

Lancashire County Council's Priority to Increase the Number of Young People in Education, Employment, or Training

Statutory Duties

As a local authority, we have a number of statutory duties related to 16 and 17 year olds including the following two duties from the Education and Skills Act 2008:

- Local authorities must make arrangements – i.e. maintain a tracking system - to identify 16 and 17 year olds who are not participating in education or training. Putting in place robust arrangements to identify young people who are not engaged in education or training or who have left provision enables local authorities to offer support as soon as possible.
- Local authorities must promote the effective participation in education and training of 16 and 17 year olds in their area with a view to ensuring that those persons fulfil the duty to participate in education or training. A key element of this is identifying the young people in their area who are covered by the duty to participate and encouraging them to find a suitable education or training place.

The act also places statutory duties on educational institutions to provide us with relevant information to support us in meeting our duty to track participation. All educational institutions have a duty to notify us as soon as possible whenever a young person aged 16 or 17 leaves education or training before they have completed their programme. Where a young person is at risk of dropping out, educational institutions are expected to work with that young person to assist them in remaining in a positive destination, even if this is with another institution where that is in their best interests.

These duties are set out in the Department for Education's (DfE) statutory guidance document for local authorities entitled Participation of Young People in Education, Employment, or Training.

It is worth noting that reference to young people aged 16 and 17 refers to their academic age. They are young people in years 12 and 13 and have passed their compulsory school age.

Current Position/Performance

In Lancashire, there are currently 27,765 young people within the 16 and 17 year old cohort, which is the fifth largest across all local authorities in England. As stated in our statutory duties above, we are required to track the participation status of this cohort on an ongoing basis.

To accurately maintain our participation information, a number of activities take place to support this. These include recording the intended destinations of year 11 pupils by working with schools; undertaking the September Guarantee for 16 and 17 year olds to ensure they have a suitable offer of a place in learning; ongoing data exchange with other local authorities; providing destinations information to schools; receipt of enrolment data from colleges and other post-16 providers; receiving monthly lists of young people leaving or joining post-16 providers; and continual tracking of participation, with a focus on those who are either not in education, employment, or

training (NEET) or whose participation status is not known and are in a vulnerable group.

The key measure used by the DfE to determine how effectively local authorities have been in discharging their statutory duty is a three-month average of December to February performance. This information is in the public domain and is focused on NEET and those whose participation status is not known. The table below sets out our performance over the last three years:

Table 1: DfE Comparative Data Scorecard Performance

	NEET		Not Known		Combined	
	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number
UNOFFICIAL Dec 2021 – Feb 2022 3mth average	2.5	689	2.7	754	5.2	1,443
Dec 2020 – Feb 2021 3mth average	2.5 (2.8)	680	3.2 (2.7)	856	5.8 (5.5)	1,536
Dec 2019 – Feb 2020 3mth average	2.6	667	4.3	1,103	6.9	1,769
Dec 2018 – Feb 2019 3mth average	2.1	519	8.0	2,017	10.1	2,535

The figures in brackets show the national position for the most recent published data.

Please note that the latest figures are currently unofficial and have not yet been published. However, we are confident that our figures are accurate.

As can be seen from the table above that our performance has improved significantly, particularly in relation to not knowns. The improvement in the not known figures is not mirrored by a corresponding increase in the NEET figures, which shows that a notable proportion of the young people in the not known group were participating in EET. This aligns with our priority to increase the number of young people in EET.

For the 2021/22 academic year, our most recent performance for all 16 and 17 year olds is from the March data return to the DfE. The information for all 16 and 17 year olds as well as those in a vulnerable group, is shown in the tables below:

Table 2: Overall Combined NEET and Not Known Position – All 16 and 17 Year Olds

	NEET		Not Known		Combined	
	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number
March 2022	2.7	745	2.0	565	4.7	1,310
March 2021	3.0	805	2.1	565	5.1	1,370
March 2020	2.7	681	3.5	902	6.2	1,583

Whilst our NEET position remains relatively stable, we have seen a continued improvement in our not known figures. This shows that an increasing number of young people are in a positive EET destination.

Table 3: Overall Combined NEET and Not Known Position – Lancashire County Council Children Looked After Young People Aged 16 and 17 Resident in Lancashire

	NEET		Not Known		Combined	
	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number
March 2022	17.5	58	3.0	10	20.5	68
March 2021	19.9	62	1.3	4	21.2	66
March 2020	23.7	71	2.3	7	26.1	78

The 16 and 17 year old Children Looked After (CLA) young people in this table are those who are resident within Lancashire and for whom Lancashire County Council is their corporate parent.

