

Meeting of:	Learning and Culture Scrutiny Committee
Date of Meeting:	Thursday, 11 January 2024
Relevant Scrutiny Committee:	Learning and Culture
Report Title:	Youth Engagement and Progression Update
Purpose of Report:	To make members aware of the progress made since November 2022 of the Youth Engagement and Progression Framework and the current levels of young people Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET)
Report Owner:	Paula Ham, Director of Learning and Skills
Responsible Officer:	Peter Williams, Lead NEETs Project Officer
Elected Member and Officer Consultation:	Cllr Rhiannon Birch, Cabinet Member for Education, Arts and the Welsh Language Morwen Hudson, Head of Standards and Provision Martin Dacey, Lead for Social Inclusion and Wellbeing Rhys Jones, Pupil Engagement Manager
Policy Framework:	The recommendations of this report are within existing policy framework and budget
<p>Executive Summary:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> This report is to make members aware of the percentage of young people Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) in the Vale of Glamorgan (VoG) Local Authority (LA) in 2022/2023, as well as updates to the NEETs agenda from Welsh Government and the work being undertaken locally within the Vale of Glamorgan. The report consists of annual destination data of school leavers conducted by Careers Wales on behalf of Welsh Government in October 2022, with the statistical report for the destination survey being released in April 2023. The data highlighted the level of young people classified as NEET had reduced in National Curriculum Year (NCY) 12 by 0.2%, whereas in NCY 11 and 13, the figures had increased by 0.5% and 0.25% respectively. Although there was an increase in NCYs 11 and 13, the LA remains below the Welsh average, which also saw similar increases of 0.5%, 0.3% and 0.51% for NCYs 11, 12 and 13. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Year 11 young people classified as NEET in the LA was 1.50%, below the Welsh average of 2.10%. 	

- Year 12 young people classified as NEET in the LA was 0.20%, below the Welsh average of 0.70%.
- Year 13 young people classified as NEET in the LA was 2.25%, below the Welsh average of 2.80%.
- Careers Wales noted in the 2022/2023 data that the percentage of year 11 leavers who are NEET across Wales (2.1%) is the highest since 2015. They also acknowledge that 2022 is the first year since the Covid pandemic where learners sat examinations, resulting in grades that were not centre-determined grades.
- Within the LA, it is recognised that not as many young people are returning to education as in previous years, however more detailed work is being undertaken, with strong partnerships in evidence with Careers Wales, Council departments, education and training providers.
- The 2022/2023 data cleansing process is normally undertaken by the targeted Youth Service Team. Due to the closure of the Youth Service's European Social Fund (ESF) projects Inspire to Achieve and Inspire to Work, and the additional audit processing required for this, the impact and dedication of resource was not as comprehensive as in recent years, which may have had an impact on the LA's data sets.

Recommendations

1. That Members consider the progress made in the last 14 months of the continued implementation of the Youth Engagement and Progression Framework (YEPF) to reduce the number of young people classified as NEET in the Vale of Glamorgan.
2. That Scrutiny Committee [Learning and Culture] receives a further progress update report in July 2024, moving the annual feedback to a more pertinent time in the annual cycle as this is a more timely update following the official destination release in April each year.

Reasons for Recommendations

1. The LA has a strategic responsibility for implementing the Youth Engagement and Progression Framework (YEPF) to reduce the number of young people Not in Education, Employment or Training.
2. That the Scrutiny Committee [Learning and Culture] has continued oversight of the YEPF.

1. Background

- 1.1 The YEPF has been in place since 2013 and has been the focus and guide of NEETs prevention support for the past decade. In 2022, Welsh Government undertook a review of the YEPF and published updated documents in September 2022; relevant links are provided in the Background Papers section of this report. The key change in this release of the YEPF was the change of age to 11 to 18 years old, with the Young Person's Guarantee (YPG) operating alongside for those aged 16 to 24 years old.
- 1.2 The current national [milestone](#), as part of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015, put in place by Welsh Government for the YEPF and YPG is that at least 90% of 16 to 24 year olds are in education, employment or training by 2050.
- 1.3 This report seeks to make elected members aware of the progress made in the Vale of Glamorgan in respect of reducing NEETs and the milestones achieved.

2. Key Issues for Consideration

- 2.1 The Welsh Government official statistical data on NEETs for 2023 was released in April 2023. The annual survey of school leavers undertaken by Careers Wales in October of each year, on behalf of the Welsh Government, provides a snapshot of pupil destinations. It includes pupils in year 11 who have reached statutory school leaving age and pupils leaving school in years 12 and 13. Overall, the data has presented positively, compared to the trends in the Welsh average. The LA has seen a comparable increase in NCY 11, a reduction in the percentage in NCY 12 and a less severe percentage increase of NEET young people in NCY 13.

