



**Association of North East Councils**

**Supporting Young People into Employment  
Task and Finish Group Report**

**Opportunities**  
**Employment** Future Policy  
**World of Work**  
**Young People**  
Education Challenge  
Careers Advice **Apprenticeships**  
**Local Initiatives**  
North East Councils  
Voluntary and Community Sector  
**Business**



# Association of North East Councils

## Supporting Young People into Employment Task and Finish Group Report

### Background and Introduction

Whilst there are some encouraging signs of growth in the North East of England, particularly in areas such as manufacturing, construction and exporting, our economy still has a long way to go and tackling unemployment remains a key challenge for the public, private and voluntary sectors. Latest figures from the Office of National Statistics highlighted the UK unemployment rate falling to a five year low, with the North East the only area of the country to see an increase in unemployment over the last quarter. A total of 135,000 people were unemployed in the North East between January and March 2014, setting the region's unemployment rate as the highest in the country. Latest ONS figures for February to April show unemployment at 9.8% – a rise of 6,000 over the quarter – compared with a rate of 6.6% nationally, which underlines the importance of focusing our efforts on job creation in local labour markets and promoting opportunities and access to the world of work.

Councils across the North East, individually and across Local Enterprise Partnership geographies, are actively engaging in exploring opportunities to help address youth unemployment, promote job opportunities in their areas and support young people into work. The focus of the Task and Finish Group has been on how we can build on these, seize opportunities for collaborative approaches, share good practice and where appropriate to bring some 'industrial scale' to locally-led initiatives that are successful on the ground. **There is substantial evidence to underline that it is locally-led initiatives rather than national programmes that are delivering on the ground and supporting young people into employment.** The report highlights that fewer young people are starting national work programmes than three years ago and that conversely local council-run schemes have achieved greater success over the same period in helping young people into jobs or training.

The North East LEP and Tees Valley LEP geographies are taking forward the skills agenda in a number of key areas as part of their Strategic Economic Plans and, more recently, the Combined Authority for the seven local authorities in the North East LEP geography has skills as a key function.

### Scope and Focus of the Task and Finish Group

The scope and focus of the Task and Finish Group was on what councils can do individually and collectively to support the following:

- The role of councils in working with the public, private and voluntary sectors to help give young people exposure to the world of work and to better equip them with 'work ready' skills, competencies and behaviours.
- To identify opportunities for bringing industrial scale to those initiatives that we know have a tangible and successful impact on the ground in local areas.
- The role of councils in supporting activity aimed at harder to engage with young people and in relation to those living in more challenging circumstances where it is harder to access apprenticeships, training and jobs.
- The role of councils in informing, shaping and influencing future policy on improving the employment prospects for young people, including identifying the main messages we would want to communicate to inform the main political parties ahead of the next General Election.
- The opportunities for delivering the aspirations of the North East Education Challenge through engaging local authority Directors of Children's Services, the 2 LEPs and Schools North East.
- The scope for councils to use 'social value' clauses in procurement procedures and practices to support the creation of jobs and apprenticeship opportunities in local labour markets particularly linked to areas of growth such as in the construction industry.
- The opportunities for highlighting, raising awareness and sharing good practice amongst councils aimed at supporting young people into employment.

## Evidence Gathering

To inform the considerations of the Task and Finish Group, four evidence gathering sessions were convened between January and April involving a range of external contributors, as outlined below.

**Evidence Session 1:** Promoting Work Ready Skills and Access to the World of Work (Business Focus)

**Evidence Session 2:** Engaging with Young People in Challenging Circumstances and Communities: Identifying Barriers to Accessing Work Based Learning (Voluntary and Community Sector Focus)

**Evidence Session 3:** The North East Education Challenge, Foundation for Jobs and North East Procurement Organisation (Local Authority Focus)

**Evidence Session 4:** Youth Focus North East and Government Perspectives (Young Person's and DWP/JCP Focus).

The two Local Enterprise Partnerships for the North East participated in the initial scoping meeting of the Task and Finish Group, held in November 2013, to outline the focus of their activities with a view to the Group considering complementary perspectives that would add value.

