors to a substantial number of government policy developments and initiatives designed to tackle the underachievement and social exclusion experienced by a significant minority of disadvantaged young adults. Whilst New Start and New Deal for Young People were focussed initiatives, with clearly defined objectives linked to employability and welfare to work, the tone, recommendations and outcomes of Learning to Succeed, Bridging the Gap and the Report of PAT12 were quite different. The emerging approach and subsequent policy was more comprehensive. It was driven by a recognition that the problems and experiences of the most disadvantaged young adults were complex and inter-related and therefore required an holistic and often intensive response that would address their wide ranging (and changing) needs.

Learning to Succeed: a New Framework for Post-16 Learning

Published in June 1999, this White Paper identified two key problems in relation to young adult learners:

- Around 1 in 11, 16-18 year-olds were not in education, employment or training – a proportion that had remained virtually unchanged since 1994.
- Only 74% of 19 year-olds achieved level 2 qualifications.

To address these challenges the Paper announced the Government's intention to launch two major initiatives targeted at young adult learners:

- The establishment of a new and comprehensive youth support service to provide help and guidance to young people aged 13-19, to raise their aspirations and tackle problems through a network of personal advisers (which was later launched in 2001 as Connexions).
- The introduction of the Learning Gateway, for 16 and 17 year-olds who require additional guidance and support to enable them to benefit most from mainstream learning.

¹⁰ Mapping the New Deal: local disparities in the performance of welfare to work, Sunley P., Martin R., Natal C., Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers, Vol 26, December 2001.

Bridging the Gap: New Opportunities for 16-18 year-olds Not in Education, Employment or Training

Published by the Social Exclusion Unit, the purpose of this report was to:

“work with other departments to assess how many 16 to 18-year-olds are not in education, work or training, analyse the reasons why, and produce proposals to reduce the numbers significantly.”

The report found that each year 161,000 young people aged 16-18 are not involved in education, employment or training. The report recognised that the 16-18 transition phase is particularly difficult for young people who experience multiple disadvantage and complex social exclusion. It also recognised that the options available to these young people are often not appropriate to their needs and do not provide the level of intense support required. On the basis of such findings the Social Exclusion Unit made a number of key recommendations, including:

- The creation of a comprehensive youth support service (which was later launched in April 2001 as Connexions).
- Clear goals for young people to aim for by age 19 - through a new approach referred to as ‘Graduation’.
- A variety of pathways to ‘graduation’, which suit the needs of all young people.
- The development of Education Maintenance Allowance pilots.
- The launch of a youth card at 16 to assist with transport and other costs.

Report of Policy Action Team 12: Young People (March 2000)

Published in March 2000 as part of the National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal, this report recognised that:

“Through a combination of poverty, family conflict, poor educational opportunities and poor services, too many (young people) find themselves apparently destined for a life of underachievement and social exclusion.”

The report of Policy Action Team 12 (PAT12) recognised and welcomed much action taken by government to improve provision and services for young people, including improved targeted provision, for example through Youth Offending Teams and Drug Action Teams, New Deal for Young People and the commitment to establish Connexions, a new youth support service. However, an overarching key conclusion of the report was a need for ‘greater coherence of Government policies at a national and a local level.’ To achieve this PAT12 outlined a number of proposals, including:

- A ministerial group for young people
- Dedicated official support, perhaps through a ‘youth unit’
- Improved support for families
- A new preventive budget to promote cross-cutting interventions for young people facing the most acute risk.

As a result of the report of PAT12 the position of Minister for Children, Young People and Families was created, the Children and Young People's Unit was established, as was a cross-departmental group for children and young people.

Each of these three reports recognised the complex and inter-related problems encountered by many disadvantaged young adults and the need to develop 'joined-up thinking' – coordinated strategies to effectively tackle the problems, which included poverty, homelessness, crime, educational under-achievement and school exclusion, teenage pregnancy, mental health problems, drug and alcohol use...