- 2.2** The percentage of Year 11 leavers who were NEET increased from 1.00% in 2021 to 1.50% (23 young people) in 2022, below the Welsh average of 2.10% and the LA was ranked fifth in Wales.
- 2.3** The percentage of young people classified as NEET upon leaving year 12 in 2022 was 0.20% (two young people), reduced from 0.40% in 2021, with the LA ranked first in Wales.
- 2.4** The percentage of year 13 leavers who became NEET in 2022 was 2.50% (19 young people), increasing from 2.25% in 2021, with the LA ranked ninth in Wales.
- 2.5** The European Social Fund (ESF) Programmes Inspire to Achieve (I2A) and Inspire to Work (I2W) were closed in December 2022 due to the end in this funding stream, with delivery ceasing in October 2022. Both projects have been instrumental in the process of engaging young people at risk of becoming NEET since 2016 and 2017. The projects have also been fundamental in supporting the LA's work of reducing the number of young people aged 16-18 who are NEET. Both I2A and I2W were great successes in the Vale, with the final claim for outcomes being above target across both projects.
- 2.6** Due to the conclusion of I2A, I2W and the Youth Engagement Programme (YEP), the Youth Service undertook a restructure of the targeted NEETs and Homelessness prevention teams, which resulted in a combined service called STRIVE being established in January 2023. This combined several workstreams and allowed the focus of support to now shift to pre-16 young people. Funding for this initially came from the Welsh Government Youth Support Grant and Youth Service core funding. Alongside this, a bid had been submitted for Shared Prosperity Fund (SPF) funding to enhance the pre-16 NEETs prevention work. Due to the Council's cost pressures, the SPF funding was used as a cost-saving measure, to save £190,000, to continue delivering as a service instead of adding additionality to pre-existing provision. In addition to this, further SPF funding was secured in June 2023 for two additional members of staff to be brought into the team as a result of wider SPF underspend. This resulted in SPF targets being increased by 20% to support this additional funding, which came into effect during quarter one of this financial year. Following successful recruitment and selection, two staff were brought into post in September 2023.
- 2.7** The SPF funding started in January 2023, resulting in three quarters being delivered at the time of this report. SPF funding requires quarterly reporting to be undertaken, using reporting from the Capita ONE management of information system and a written report. The SPF funding comes with three outputs and two outcomes that the service works towards as part of the delivery model.
- 2.8** The STRIVE SPF outputs are for the numbers of young people supported to access basic skills support; young people supported to access life skills support; and young people supported to gain a qualification. From the three quarters completed to-date, all three outputs have progressed well, with the percentage achieved against the profiled targets being 94%, 181% and 117% respectively. These percentages equate to over 140 young people being supported as part of STRIVE's NEET prevention support in the first nine month period.

- 2.9** The STRIVE SPF outcomes are the number of young people engaged in life skills support following interventions and the number of young people who have achieved a recognised qualification. As of the end of the third quarter, there has been limited claiming against both outcomes due to delays with regards evidencing and achievement of qualifications, along with clarification on evidence requirements from SPF. Progress will be made in these areas as both interventions with young people and verification of assessments for qualifications are completed.
- 2.10** The LA's Communities for Work Plus (CFW+) team, are now leading on 16-24 employability as part of the Young Person's Guarantee funding. CFW+ now has four mentors that focus on work with 16-24 year olds in the local area, allowing them to focus and develop knowledge on what is available to young adults and how they can best support them. CFW+ have strengthened their relationships with Youth Justice and Early Support Service (YJESS, previously Youth Offending Service), the Vale Youth Service, Working Wales, Job Centre Plus (JCP) and local Jobs Growth Wales Plus (JGW+) providers in the area. Regular meetings with these partners have allowed for monitoring and reporting on the progress of local NEETs in the LA and the development of plans to address concerns.
- 2.11** In collaboration with JCP and CELT+ a new youth job club has been developed to support young adults in the Vale. The clubs run weekly with existing and new individuals attending for support. CFW+ mentors provide the employability support, with CELT+ advisors providing pre-employability support for individuals further away from the job market. By doing this they can work together to ensure these young adults are getting intense full wrap around support. Employers also attend these job clubs to showcase their vacancies and provide opportunities for young people to apply and interview.
- 2.12** CELT+ have funded a round of QuickStart positions to support young people aged 18-24 into employment opportunities within the LA. CFW+ supported with this round of the scheme due to previous experience from last year. As part of this, work was undertaken with participants on this scheme to assist them in applying for the roles. The scheme has been very successful this year, with 14 vacancies available, double that of last year. Overall, the scheme saw over 300 applications being received, while not all met the criteria due to their location, it has shown that the scheme is welcomed by individuals within this age group. It has been positive for CFW+ participants to have the support of their mentors to gain interviews and opportunities from this scheme.
- 2.13** Within the 16-24 age group, CFW+ has engaged with 266 individuals in the period November 2022 to October 2023. For the same period, 82 young people have entered into employment. In this reporting period, CFW+ demonstrated a job entry conversion rate of 30.83%.
- 2.14** Following the review of the YEPF, as noted in the November 2022 Scrutiny Committee update, further work has been done locally to implement changes to the way in which the LA challenges 'unknown' young people. Closer working has been put in place to work with all Vale secondary schools, including their sixth forms, in identifying at risk young people and establishing data sharing processes