Through closer working with the Virtual School's Employment and Support Team, we have seen a real improvement for these young people.

Whilst the March 2022 figures show ten young people within the not known group, this has already been addressed and is now zero. Throughout this academic year, we have had no 16 and 17 year old CLA young people whose destination is not known.

Table 4: Overall Combined NEET and Not Known Position – 16 and 17 Year Olds with an EHCP

	NEET		Not Known		Combined	
	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number
March 2022	7.3	73	0.6	6	7.9	79
March 2021	7.9	72	1.2	11	9.1	83
March 2020	8.2	74	0.8	7	8.9	81

As with CLA young people, the not known position for 16 and 17 year olds with an EHCP has improved through closer working with the Inclusion Service .

The improvements shown above make it clear that we are working in line with Lancashire County Council's priority of increasing the number of young people in EET. As at March 2022, the percentage in EET was 95.3%, which equates to 26,637 young people.

The latest official participation figures from the DfE are from March 2021. These figures show that our participation has continued to improve from 92.3% in March 2020 to 93.4% in March 2021. This position is above our statistical neighbours, the North West, and the national average.

The improvement in our performance is due to a number of factors, including:

- More efficient ways of working in relation to the systems and procedures used to process the significant amount of data we receive from schools, post-16 providers, and other local authorities
- Improved links with internal services working with young people in vulnerable groups, such as the Virtual School and the Inclusion Service to determine the participation status of the 16 and 17 year olds within their client groups, with a particular focus on those whose participation status is classed as not known
- Improved engagement with the secondary schools and post-16 education and training providers within the county to improve the accuracy and timeliness of the data we submit to the DfE
- Increased engagement with other local authorities in the North West as a large number of our 16 and 17 year old residents participate at institutions within their areas.

Support for Young People

A range of activity is taking place to support young people who are unsure of their next steps or who are NEET. As an authority, we are either engaging with these directly or maintaining links with partners, such as the Lancashire Enterprise Partnership's Skills and Employment Hub and the Lancashire Careers Hub to understand further developments.

Various projects and resources which are aimed at engaging young people are available and they include the European Social Fund (ESF) Moving On Project; the government's Kickstart scheme; the Project Search supported internship programme; Youth Hubs; and START in Lancashire, a web-based IAG resource for young people and schools.

It is worth noting that as the ESF-funded projects come to an end, there will be less flexible provision available for young people. This type of provision is used to re-engage young people who are or at risk of becoming NEET and it allows providers to deliver programmes which might otherwise not be funded through mainstream activity. This type of provision is proven to be successful in supporting young people to progress into a positive destination. The government have identified the successor fund to ESF as the UK Shared Prosperity Fund and further detail is expected in relation to its design and priority focus.

Work is also taking place to support young people in their transition from school to a positive post-16 destination.

We are undertaking a pilot project with Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council, a further education college, and two secondary schools to introduce a proforma to capture information about the support a young person may require to help them make a successful transition from key stage 4 to key stage 5. The intention is that this is completed by the schools and shared with the college, so that they can put the required support in place. We are hopeful that this will help ensure young people make a positive and sustained transition and that appropriate support is provided to prevent them from dropping out or disengaging. Should this be successful, we will work to ensure that this is in place across the county to support as many young people as possible.

Last summer, we utilised some COVID recovery funding to provide year 11 school leavers with no intended destination with high quality and impartial information, advice, and guidance to support their next steps. We commissioned Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council's New Directions Careers Guidance Service to do this work on our behalf. They contacted 982 young people and as of November 2021, 81.6% were in a positive destination.

We recently submitted a bid for funding from the Careers and Enterprise Company's transition fund and this was successful. This funding will enable us to continue this offer of targeted support to this year's cohort of year 11 pupils who have no intended destination.

In response to the pandemic, we created a key stage 4 to key stage 5 transition booklet for schools to use with year 11 pupils and their parents/carers. As COVID-19 prevented young people from visiting post-16 providers, taking part in taster days etc, the document was designed to provide information about individual school sixth forms and colleges in Lancashire to help support their decision making regarding their futures and what each institution is able to provide. As this document was well received, we have continued to produce this. We are looking to enhance the content of this to support next year's year 11 pupils.