The Learning Gateway

Originating from the perceived successes of New Deal for Young People, New Start and from the three seminal reports published in 1999 and 2000, the purpose of the Learning Gateway was to enhance participation in learning, employability and opportunities for work. A key driver behind this initiative was the emphasis upon implementing an individualised, young adult-centred approach (through Personal Advisers), which was perceived as fundamental in enabling disadvantaged and disengaged young adults to overcome social exclusion and inter-generational cycles of deprivation.

Introduced in September 1999, the Learning Gateway provided a client-centred approach to support young people aged 16 and 17 who had dropped out of learning and needed advice and help to enable them to re-enter mainstream provision. The Learning Gateway was constructed around two key elements. Firstly, a 'front end' covering outreach, initial assessment, guidance, support and planning, all of which were undertaken by a personal adviser through the auspices of the Careers Service. Secondly, a 'life skills' learning option was available, designed to help young people improve their self-esteem and motivation, as well as develop their basic and key skills. After completing the 'front end' and the optional 'life skills' element, young people were encouraged to make the transition into work-based training, education or employment. Central to the success of the Learning Gateway was the role of Personal Advisers, providing seamless and ongoing support to young people who had become disengaged through the 16-18 transition process. A report published in 2001¹¹ concluded that:

- Young people who had been on the front end for a significant period of time were often grappling with a range of complex personal problems.
- Young people valued the personal and practical support provided by PAs on a one-to-one basis.
- Young people involved in Life Skills were particularly appreciative of courses that were individually tailored to meet their needs and interests, including work placements or outward-bound activities.
- Young people felt that the Learning Gateway had helped them develop a more positive attitude, enhanced their self-confidence, improved communication and social skills and increased their motivation to organise their lives more productively.

¹¹ Young People's Experiences of the Learning Gateway, Sims D., Nelson J., Golden S. and Spielhofer T., NFER, July 2001.

The effectiveness of the Personal Adviser role, as applied within the Learning Gateway, and the emphasis upon intensive and personalised support, as developed through New Deal for Young People, were features that were fundamental in the planning and development of Connexions.

Connexions

In April 2001, the Government accepted the recommendations outlined in Learning to Succeed, Bridging the Gap and the report of Policy Action Team 12, when it piloted the launch of the Connexions: a support service for all young people aged 13-19. The 2001 pilot was followed by full-launch in 2003, when Connexions was rolled-out across an infrastructure of 47 local Connexions Partnerships.

The ultimate purpose of the service was to remove barriers to learning, and to raise young people's aspirations to enable them to achieve their full potential. It was driven by a desire to improve achievements in learning by all young people aged 13-19 and to re-engage (or prevent the disengagement) of the 10% of 16-18 year-olds who, despite initiatives such as New Deal and Learning Gateway, continued to be NEET.

The strategy underpinning Connexions was to provide a comprehensive and coherent approach to meet young people's holistic needs. The four key themes were:

- Flexible curriculum that engages different young people and leads to relevant, sought after qualifications;
- Ensuring high quality provision in school sixth-forms, further education colleges and work-based learning;
- Targeted financial support for young people in learning;
- Outreach, information, advice, support and guidance.

At the heart of Connexions was the creation of a network of Personal Advisers, drawn from a range of backgrounds, who could provide personal support to young people. Reports on the impact of the Connexions were mixed. It evidently increased awareness of the options available to young people in the transition to adulthood, providing practical help and support so that they could take part in new activities, supporting their re-engagement in learning and skills. A 2004 survey¹² concluded that the service struggled in its ambition to be both universal and targeted at those at risk; evidence suggests lack of resources for over-stretched personal advisers, and poor communication between those providing the universal service and those working with young people with specialist needs and at serious risk. Several young people did not have sustained contact with an adviser, whilst those who did, testified to the benefits. Overall, young people principally valued the holistic approach of Connexions, particularly the combination of personal support and development opportunities.

In March 2004 the National Audit Office reported that Connexions was on course to meet its objective of reducing the proportion of 16-18 year-olds not in education,

¹² Understanding the Impact of Connexions on Young People at Risk, Hoggarth L. and Smith D., De Montfort University, Universities of Bristol and Derby, DfES, 2004.

employment or training (NEET) by 10% between November 2002 and November 2004 and that Connexions had significantly improved the quality of information and guidance available to young adults.

