



Liverpool
City Council

CONSULTATION OPPORTUNITY

Inspiring: Engaging: Progressing

A draft strategy to get more young people into learning and work

Respondent: GMLPF (on behalf of Liverpool Provider Network)

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Introductory Remarks

GMLPF, on behalf of the Liverpool Provider Network and other members who have delivery in Liverpool, welcome the opportunity to comment formally on Liverpool City Council's draft NEET strategy.

We held a member network meeting to discuss the strategy and this response brings together the views expressed at that meeting.

Before responding to the 7 specific consultation questions, GMLPF and members thought an overview or preamble to the consultation would assist by providing some additional context.

- GMLPF and members welcome the draft strategy and its focus on reducing levels of NEET locally – we share your desire to tackle what has historically been a persistent issue for us locally and to provide our young people with the chances and opportunities that other young people have elsewhere in the UK to succeed and build a career. Current levels of NEET are not acceptable and act as a real drag on the prospects of young people and the wider local economy.
- GMLPF and members thought the 5 pillars proposed in the draft strategy were a useful framework for addressing a number of the issues that have contributed to the high levels of NEET that have been seen locally and the emphasis upon closer partnership working
- GMLPF and members support the desire to bring about a whole system change HOWEVER we feel the current draft strategy focuses too much upon changing the demand side and largely overlooks supply side issues. In that respect it lacks the necessary balance. The draft strategy does not, we believe, address sufficiently a number of the supply side issues that have contributed to the high levels of NEET. The draft strategy suggests that there is a need to develop new provision and reshape existing provision. Yet, too often, the current funding rules in place restrict the ability of providers to do this. If this is not addressed we run the real risk of overstating what we can do, over-promising to the young people we all want to help and then failing to deliver the strategy. The draft strategy does not touch upon some of the infrastructural and architectural issues that limit our ability to reduce NEET ie:
 - Current Demand – we have members with excellent and attractive provision who are simply unable to meet demand locally and thus help reduce levels of NEET because they lack the financial resources ie Study Programme funding to address demand. Learners often go to those providers because they offer an alternative to more mainstream, College provision which may be appropriate for the majority but not for all.

- Funding – it is our view that the current funding model, unless reformed, will not enable Liverpool City Council, partners and our members to achieve the strategic vision and objectives as laid out in the strategy. The current funding model for Study Programme, we believe, simply does not work insofar as;

Too much funding is tied up contractually in a small number of institutions. Too often full contract delivery is not incentivised. Also, there is no scope to vire funds across providers to support good performing ones.

There are simply insufficient Study Programme contracts locally (Liverpool and wider City Region) – we have seen a reduction in the number of primes and sub-contractors that we know to be operating locally

Too many local providers are reliant on national providers who operate out of area through sub-contract arrangements. Due to sub-contracting rules and, increasingly we believe, devolution related issues out of area primes are either pulling out of the LCR, reducing their contracts locally and are not prepared to support funding growth, even where there is demand. With regards to the latter point, we have also seen primes backtracking on growth funding requests with the resultant effect that some providers locally are having to suspend learning, which is actually going to contribute to increased levels of NEET.

- Provision Type – the strategy picks up that the type of provision is necessarily appropriate for those that are NEET. We would agree. There is an increasing policy shift towards higher level and longer term learning programmes. These are inappropriate for many individuals who are NEET and there is a real need for bridge programmes that build the skills and readiness of those who are NEET to progress and remain in learning
- The Supply Side – the strategy does not really touch upon the learning provider infrastructure that we need to deliver the strategy. What is the mix of provision that we require to deliver this strategy? It is not enough to say that this issue will be picked up in an action plan. The strategy needs to explicitly acknowledge that we need to broaden the supply side in order to meet demand. A failure to do so will result in provision being unable to respond to and meet demand.

We are keen to gain your feedback on the draft strategy.
We have listed below the Consultation Questions we have included in the document.

Question 1: Have we clearly identified what success will look like?

Your response:

GMLPF and members feel that the draft strategy clearly identifies that success will be measured by the ability to reduce levels of NEET to below Core City and England averages by 2021 and 2023 respectively. This will be the primary determinant of success. This equates to approximately a 40% reduction on current NEET numbers or 400 less individuals who are NEET.

Underpinning that there are a series of aims which will also determine if the strategy is successful or not.

We would argue that the last aim; Developing our lobbying approach needs to be brought to the fore and expanded. It is not sufficient to aim to lobby for changes in funding. One of the primary reasons why we have high levels of NEET currently is funding related. Put simply, the funding is not sufficiently flexible nor in the right places to enable us to respond to demand or work with the additional number of learners that this strategy envisages.

Without funding changes it is highly unlikely that we will have the minimum level of provider infrastructure (as current arrangements have resulted and are actually resulting in a reduction of local capacity) and the ability to develop a more learner focused offer. Unless this is recognised as an issue, it is our fear that the strategy will be unworkable.

Question 2: Are the principles fit for purpose?

Your response:

In general GMLPF and members feel that the vision and principles are fit for purpose but there is a sense that, again without a recognition that there are significant supply side constraints and without accompanying changes to funding, the vision of EVERY YOUNG PERSON being supported to succeed is highly unlikely to be achieved.