on learner destinations. STRIVE also attended GCSE and A-Level results days in most VoG schools, to support the tracking of young people and to offer support to these individuals. This support has been embraced by the schools and these changes have been generally positively received.

- 2.15** The Youth Service is now embedding alternative methods for data collection for young people who are being followed up as part of the challenging of NEET young people, using Microsoft Forms as a portal for updates to be provided. This is part of a wider digital information offer, which is being hosted on the LA's external website under the title of [Post-16 Choices](#) with the aim of removing barriers to support or accessing information. As a result of this, the Service is receiving regular updates through these tools, which may not have been as easily received previously, evidencing the importance adapting to the needs of young people and offering up-to-date information and communication options that young people can engage with.
- 2.16** As part of the YEPF, the LA is required to have an early identification tool (EIT) in place to help identify young people at risk of becoming NEET or homeless. The EIT has been part of the YEPF since its inception to identify those at risk of becoming NEET, with the YEPF review combining that with identifying those at risk of youth homelessness. The LA previously had an EIT in place, which involved data collation, seeking feedback from schools and then final presentation. This process was undertaken twice a year and was effective in supporting the work of I2A, even though the data acted as a snapshot and would become outdated with changes in young people's lives. With the developments in the ONE management of information system, a review was undertaken to explore the viability of a live system, which would be able to be run as required through a Capita ONE report. This was trialled on an individual basis, utilising the Risk of NEET Indicator (RONI) report, which enhanced the EIT in place and reflected changes in individual young people's situations. Over the past six months, further work has been done to develop reports to create live reporting for full cohorts of students in a year group within a school.
- 2.17** Alongside this work locally, a national review has been undertaken by Welsh Government and revised [guidance](#) has been published in November 2023. With this revised guidance, a further review of the Vale's local EIT will be undertaken and implemented over the coming months to ensure its accuracy and relevancy. This will build on the work undertaken in the recent review, which will allow for more comprehensive and timely identification of young people at risk, which can be shared with partners such as Careers Wales to be able to target their support to those most at risk.
- 2.18** Estyn is currently undertaking a review of the lead worker role within NEETs prevention. As part of this review a report will be published and further work will be done at a local level to review the lead worker role in relation to the support the VoG offers its young people.
- 2.19** The Youth Engagement and Progression Strategic Board, chaired by the Head of Provision and Standards, continue to meet quarterly. The Board is made up of both internal and external stakeholders working across both pre-16 and post-16

sectors. The group analyses the NEETs data trends, monitors performance, and provides strategic direction in addressing the NEETs agenda accordingly. The board's Terms of Reference are reviewed annually to ensure appropriacy.

- 2.20** Lead Worker Meetings, with key education and training providers, take place monthly, to ensure up to date NEETs data is considered. Offers and updates of provision are discussed and can be adapted to ensure flexibility to cater for young people at risk of becoming NEET. During the summer and autumn months, the key focus is to engage young people, ensuring they are enrolled onto appropriate courses and learning pathways. As part of this, the group is regularly looking at ways in which they can work together to increase promotion of services. This ties in with the run up to the destination survey at the end of October each year. The Post-16 and Seren Advisor meet with the local Working Wales manager on a weekly basis to look at tier 3 NEETs data and to consider which progression routes are provided to support these individuals. Updates on young people's destinations or current engagement in education, employment or training is shared with Careers Wales, as part of the data sharing protocols that are in place.
- 2.21** There is no longer a directory of alternative learning provision for statutory school age learners. The Pupil Engagement team have since taken on the sharing of updates verbally through meetings with schools, ensuring that schools are advised alongside this of their responsibility to undertake quality assurance of these provisions. The Pupil Engagement team seek and support the locating of new providers for Vale learners, and providing termly updates to partners on provisions. Work is currently being undertaken to develop a web page for the sharing of information around the Pupil Engagement team. This is expected to commence in January 2024.