At the time of writing the future of Connexions and the 47 local partnerships is unclear. The publication of Youth Matters in 2003 and Every Child Matters in 2005 and subsequent progress in developing and implementing integrated youth support and creating local Children's Trusts, has significant implications for Connexions. Through this new structure, funding that was routed to the 47 local Connexions Partnerships will now go directly to each of the 150 local authority areas by April 2008. Through direct planning and commissioning of integrated youth services, local authorities will have the autonomy to secure local provision for information, advice, guidance and support services, hence there is no guarantee that this function will continue to be undertaken by local Connexions Partnerships. Currently, a number of Connexions Partnerships are in the process of disaggregating their services, with responsibility for IAG being redeployed elsewhere.

Commenting in 2005 on the impact of Youth Matters and Every Child Matters on Connexions, Coles is sceptical of what he perceives as abandonment of the service and identified a number of features that he considered to be missing from the proposed new arrangements, these include:

- A Personal Adviser role to 'broker' and 'advocate' on behalf of vulnerable young people.
- A wide-ranging, comprehensive training programme for ALL professionals working with children and young people.

In late 2006, Hoggarth and Payne also questioned the transition from Connexions to integrated youth support via the Youth Matters reforms. They reached the conclusion that many of the most important messages from large-scale research examining the impact of Connexions were overlooked and that:

*"Some of the most important messages have been buried under the political imperatives of opening up youth provision to competing providers in the market, of supporting the formation of the new Children's Trusts and of maintaining the impetus of the Government's 'respect' agenda on anti-social behaviour."*¹³

Education Maintenance Allowances

EMAs were introduced in 2004 to stimulate demand for learning and skills among 16-19 year-olds from less affluent families. Payments of up to £30 per week are available to many young adults who engage in post-compulsory learning. Research¹⁴ found that while the allowances have had a positive impact on preventing some young adults from becoming NEET by staying on in full-time education post-16, they have been less successful in attracting those who are NEET back into full-time education.

¹³ Evidence Based or Evidence Buried? How far have the implications of the national impact study of the work of Connexions with young people at risk informed the Green Paper? Hoggarth L., and Payne M. in Youth and Policy, Number 90, Winter 2006.

¹⁴ Two Years On: the destinations of young people who are Not in Education, Employment or Training Sue Maguire and Jo Rennison, Journal of Youth Studies, Vol. 8 No.2, 2005

There is no significant evidence of EMAs ‘poaching’ young adults from government supported training programmes such as Apprenticeships; and they have been successful in reducing the number of 16 and 17 year-olds entering work without training, a route that is strongly associated with high levels of job turnover and young adults becoming disengaged from learning and work. During the first year of national roll-out (2004/5) 297,259 16-17 year-olds claimed an EMA. Most recent statistics for the period August 2006-June 2007 indicate that 519,950 16-18 year-olds claimed an EMA.

Apprenticeships

During the last decade apprenticeships have come to be particularly valued by employers for the training in intermediate skills they provide. Recently extended, there are now currently over 180 apprenticeships available across more than 80 industry sectors. The numbers of young adults starting apprenticeships has exceeded the target and from 1997 to 2004 their number rose from 75,800 to 255,500. During 2005/6 252,300 young adults were engaged in apprenticeships.¹⁵ A recent House of Lords Economic Affairs report proposed an expansion and overhaul of apprenticeships:

“We recommend renovating and expanding the existing apprenticeship system. Apprenticeship gives young people the skills that employers demand, which in turn boosts their wages. In most European countries such systems are the main route to skill for up to half of all young people, and comparable opportunities are badly needed here. In Britain, by contrast, we found that many who could and should benefit from apprenticeship have not done so.”¹⁶

The report highlighted that in the UK just 53% of people finished their apprenticeship, compared to 75% in Germany. It also recommended increasing the number of places available and securing higher retention rates (recent figures indicated a rise in the completion rate from 24% to 59%).

The drive to improve apprenticeships is located within the perceived need to improve vocational training, in order to develop a highly skilled and appropriately trained workforce that will meet the UK’s future skills needs and contribute to economic development.

