

Policy watch

New strategies emerge to help
16-24 year olds



952,000, that's the grim figure that stands out from the jobless figures announced just before Christmas. It refers to the number of 16-24 year olds officially out of work, the highest number since records began 18 years ago. There were a few nuggets of comfort for young people with the overall quarterly rise slightly down on that of previous quarters and a slight increase in the number of 16 and 17 year olds finding work but the spectre of 'a *lost generation*' of young people continues to haunt families and politicians like.

The latest attempt to tackle the problem came in the form of a [Strategy Paper](#) for 16-24 year olds published as an adjunct to the recent Employment [White Paper](#). It's helpful to see it alongside a further Paper that came out at the same time and commissioned by the DCSF on the plight of disengaged 14-16 year olds in England. Disengaged young people or NEETs have provided fertile ground for researchers in recent years but questions have been easier to come by than answers. This latest [Paper](#) from the National Centre for Social Research ploughs through the familiar list of NEET pointers: peer pressure; parental aspiration or lack of; poor relationship with the school; lack of appropriate advice and guidance and an inappropriate curriculum to name but the headline conclusion was that *"the majority of young people were either engaged or disengaged from education by the time they were in Year 9."* This supports the growing belief that disengagement kicks in early and that it has as much to do with social factors as with schooling. Those most at risk appear to be *"white, male and from disadvantaged backgrounds."*

Quite how such people will fare when the participation age is raised initially to age 17 in 2013 remains to be seen. The latest planning [document](#) on raising the participation age also came out as part of the batch just before Christmas. Aimed at local authorities, it's the first of what will be a series of planning documents. Many of the *"further actions"* it requires at this stage are at a local level and can be seen displayed in the customary planning charts at the back of the Paper. To list a few, within the next six months, Directors of Children's Services are expected to have conducted an extensive progress check in readiness for 2013, 14-19 partnerships to have started to build up data and trends on *"participatory trajectories,"* and local authorities are to ensure guidance services, communication strategies, advisory teams, diverse provision and *"family wide approaches"* are all in place presumably in the time left over from taking on responsibility for 16-19 funding and other matters. *"There is a lot to be done over the next four years,"* the Paper notes, adding for good measure *"we legislated five years in advance in order to allow for everyone to prepare thoroughly for the raising of the participation age."*

Many authorities will already have taken the hint especially as the first group to fall under [RPA](#) is already in Year 8. Indeed, eleven areas are already undertaking local trials and a further wave will follow in 2010/11. The Dept for its part is hosting a series of national conferences in March 2010 while developing an implementation toolkit to be available at the same time, setting up a front-line

practitioner group by the summer and preparing statutory guidance for local authorities for January 2011.

Clearly the various Guarantees of places in learning and/or training for young people, the promise of a further £20m in Foundation Learning for 2010/11 and of statutory guidance on the Diploma Entitlement in spring 2013, let alone the extra resources and support for apprenticeships all help but many authorities will be carefully watching for the outcomes from two other developments first. One will be the picture on funding that emerges out of the next Budget assuming that's in March and the other will be of course who holds the balance of power after the next election. Both major Opposition Parties, for instance, have expressed reservations about forcing young people to participate.

To return to this latest Strategy Paper, it is aimed at those who determine services for young people and promises *"a coherent and comprehensive range of support for 16-24 year olds."* Much of this is already out on paper at least in the shape of the June 09 Schools White Paper, the October 09 Information, Advice and Guidance White Paper, the November 09 Skills Strategy Paper and the December 09 Pre Budget Report. What we have now is clearer intent, one that can be seen in three ways: more money, more support, more action.

More money can be seen in the extra £202m promised for 16-18 participation in the recent [Pre Budget Report](#). This is extra in that it comes on top of what was announced in Budget 09 and is committed for the next three years. There are four points to note about this money. First, it is to be used specifically for additional 16-18 learners; second, it shows the degree of influence Ed Balls has over the Treasury in that he has been able to squeeze money out where other departments have not; third, it allows Labour to counter the Conservative pledge of an extra 100,000 places for 16-18 year olds in FE over the next two years and top it; and fourth, it shows the extent of politicking inherent in this issue.

More support can be seen in the emphasis being placed on Connexions and Jobcentre Plus working together to support 16 and 17 year olds finding work. There may be a certain irony here given that one of the reasons why Connexions was taken back under local authorities was because of a perceived over concentration on disengaged young people. However proposals for young people listed in both this Paper and the Employment White Paper include the provision of dedicated advisers, better sharing of client data between the two agencies, speedier referrals, mentoring and group advice sessions.

As for more action, the most significant steps are the extending of the various Guarantees. So the September Guarantee will be extended to January 2010 to guarantee an Entry to Employment place to any 16/17 year old still not in education, employment or training. The Young Person's Guarantee that guarantees all 18-24 year olds access to a job, training or work experience will be brought forward to cover claimants after just six rather than twelve months. And the Graduate Guarantee will further offer access to training, an internship or help towards self-employment for new graduates still unemployed after six months.

All of which along with the £300m of funding promised and additional 100,000 places in training, internships, work experience or job opportunities is aimed at ensuring the next generation does not become the lost one.

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