3. How do proposals evidence the Five Ways of Working and contribute to our Well-being Objectives?

- 3.1** Reducing the percentage of young people from becoming NEET is set out in the Youth Engagement and Progression Framework and the Welsh Government Child Poverty Strategy. It helps support the national milestone and local indicator of increasing the percentage of young people in education, employment, or training, under the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015.
- 3.2** The LA's Corporate Plan 2020-2025 'working together for a brighter future' demonstrates a direct link with Objective 2 'to support learning, employment and sustainable economic growth', with specific actions set out to "ensure there is appropriate access to quality early years, nursery and education provision enabling people to achieve their best possible outcome whatever their age" and to "work with education, training business and other agencies to provide a range of advice, support and training opportunities which improve people's skills in readiness for work" and "work as part of Cardiff Capital Region to progress strategic planning in transport, initiatives and promote sustainable economic growth and employment".

- 3.3** The variety of provision continues to develop with a wide range of offers from alternative education providers, vocational learning with progression routes, tailored support, and information and guidance. This supports learners to explore their interests and realise their potential.
- 3.4** We work collaboratively with internal and external partners that include agencies, education and training providers, Careers Wales and Welsh Government to help meet the well-being objective. This collaborative approach to identifying and supporting those at risk aims to act as a preventative measure to young people leaving education with low aspirations or future opportunities to progress to sustainable education, employment, or training.

4. Climate Change and Nature Implications

- 4.1** Climate change and nature implications affect young people accessing employment or education. The Corporate Plan 2020-2025 Objectives including 'to support learning, employment, and sustainable economic growth, is relevant to the work in relation to climate change and economical use of natural resources.
- 4.2** Throughout the work of officers within this area, most meetings with partners, stakeholders and internal staff are held over Microsoft Teams to help minimise transport between meeting locations.
- 4.3** Moving away from ESF funded projects allows for a more sustainable approach to the need for paper-based files. By using digital management of information systems within the Council, we can move more towards a paperless service. To support this work and the implementation of Microsoft Forms as a method of data collection as discussed, a data protection impact assessment was undertaken to ensure this was processed responsibly. Through this, and the resulting reduction in door knocking these individuals, there is a reduction in the carbon footprint of those officers involved.
- 4.4** With the implementation of the wider electric pool car strategies from the Council, it is expected that these will continue to be used, along with carpooling with other staff when available to attend face-to-face meetings.

5. Resources and Legal Considerations

Financial

- 5.1** The Welsh Government Youth Engagement & Progression Framework (YEPF) is part of the Youth Support Grant of £477,302, of which £63,254, is assigned to the work of the YEPF, including provision. Welsh Government have confirmed that the grant will be in place from April 2022 to March 2025.
- 5.2** In terms of the financial year 2023/2024, the total amount of SPF grant funding allocated was originally £190,000. With this, an additional two members of staff were appointed as discussed in this report. This has subsequently increased to

£270,000. In addition to the SPF grant, £71,460 is funded through the Youth Service's core budget.

Employment

- 5.3** Supporting the YEPF, the Youth Service uses core funding to cover the EPC role within the Council, also 1.4 (FTE) of Mentor positions. In addition, Welsh Government grant funding is used to support the costs and the work plan for both the Post-16 & Seren Advisor role and the Post-16 Learning Coach & Mentor positions. As discussed in the report, SPF funding is used to offset the staffing costs of to the amount of £270,000 for 6.6 (FTE), this creates greater risk with 86% of staffing coming from grant funding.