In July 2007, Skills Minister David Lammy announced that the government had accepted the recommendation of the Leitch Review to increase apprenticeships to 500,00 by 2020.¹⁷

Every Child Matters

In September 2003, the Government published the Green Paper, **Every Child Matters**¹⁸. This Paper recognised that:

¹⁵ First Release – Further education, work-based learning for young people, train to gain and adult and community learning – learner numbers in England – October 2006, LSC, Coventry, 2007.

¹⁶ Economic Affairs Fifth Report, House of Lords, July 2007.

¹⁷ Guardian, 20th July 2007.

¹⁸ Every Child Matters (CM 5860), DfES, The Stationery Office, Norwich, 2003.

“Overall, this country is still one where life chances are unequal. This damages not only those children born into disadvantage, but our society as a whole. We all stand to share the benefits of an economy and society with less educational failure, higher skills, less crime, and better health. We all share a duty to do everything we can to ensure every child has the chance to fulfill their potential.”

Outlining plans to reform the delivery of services for children, young adults and families, the purpose of this Paper was to provide a strategy to ensure that every child and young person, up to the age of 19, receives comprehensive and integrated support to achieve five key outcomes:

- Be healthy
- Stay safe
- Enjoy and achieve
- Make a positive contribution
- Achieve economic well-being

The Children Act 2004

Through the establishment of Children’s Trusts across England, The Children Act 2004 made significant progress in implementing steps to achieve the five key outcomes. Children’s Trusts have been created to address the fragmentation of responsibility for children’s services, therefore formalising and integrating the range of support and services offered in local authority areas. A national evaluation¹⁹ of 35 Children’s Trust pathfinders highlighted positive developments, indicating that the pathfinders acted as a catalyst for more integrated approaches to the provision of services and that expertise in the joint commissioning of services was developing across traditional organisational boundaries, resulting in local positive outcomes for children and young adults.

Youth Matters

In 2005 the Youth Matters Green Paper was published. This paper built upon earlier proposals by setting out a vision to develop and implement Integrated Youth Support to help all young adults achieve the five Every Child Matters outcomes. Focussed around 13-19 year-olds, the Paper also proposed that young people should have:

- More things to do and places to go in their local area - and more choice and influence over what is available.
- More opportunities to volunteer and to make a contribution to their local community.
- Better information, advice and guidance about issues that matter to them, delivered in the way they want to receive it.
- Better support when they need extra help to deal with problems.

¹⁹ Children’s Trust Pathfinders: innovative partnerships for improving the well-being of children and young people – national evaluation, final report, University of East Anglia and NCB, 2007.

The Green Paper was followed in 2006 by the publication of Youth Matters: Next Steps, the strategic implementation plan. The Government's intention is that Integrated Youth Support is implemented throughout England by 2008, delivered through a number of strands including targeted youth support (reaching the most vulnerable young adults), information, advice and guidance, the youth offer, positive activities and volunteering. Through the Youth Matters reforms the policy focus is shifting from intervention to prevention. The aim is that services will work together to deliver personalised early response to the problems encountered by young adults.

One of the most important consequences of Youth Matters is that local authorities have a duty to ensure that young adults have access to a range of provision and services, rather than a duty to offer direct provision. This has resulted in commissioning of services and a range of implementation structures, which are often unique and specific to a local area. The transition towards Integrated Youth Support is proving challenging to many local authority youth services, characterised by concerns about resource cuts and job stability. However, it is currently too early to judge whether the fully implemented system will result in a more coherent, responsive service that achieves positive outcomes in addressing the often-complex needs of young adults.

The key policy driver underpinning Every Child Matters, the Children Act 2004 and Youth Matters is the creation of a safe, fulfilling and positive experience of childhood and youth, where individuals have access to intensive and personalised support. This support is designed to enable young people to make effective transitions from childhood to adulthood, reduce disaffection and engender a positive and responsible contribution to society.