The key issues and findings from the evidence gathering sessions are clustered around three themes, developed in the report. These include:

**Theme 1: Promoting work ready skills and access to the world of work**

**Theme 2: The role of councils in improving educational, work and life chances**

**Theme 3: Removing barriers for young people with challenging needs and circumstances.**

# Theme 1: Promoting Work Ready Skills and Access to the World of Work

## Context

There is an increasing body of evidence that clearly demonstrates that introducing young people to business, knowledge of local labour markets and job opportunities, whilst they are at school or college can bring significant benefits in shaping educational and career choices based on knowledge of local labour markets and insights into the world of work. Introducing young people at as early a stage as possible has also been evidenced to bring benefits.

Recent research by *The Work Foundation* for example (sponsored by the fast food company KFC) entitled 'Youth Insight: The voices of UK young people on their experience of the world of work, and their aspirations for the future' highlights the importance of businesses in supporting young people into employment. The study recommends that businesses engage with Government nationally to shape policy direction and with councils and education providers locally on initiatives such as work placements and apprenticeships.

An earlier study by the Work Foundation also found that employers have a role to play in both recruiting young people and also in supporting them on their transition from education to the workplace. The study recommends that employers should engage with young people whilst still at school or college by offering work experience and by mentoring.

The CBI is also supportive of schools and businesses working together to help prepare young people for the labour market. As part of the 'Getting the UK Working' project the CBI puts forward recommendations for businesses and Government to support young people into work, including:

- Tackle the chaotic school-work transition by boosting schools' understanding of employability.
- Put in place a network of local business-nominated champions, charged with developing school-business links in each local area.
- A step-up in commitment to quality work experience.

Work experience is viewed positively by both the Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission and the Institute of Public Policy Research (IPPR) as one method of tackling youth unemployment. In their report '*State of the Nation 2013: Social Mobility and Child Poverty in Great Britain (October 2013)*' the Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission it is recommended that at least half of all businesses should offer apprenticeships and work experience

opportunities to young people. IPPR also emphasises the importance of businesses and young people's engaging in work experience but goes further, suggesting that a Job Guarantee Scheme which provides young people with work experience would assist when they are seeking employment.

In the North East there are several initiatives being taken forward aimed at helping provide opportunities for young people to gain access and exposure to the world of work. Within the confines of the timescale for the Task and Finish Group, members could not hear from all of these but recommended hearing from the Esh 'Building My Skills Programme', the 'High Tide Foundation' and the Foundation for Jobs (based in Darlington), summarised as follows.

## Building My Skills Programme

The 'Building My Skills Programme' is co-ordinated by the Esh Group and connects North East businesses to schools through the delivery of employability skills workshops and modules. The Programme, which focuses on students in Years 10 and 11, sixth forms and colleges gives young people exposure to the world of work to better equip them with work ready skills, competencies and behaviours, as well as providing an opportunity to build confidence and raise aspirations.

Following a successful pilot of the programme during the 2012/13 academic year, the Esh Group approached the Association of North East Councils in May 2013 to seek support in facilitating discussions with the education and skills lead officers within the twelve local authorities. Following a roundtable discussion, to which all authorities were invited to participate a total of 17 schools participated in the 2013/14 academic year across 9 local authority areas (with 29 employers on board). Building on the relationships fostered with local authorities Esh has extended the Building My Skills Programme for the 2014/15 academic year. **The Programme has been scaled up to include 31 schools from all 12 local authority areas (with a minimum of 2 schools per area).** The number of businesses directly involved in the delivery of the programme will also increase to an anticipated level of 60 private sector partners.

Third party endorsements from business and educational organisations highlight the value of the Building My Skills model, including from Calvin Kipling, Head Teacher of Darlington School of Mathematics and Science who said: "*It is important that schools are able to engage with businesses, to*

*provide pupils with experiences that make their education as real and relevant as possible. Pupils have been really engaged in the programme so far and it has added to the wide range of excellent opportunities on offer for pupils at DSMS.”*

Mark Whitehall, Association Director of Turner Townsend said of the Programme “...it brings actual real life and practical advice to help students develop their employability. It is an incredibly rewarding programme and the on-going legacy within the community will, we believe, see the students move beyond school and develop successful careers.”

Esh is keen to continue working with local authorities in order to spread and grow the impact of the 'Building My Skill' scheme and have identified a number of ways in which councils can do this. These include:

- Help with bringing new schools into the programme.
- Increase the capacity within the programme to give young people exposure to real life interview scenarios.
- Introduce new and relevant businesses/sectors and more SMEs to the Building My Skills Programme.
- Help increase parental engagement with the programme.
- Guaranteed work experience/apprenticeship offers (Esh Academy).
- Provide more networking opportunities.