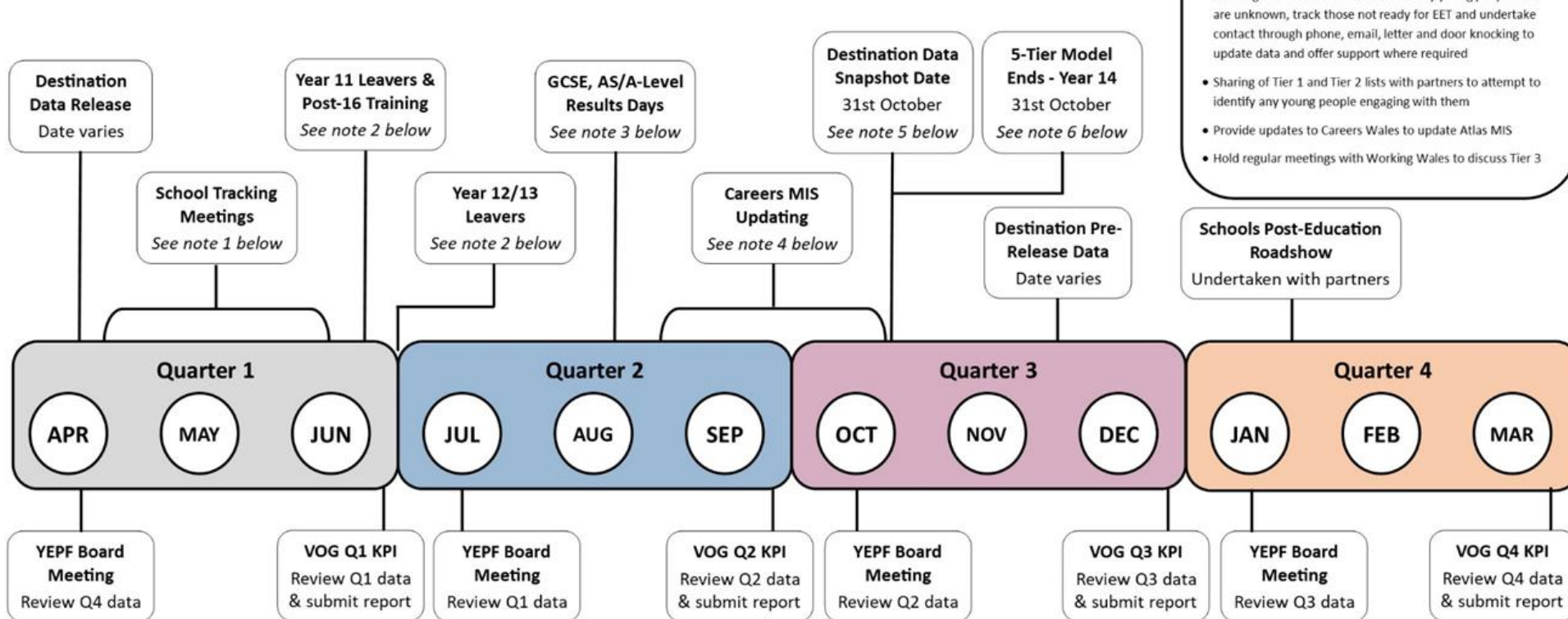
Legal (Including Equalities)

- 5.4** The Engagement and Progression Framework supports the early identification of pupils at risk of becoming NEET and enables support to be put in place to ensure equality of access to education, training, and employment opportunities regardless of age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy, maternity, race, religion, sex, sexual orientation.

6. Background Papers

- 6.1** Vale Youth Service NEETs Yearly Quality Cycle: See Appendix A for image of annual quality cycle and comments.
- 6.2** Welsh Government Guidance: Youth Engagement and Progression Framework: Overview, available at: [Youth Engagement and Progression Framework: Overview \[HTML\] | GOV.WALES](#)
- 6.3** Welsh Government Guidance: Youth Engagement and Progression Framework: Handbook, available at: [Youth Engagement and Progression Framework: Handbook \[HTML\] | GOV.WALES](#)

Vale NEETs Yearly Quality Cycle



Note 1: Meetings or reporting from schools on students that are of concern, e.g. those not sitting exams, poor attendance, etc. Information to be shared with Post-16 Learning Coach for early identification and support. Updates to be provided from schools, Learning and Skills Directorate staff and Careers Wales. This follows similar models of practice used in other local authorities, including Monmouthshire.

Note 2: Year 11 students end education on the last Friday in June. From this point, they can now be referred to post-16 traineeships as part of Jobs Growth Wales Plus, or can access Summer School provisions, if running, throughout the summer months.

Note 3: Youth Service staff to attend Vale schools on Results Days for data collection exercise and to offer post results support. This will include gathering updated contact details and destination information, where possible.

Note 4: For Destination Data, Careers Wales receive updates from schools, colleges, universities and providers during the first half-term of the new school year. Careers Wales Advisors to continue attempting to contact young people, who remain recorded as their previous school year. This continues until they have a confirmed progression or they are moved to Tier 1 on the five-tier model if they cannot be contacted, in agreement with the Local Authority. All outstanding young people who are out of sync with their actual year group are moved to Tier 1 as of 1st November.

Note 5: Destination Data snapshot date, work can still be done after this date to allow correction of data, however young people entering EET must have already started by the 31st October to be included as in a confirmed destination.

Note 6: Year 13 leavers, from August onwards, remain as year 13 until they have a confirmed destination. As with Note 4, they can be moved to Tier 1 if this cannot be confirmed. Those of year 14 age will then not show on the five-tier model after the 31st October, due to their age.