14-19 Education and Skills

Originating from the Final Report of the Working Group on 14-19 Reform (also known as The Tomlinson Report, October 2004) and the White Paper '14-19 Education and Skills' (February 2005), the 14-19 education and skills agenda and reforms are designed to deliver major improvements in provision and achievement rates amongst this cohort and are described by government as one of the most significant changes to formal education in England for many years:

"We want a world-beating system of 14-19 education; a system where all young people have opportunities to learn in ways which motivate and engage them and through hard work position themselves for success in life."²⁰

Unfortunately many of the proposals outlined in the much celebrated 2004 Tomlinson Report did not find their way into the White Paper. Tomlinson's vision of a diploma that encompasses the plethora of qualifications, awards and activities available to young adults was lost, as was the proposal for a credit-based system.

Under the remit of the newly formed Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF), the 14-19 agenda is underpinned by three key targets (as referred to at the beginning of this Paper):

²⁰ www.dfes.gov.uk/14-19/

- To increase attainment by age 19 at level 2 (equivalent to 5 GCSEs at A*-C grade) from 67% in 2004 to at least 70% in 2006 and by a further 2% by 2008; and at level 3.
- To increase the number of young adults completing apprenticeships by 75% by 2007/8 as compared to 2002/3.
- Increasing the number of young adults participating in education at 18 from 75% now to 90% by 2015 and reducing the proportion of young adults not in education, employment or training by 2% by 2010.²¹

These targets will be achieved through reform of the curriculum and qualifications on offer to young adults in secondary and post-compulsory education. The aim is to create a system that provides a choice of routes, which lead to valuable qualifications and progression to further learning. Perhaps where the reforms are likely to have greatest impact, is in developing and improving the range and profile of vocational learning options. In 2004 Barber commented:

“The work-based learning route is still seen as the poorer sibling in education, something reflected in funding, quality and status.”²²

New options are designed to overcome this two-tier system and ensure real choice and parity between academic and vocational routes. At the heart of this is the development and introduction of new specialised diplomas, from 2008, in vocational areas such as Engineering, IT, Hair and Beauty, and Retail. ‘Employer-designed’, the specialised diplomas will be offered in 14 lines, from levels 1 to 3. They will prepare young adults for life and work, by combining general and applied learning in ‘real world environments’. Each diploma will follow a common template focussed around principal learning, additional/specialist learning and generic learning.

Whilst the new Diplomas will be designed to meet the needs of vocationally-focussed young adults, the Foundation Learning Tier (FLT) will provide a coherent structure for young adults below level 2. Through the FLT young adults will be provided with the opportunity to take qualifications at entry level or level 1, as a springboard for progression to level 2. Three curriculum strands are currently being developed and will be central to programmes across the FLT; these are skills for life and work, vocational and subject-based learning, and personal and social development. Phased roll-out of the FLT will take place from September 2007, for completion by 2010.

The ‘revolutionary’ diploma outlined in the Tomlinson Report has been replaced by the development of an intermediate level general Diploma, comprising 5 GCSEs A*-C, including maths and English. The Nuffield Review of 2006, describes this general Diploma as:

“Very different from the general Diploma proposed in the final report of the Working Group on 14-19 Reform, which was designed at four levels to provide a ladder of progression in general education for a large section of the 14-19 cohort. The general Diploma in the 14-19 Implementation Plan appears to be a measure designed to

²¹ www.dfes.gov.uk/14-19/

²² A Revolution in the Air? We need radical reform, Barber B., in Adults Learning, December 2004, NIACE, Leicester

establish a new Level 2 benchmark and to 'raise the bar' of institutional performance at 16...the likely effects will be to reinforce the break at 16-plus, a far cry from the rhetoric of the 14-19 White Paper."²³

Other key changes under the 14-19 education and skills agenda include:

- Changes to GCSEs and A-levels, including an increased range of applied GCSEs.
- Incorporation of functional skills into GCSE Maths and English and into Diplomas. Functional skills are defined as '*practical skills in English, mathematics and information and communications technology (ICT) that allow individuals to operate confidently, effectively and independently in life.*'²⁴ A definition of functional skills, assessment options and standards is currently being undertaken and will be followed by the launch of two-year pilots in September 2007.
- Availability of the International Baccalaureate in all local authority areas.