There is also a view that the principles as articulated in the strategy differ little from previous strategies. We need to be bolder, more innovative and set our goals higher.

Moving towards the new EIF and overlaying its key principles on this strategy, unless we get the architecture right it will be impossible for us to IMPLEMENT our INTENTIONS and thus deliver IMPACT. We cannot over-exaggerate the significance of system change, that the system as is currently funded simply would not enable the strategy to be delivered. It is vital that the vision and principles take into account the need for Liverpool City Council (working with other local authorities and the LCR Combined Authority) to work with ESFA to ensure that the funding and infrastructure locally is in place to deliver the strategy.

GMLPF and members feel that there is one omission in the list of principles and that is to engage and work with schools more closely to help raise standards, especially English and Maths, and to promote the wider employability agenda.

Too many students leave school at 16 ill equipped to commence a Traineeship or Apprenticeship or go into FE. Poor English and Maths and other core functional skills means that learners locally take longer to achieve a Level 2 and 3 qualification than their counterparts elsewhere in the country. As a result, post 16 provision has to focus greater levels of funding and attention on this area; an area that we know is not attractive to and discourages many learners. Without the strategy highlighting this critical issue the English and Maths issue will simply not go away and will make it difficult to develop a learner centred curriculum offer.

Schools have a key role to play in supporting the implementation of this strategy, increasing skills levels and building the capability of learners to progress into further learning and employment. The strategy needs to reflect that.

Question 3: Are there any other significant programmes or funding streams that supports 16 to 19 year olds that should be included?

Your response:

The draft strategy touches upon a number of funding streams. One that may play a key role in talking NEET in future is the UK Shared Prosperity Fund. Whilst the precise details of this new fund are yet to be agreed, it is highly likely it will fund work with the NEET cohort in disadvantaged areas such as the LCR. It should therefore be referenced.

The key issue with funding is not to list different funding streams but to ensure that they align with one another and support, either or both of, progression and wrap around support.

We would also argue that the funding of those who are SEND needs to be expanded more, in particular ensuring that the local authority and providers work more closely together to ensure that SEND learners get the appropriate levels of support in a timely fashion to support them.

We would also add that there is an important omission in the funding section and which warrants mention. That is the absence of funding to support, and provide bridge activities to, school leavers at risk of becoming NEET to ensure that they remain engaged and are supported to progress onto next stage learning programme.

Question 4: Are there other strengths or areas for development that we should identify?

Your response:

Under areas for development, the draft Strategy highlights the need for businesses and employers to provide more job opportunities and work experience. We would argue that many employers are offering job opportunities and work experience but are struggling to recruit appropriate employees as they lack the key skills, attitudes and behaviours to start and complete an Apprenticeship programme.

When discussing Section 8, GMLPF and members of the local provider network felt that some of the strengths listed were actually, in some cases, areas for development. Whilst it was the case that we started proportionally more young people onto an Apprenticeship this, we understand, is

no longer the case. At a City Region level we now lag behind the NW and England for All Age Group Starts and we think this is the case for 17-18 year olds. The factual accuracy of this statement needs to be checked.

Whilst high levels of school retention and progression from Year 11-12 might be a positive indicator it might also mean that young people are not necessarily receiving the appropriate IAG to make informed choices.

One area for development is also to work with those young people who are NEET and aged 17-18 as there have been increases in NEET for those 19+. The strategy needs to reference the need to both work with the 16-17 cohort but undertake work to reduce NEET amongst the older age group.

We would also say that the strategy needs to focus more on the issues of mental and physical health. Our experience shows that many learners are now presenting with mental health issues in particular. There is a need for much greater levels of activity and support in this area, which would help build mental resilience.

Question 5: Are the “Pillars for Change” clear?

Your response:

Yes the Pillars for Change are clear and there is a clear logic chain to them. They relate back to the vision and principles outlined earlier in the strategy

Question 6: Are there areas of work that are not covered by our proposed “Pillars for Change”?

Your response:

As touched upon in earlier questions and responses to the consultation there is a need for a clear acknowledgement and, possibly even, a 6th pillar (an underpinning or cross cutting theme) that highlights the need for architectural and infrastructural change.

Unless there is a change to funding it is hard to envisage many of the strategy’s wider aims being realised. If there is no change to the funding, no greater freedoms and flexibilities and a broadening of the provider base ie more providers being able to access funding and even become primes, it is hard to envisage that many of the strategy’s key aims could be implemented and levels of NEET reduced

Question 7: Is there anything else to include in monitoring the success of the strategy?

Your response:

GMLPF and members do feel that it makes sense for an existing group ie Health and Wellbeing Board to have oversight of this strategy.

We would urge the NEET Working Group to form the basis of any reporting arrangements; developing and managing an action plan, presenting on and reporting against the progress of the action plan and wider strategy.

This group must be a cross agency body and have access to and report and present to the Health and Wellbeing Board to ensure a clear line of sight of key issues.

If you wish to provide your organisation's details please do so here:

Your response:

Deadline: Wednesday 20th February 2019

Thank you for your contribution

Please email this completed form to: Neet.Strategy@liverpool.gov.uk