## **The High Tide Foundation, PD Ports**

Members of the Group also received a presentation about the High Tide Foundation, a charity established in 2012 by businesses in Teesport, aimed at encouraging marine and related businesses to engage with young people, including through the provision of work experience, visiting schools and talking to students and offering apprenticeships. It was reported to Members that the initiative grew out of a visit to the Tees Valley by Prince Charles in the wake of the steelworks closure in Redcar in 2010. A senior business leadership group was convened which identified skills, youth unemployment and aspirations as key challenges facing the area. The High Tide Foundation, which gained charitable status in 2012, brings businesses together to engage with young people to provide opportunities for experiencing the world of work with an industrial focus.

The High Tide Foundation runs three schemes:

- 'High Tide Cadets', which is an eight week programme targeted at 12-14 year olds, providing an insight into the employment opportunities available in Teesport.
- The 'High Tide Pre-employment Programme' which prepares unemployed or underemployed 18-30 year olds for apprenticeships or employment.
- The 'High Tide Summer Scheme' which offers a two week work placement to 16 year olds who have just taken their GCSE's. Graduation took place in October 2013 for the first students who participated in the 'High Tide Summer Scheme'.

It was suggested to members of the Task and Finish Group that the High Tide Foundation model could contribute to discussions around the scaling up of activities as it was felt to have the essential elements of providing a means for collating business interests and having a focus on the needs and challenges of an area. It was felt by members that the model would benefit from more active engagement with local authorities, individually and through the LEP geography/geographies, to help maximise its potential in the area.

## **Foundation for Jobs (based in Darlington)**

Since the Foundation for Jobs was launched in April 2012 to tackle youth unemployment it has worked with more than 2,700 young people, aged up to 24 years, in Darlington. These include 250 new apprentices, 2,230 school age pupils building closer links with industry, 231 young people taking part in internships or eight-week work experience placements and 66 young people developing entrepreneurial skills. Now a national award winning project, Foundation for Jobs is a joint initiative involving Darlington Borough Council, The Northern Echo and the Darlington Partnership of private firms and public sector organisations and has generated support from businesses and industrialists across the whole of the North East.

Working with firms to address reasons they may not previously have taken on young people, the Foundation now has apprentice joiners, mechanics, business administrators, contact centre staff, plasterers, printers, media workers, restaurant staff, electricians, and a whole variety of career options. To increase young people's understanding of

apprenticeships they have taken apprentices from local firms into schools to share their experiences. Internships and work experience placements have given many young people their first taste of a workplace.

## Key Findings of the Group

### Exposure to Career and Learning Opportunities

Young people who have contact with industry while at school are five times less likely to be unemployed at the age of 25 years (Source: Foundation for Jobs).

The Task and Finish Group considered this to be an interesting finding and noted the increasing evidence that exposure to career opportunities and ideas at an early age, ie pre-GCSE choices, was helpful. Task and Finish Group members heard that initiatives and schemes tended to target Years 10 and 11 and that there is a need to introduce employability, work ready skills, and careers information and advice earlier into the curriculum, for example, as early as Year 8. The Foundation for Jobs is already working with primary school pupils aged 10 years and upwards. It was reported that the Sunderland Business and Schools Task Group had identified the need to start programmes earlier in the curriculum.

**The demise of careers advice and guidance in schools and current piecemeal and fragmentary approaches are a concern.** Whilst some schools continue to be proactive, Members heard that provision and performance in this area was strongly influenced and dependent on the senior leadership within the school and its commitment to it.

Many students are not aware of those industries that offer and will in future generate, employment opportunities in local labour markets and particular sectors. Often the perception of jobs in industries and sectors that the North East has particular strengths in, such as advanced manufacturing, pharmaceuticals and engineering are outdated and remain unattractive as career choices. The Foundation for Jobs (FFJ), with a focus on helping bridge the gap between schools and employers, highlighted the need to address the mis-match between supply and demand which continues to lead to young people not having the necessary skills to access the jobs available. The merits of developing a 'one stop shop' through links between schools, colleges and local employers were underlined.