Transitions – Young Adults with Complex Needs

In November 2005, the Social Exclusion Unit published 'Transitions - Young Adults with Complex Needs'. Although not explicitly focussed upon education provision, this report examined the effectiveness of services for young people with complex needs as they make the transition to adulthood. The report focussed on young adults aged 16-25.

The report recognised that certain groups of young people experience 'the phenomenon of the invisible early twenties' and suffer disproportionately as a result of specific disadvantage, including homelessness, worklessness, lack of education and training and poor health:

"there are relatively few examples of public services that address the needs of 16-25 year-olds in the round or ensure an effective transition from youth services to adult services."

The report analysed the issues that young adults face and set out 27 agreed cross government action points, including:

- Promotion of the use of strategies designed to address the underlying causes of a young person's anti-social behaviour.
- Exploration of the need and role of low-level counselling for vulnerable young people.
- Review of the provision of services for young offenders.
- Consideration of the role of the trusted adult in supporting vulnerable young adults, taking into account the views of young adults themselves.

The report also outlined five key principles of service delivery for young adults:

- Actively managing the transition from youth to adult services.

²³ The Nuffield Review of 14-19 Education and Training, annual report 2005-6, University of Oxford Department of Educational Studies, Oxford, 2006.

²⁴ 'Functional' Skills – your questions answered, DfES, 2006.

- Taking thinking and behaviour into account, and building on it.
- Involving young adults (and their families and carers) in designing and delivering services.
- Giving effective information about services, and sharing information between services.
- Offering young people a trusted adult who can both challenge and support them.

Leitch Review of Skills

The final report of the Leitch Review of Skills was published on 5th December 2006. This was followed in July 2007 by 'World Class Skills: Implementing the Leitch Review of Skills in England'. The 14-19 reforms discussed earlier in this Paper are seen as the foundation of improving provision for young adult learners. However, the Leitch Implementation Plan does make further explicit reference to young adult learners, including:

- An expectation that participation in full-time education among 16-18 year-olds will rise to 84% by 2011.
- A focus upon Apprenticeships. Advanced Apprenticeships are considered to be one of the best routes for 19-25 year-olds to achieve their first level 3 qualification (entitlement to which was announced in the 2006 White Paper on FE reform). The government's commitment to trialling a new pre-apprenticeship programme from 2008 and to expanding the number of apprenticeships available, was also reinforced.
- Recognition of the need to improve work-related learning for all young people.

Both the final report of the Leitch Review and the Leitch Implementation Plan expressed support for proposals to raise the school leaving age.

Raising Expectations: Staying in education and training post-16

Published in March 2007, the key driver underpinning this Green Paper is the need to improve participation rates among young adults aged 16-18. The central proposals outlined in the Paper included:

- Raising the statutory age for participation in education and training from 16 to 18. This will be a two-step process. Firstly, it is proposed that the participation age is raised to 17 in 2013 and then to 18 in 2015.
- Young people who are not in employment should participate in education and training for a minimum of 16 hours per week. For those in employment, they should participate for 280 hours per year (which equates to 1 day per week).
- For young people who do not participate in education and training, the proposed penalties may include £50 fixed penalty fines, withdrawal of driving licenses, attendance orders and community sentences.
- All young people will be required to participate.
- Participation must include work towards an accredited qualification.
- Participation should take place in school, college, work-based learning or accredited training provided by an employer.

Whilst the underpinning drive to increase participation rates among the ‘hardest to reach’ 10% of 16-18 year-olds has been welcomed, the proposals have also received extensive criticism. The potential punishment or criminalisation of young people who do not participate, some of whom exhibit the most complex needs, has been viewed by many as draconian. In addition, the apparent lack of recognition of the role of informal learning, non-formal awards and volunteering activities is considered by many as shortsighted. The Paper fails to recognise that informal approaches are often the most effective routes to re-engagement for young adults who have not succeeded through formal learning.

10-year youth strategy - 2007

In July 2007, the Department for Children, Schools and Families published ‘Aiming high for young people: a ten year strategy for positive activities’, as part of a local youth offer, this strategy outlines a framework of ‘things to do and places to go’. Although the strategy does focus explicitly on learning provision, it incorporates a number of reforms designed to (re)engage some of the most marginalised and hard-to-reach young adults. The reforms include:

- The extension of the Youth Opportunity Fund and Youth Capital Funds until at least 2011, with an additional £25million for projects in the most disadvantaged communities.
- The development of a Youth Leadership Fund and the establishment of a National Institute for Youth Leadership.
- The development of a ‘third sector evidence base’, to include a new national research centre.
- The Development of a National Youth Volunteering Programme.