Finally, we are currently undertaking a review of our Youth Zone webpages to ensure that the information is relevant, current, and easily accessible. Colleagues within our Children and Family Wellbeing Service will be seeking the views of young people in relation to what information they would like to see and how this should be presented to ensure that this meets their needs.

Other Local Authority Approaches

We have been working hard to improve our performance in relation to increasing EET and reducing NEET and as can be seen from the figures above, this has been successful. However, due to the level of staffing and resources allocated to this work and the number of institutions we liaise with, we are limited to how much more improvement can be made going forward. To understand how other authorities do this work, we contacted three councils who have a similar size cohort to Lancashire, but whose three-month average performance is better, to understand their approaches to this area of work in terms of both processes and staffing.

In terms of the performance of these three authorities, the table below sets out their December 2020 to February 2021 three-month average performance compared to Lancashire:

Local Authority	16/17yr old Cohort	NEET		Not Known		Combined	
		%	Quintile	%	Quintile	%	Quintile
Lancashire	26,670	2.5	3 rd	3.2	4 th	5.8	4 th
Hertfordshire	26,340	2.7	3 rd	1.0	2 nd	3.7	2 nd
Hampshire	28,660	2.3	2 nd	2.9	4 th	5.2	3 rd
Essex	31,980	3.0	3 rd	1.3	2 nd	4.3	2 nd

From our discussions, it was clear that these authorities have assigned a greater staffing resource to this work and as a result, they have been able to maintain a number of functions previously undertaken by the Young People's Service in Lancashire. This includes 'door knocking' to establish a young person's destination, going into schools to work directly with young people on a 1:1 or group basis, and providing information, advice, and guidance. It is fair to say that some the approaches were previously in place in Lancashire, but current structures have not allowed them to be maintained. For this work to be reinstated, additional resources would be required.

Further Considerations

The size of the 16 and 17 year old cohort in Lancashire is significant and this is set to increase to around 30,000 by 2025, based on the Office of National Statistics population projections. With only a small team assigned to our statutory duty to track participation, we are limited in terms of how much can be achieved and the extent to which we can further improve our performance.

In order to see a greater proportion of 16 and 17 year olds in a positive EET destination, we need to continue working in partnership with our secondary schools and post-16 providers, as well as partners such as the Lancashire Careers Hub.

The provision of high quality and impartial career guidance in secondary schools will help to ensure that young people are aware of all their options when they leave school. All schools and colleges across the county are engaged with the Lancashire Careers Hub, which shows a commitment from these institutions to provide this support, in line with the Gatsby Benchmarks. Working with year 11 pupils to determine their intended post-16 destination is a valuable exercise in highlighting which young people need further support from their school in making this decision.

There are also constraints to the improvements that can be made in our performance due to a lack of contact details for young people. At the time of writing, we do not have contact details for 252 young people who are classed as Not Known, which equates to 47%. If we are not able to contact the young person to determine their participation status, they will remain within the not known group. Where other services within the county council are working with these young people or their families, greater collaboration and/or data sharing will help to address this position.

Next Steps and Actions

Through the Education Strategy and supporting annual delivery plan, increasing EET will be addressed through the Place Based Partnership meetings, where this is identified as a priority for that locality.

The 16-19 Education and Skills Team will continue to track the participation status of the 16 and 17 year old cohort within the county. This will be done in partnership with secondary schools, post-16 education and training providers, other services within Lancashire County Council, other local authorities, and partners such as the Lancashire Careers Hub.

In addition, the following actions should also be considered to increase the number of young people in a positive and sustained destination:

- Consider the development of a risk of NEET indicator (RONI¹) for use in secondary schools
- Consider whether the resource allocated to this area to work should be increased to allow for new ways of working to be developed, building on the good practice shared by other authorities.
- Improved collaboration and/or data sharing across local authority teams to ensure contact details for most vulnerable pupils are accessible to relevant officers
- Ensure careers guidance and post-16 destinations feature in school improvement reviews and discussions with leaders and governors
- Develop better approaches to capturing young people's views on how they can be best supported to participate in EET
- Increase offers of employment and apprenticeships within Lancashire County Council
- Review the NEET profile across localities to provide Place Based Partnerships with more specific information on which to base their discussions.

¹ A RONI is a tool to help schools identify which young people may be at risk of becoming NEET when they finish their compulsory education.