Although welcomed by The National Youth Agency, former Chief Executive Tom Wylie commented:

“We need explicit standards on what should be available in each locality and for the qualifications of the workforce. Without investing in the professionalism and quality of youth work, we’ll end up with a plethora of web sites and great plans for improved facilities, but with little change on the ground. It will be a missed opportunity to make a real difference to their lives of young people and their communities.”²⁵

Wider Policy Developments

The period 1997-2007 has witnessed a myriad of policy designed to (re)engage young adults, improve their employability, and increase participation and achievement rates. However, throughout much of the decade, emerging policy and the drivers behind it have been enveloped by a concern to reduce levels of social exclusion experienced by young adults. Learning to Succeed, Bridging the Gap and the report of PAT 12 highlighted many of the factors that contribute to social exclusion and the subsequent impact upon the lives of the most disadvantaged young adults. All of the policies examined in this paper were, to an extent, designed to challenge cycles of deprivation and enable young adults to overcome disadvantage.

²⁵ Special Edition: The 10 year youth strategy, EYPU, NYA, Leicester, 2007.

In identifying social exclusion as an underpinning driver, it is now pertinent to briefly examine wider policy developments that have had a significant impact upon the lives of marginalised young adults.

1. The launch of the **Teenage Pregnancy Strategy** in 1999 was the government's response to the UK having the highest teenage birth rates in Western Europe – twice as high as in Germany, three times as high as in France and six times as high as in the Netherlands²⁶. The strategy has two key targets:

- To halve the under-18 conception rate by 2010, and establish a firm downward trend in the under 16 rate.
- To increase the participation of teenage parents in education, training or employment, to reduce their risk of long-term social exclusion.²⁷

Evidence suggests that young parents are at particularly high risk of experiencing social exclusion. Statistics indicate that young mothers and their babies face higher risks of poor outcomes that can have a long-term impact on their life chances:

- 60% higher rates of infant mortality.²⁸
- Three times the rate of postnatal depression.²⁹
- At age 30, teenage mothers are 22% more likely to be living in poverty than mothers giving birth aged 24 and over, and are much less likely to be employed or living with a partner.³⁰
- Teenage mothers are 20% more likely to have no qualification at age 30 than mothers giving birth aged 24 or over.³¹

Initiatives that support the engagement of young parents in learning, such as Sure Start and Care to Learn, are driven by a concern to break cycles of deprivation and are inextricably linked to education and labour market policy initiatives, particularly in the context of participation and achievement.

2. Government policy, through the introduction of **Anti-Social Behaviour Orders** (ASBOs) and developments within the **Youth Justice** system, is driven by the need to reduce anti-social behaviour, offending and re-offending rates among young children and young people. But evidence suggests it isn't working:

- Re-offending rates for children and young people leaving custody are 82%.³²
- During the period 1999-2005 over 9,000 ASBOs were issued to young people. Many organisations have consistently called for the abolition of ASBOs for children and young people, arguing that they result in criminalisation and often push young people into deeper disaffection and social exclusion.

²⁶ *Teenage Pregnancy: an overview of the research evidence*, Dennison, C, 2004, Health Development Agency, Yorkshire.

²⁷ www.everychildmatters.gov.uk

²⁸ www.dfes.gov.uk/teenagepregnancy

²⁹ www.dfes.gov.uk/teenagepregnancy

³⁰ *Teenage Pregnancy: Accelerating the Strategy to 2010*, DfES, 2006, DfES Publications, Nottingham

³¹ *Teenage Pregnancy: Accelerating the Strategy to 2010*, DfES, 2006, DfES Publications, Nottingham

³² www.howardleague.org

- The findings of the British Crime Survey for 2006/2007, published in July 2007, indicated that the perceived problem most frequently mentioned by respondents was teenagers hanging around on the streets. ‘Hoodies’, gang culture and incidents of gun and knife crime have resulted in the widespread negative portrayal of young adults in the media.

Supporting disaffected young adults into sustainable employment is perceived as central to the rehabilitation of young offenders and to the prevention of crime. Fundamental to this is a focus upon skills development, through vocational programmes, employability skills and literacy, language and numeracy skills. The impact of policy developments and initiatives outlined earlier in this paper have direct relevance to policy designed to reduce offending and anti-social behaviour among young adults.

5) Conclusion

At the beginning of this paper four key policy drivers were identified:

- The need to tackle youth unemployment.
- Increased participation rates (particularly in relation to the NEET group).
- Improved achievement amongst the cohort.
- Skills development to meet the changing needs of the UK labour market.

This brief analysis of policy affecting young adults has highlighted how early approaches and initiatives were driven by a concern to address **youth unemployment**, particularly long-term youth unemployment, in the context of the government’s Welfare to Work agenda. New Start, New Deal for Young People and the Learning Gateway were focussed programmes that targeted specific cohorts of young adults with the purpose of preventing them from dropping out, becoming unemployed and claiming benefits, or moving them from unemployment benefits into education or employment.

The latter of these three initiatives, the Learning Gateway, incorporated an attempt to provide holistic and personalised support to young adults, through a named personal adviser. This approach has since been replicated and developed and has become a central characteristic of subsequent government policy. It is exemplified through Connexions and more recently through Integrated Youth Support.

Attempts to **increase participation rates** and **improve achievement rates** among young adults are evident in all of the policies and initiatives highlighted in this paper. In 1999, Bridging the Gap provided a precise account of the problem, highlighting that 161,000 16-18 year-olds do not take part in education, training or employment each year. Widespread reforms implemented through Connexions, EMAs, Apprenticeships, Youth Matters and the 14-19 agenda have, however, had marginal impact upon this core, disengaged group; it has consistently remained close to 10% of the total cohort.

Throughout the period 1997-2007, level 2 qualifications have been a consistent benchmark for measuring achievement. In 1999, Learning to Succeed highlighted that only 74% of 19 year-olds had achieved a level 2 qualification. A 2007 report by

the Joseph Rowntree Foundation and the National Policy Institute indicated a significant lack of progress in improving achievement rates among 19-year-olds, concluding that in 2005/6 one in four had still not achieved the level 2 benchmark. The emerging Foundation Learning Tier is a further stage in the government's drive to increase level 2 achievement.

Current proposals (as outlined in the Raising Expectations Green Paper) highlight what has been perceived by some as 'a last ditch attempt' to engage 'hard to reach' 16-18 year-olds. Increasing the statutory age (from 16 to 18) at which a young adult must engage in education or training, is designed to significantly reduce the stubborn 10% non-participation rate. Reinforced by a series of penalties for non-participation, it is yet to be seen what final shape the proposed reforms will take and what impact they will have on young adults with complex needs.

Whilst employability and concerns about youth unemployment were a central feature of early government policy, **skills development to meet economic needs** has emerged as a key policy driver in the latter part of the decade. The Leitch Review has concisely identified the skills needs of the UK if it is to compete effectively in the global economy. The continued expansion of Apprenticeships throughout the last decade has addressed the needs of many young adults (just over 250,000 in 2005/6), however, evidence suggests that far more Apprenticeship places are needed if demand and skills needs are to be met. A recent announcement to provide 500,000 Apprenticeship places by 2020 illustrates the government's drive to improve vocational skills.

Skills-based reforms are also a key feature of the government's 14-19 agenda. The introduction of specialised diplomas in vocational areas, applied GCSEs and a greater emphasis on functional skills are all designed to produce a skills-base capable of competing globally and improving UK productivity.

In conclusion, the period 1997-2007 has been characterised by fast-moving policy, which has significantly altered the map of provision and opportunities available to young adults. The current climate is one of transition; the emerging 14-19 reforms, the development of Integrated Youth Support and proposals to increase the statutory education age are likely to re-shape the existing landscape. The impact of such developments in (re)engaging young adults with complex needs is yet to be seen.