In this context, industry body, the EEF which represents manufacturers in the North East, is reported to need almost a million replacement workers in the next 6 years, but that young people do not have the right skills. The EEF is calling for closer working with North East schools and education providers to ensure young people can access job opportunities created by the thousands of workers expected to retire in the near future. It has been reported that 8 in 10 manufacturers want to see colleges and universities improve the employability of young people and have highlighted the limited number of science, maths and engineering students as a key issue. Solutions identified by the EEF focus on a stronger relationship between companies working with schools and education providers, through initiatives aimed at advising students, teachers and school governors about career options and qualifications needed to pursue careers in manufacturing and engineering. Both the North East LEP and Tees Valley LEP are involved in exploring opportunities for addressing skills gaps and improving knowledge of local labour markets, particularly in areas of high growth such as manufacturing and engineering. This is something the Group supported.

### Funding and New Approaches

The issue of funding was raised and in particular the importance of seeking to secure long term funding to guarantee the sustainability of successful initiatives. Members heard that the approach and model used by FFJ was being positioned as being an 'invest to save' opportunity that might help encourage financial contributions and influence future funding by the private sector and FE colleges. Essentially, the sustainability of successful initiatives, such as FFJ, remain fragile without guarantees of long term future funding.

### Access to the World of Work

The Group heard how voluntary initiatives involving businesses and schools, such as the Building My Skills (BMS) Programme, were adding value in bringing high quality private sector organisations into the classroom and that having a structured set of activities planned well in advance made it easier for businesses and young people to participate. Members heard that the BMS model is firmly structured around the academic timetable and the key to successful delivery is school leadership and a senior level willingness to take part. Esh is actively engaged in extending the reach of the programme to

encompass both more businesses and more schools. Members of the Task and Finish Group supported the Esh aspiration to increase the programme in the next academic year to 20 schools across all 12 local authority areas. Sunderland City Council, it was reported, is actively involved in taking forward discussions to explore the potential for adopting the Esh model across all 17 secondary schools in the Sunderland area.

Evidence from Trinity Catholic College as a participating school highlighted the value of a 'record of achievement' that helped pupils make informed decisions. The school is also building a database of former pupils that have gone on to work in business organisations who might be interested and willing to support the engagement activity between the school and private sector partners. It was highlighted in this context that the introduction of new legislation will mean that it becomes mandatory for councils to collect, in league with colleges, destination measures for pupils leaving school from 2015.

In this context, Members highlighted the importance of aiming to attract more SMEs to this and other such programmes, given the characteristics of the North East's economy and the dominance of SMEs comparative to large corporate companies. It was suggested that local authorities could use their local knowledge and contacts to assist with engaging more SMEs in the BMS programme and other initiatives aimed at increasing work experience and apprenticeship opportunities.

With regard to the wider public sector, proactive engagement in future with the NHS was also highlighted as a significant opportunity for extending the reach and impact of initiatives aimed at providing access for young people to work based learning, training, apprenticeships and employment. The NHS was highlighted as a real opportunity to scale up the work experience opportunities across the North East.

The Foundation for Jobs highlighted the importance of engaging young people through innovative and interactive sessions with employers through, for example, a 'Dragon's Den' style approach in realistic work placed settings that are imaginative as well as practically focused. The benefit of realistic interview scenarios and using young apprentices as peers were also highlighted as effective tools for helping to communicate messages to young people about the range of skills and opportunities available in locally based companies and industries.

The point was underlined that for work based learning and work experience opportunities to have any real impact, they needed to be high quality experiences for young people, which led into a discussion about the need to have a fundamental re-think and consider future models for work experience provision, both in respect of the content and duration of work experience. For example, the scope for a departure from a traditional model of a one week work experience to a programme extending over a lengthier time period over a series of days – perhaps as many as 50 days over 2 years – to provide a 'taster' session involving more than one employer or sector was raised. Access to, provision and affordability of public transport was highlighted as a potential barrier to access work experience and work based learning. Significant reductions in local government finances place councils in an invidious position in relation to future funding for local transport, which ANEC will continue to press with the Government in the wider context of resources in the lead up to the next Budget and Spending Review.

## Promoting Apprenticeships

In the context of apprenticeships, the Group voiced concern about the perceived downgrading of apprenticeships in recent decades, the negative impacts of which are being felt in the economy and are only now being debated and addressed. Members heard that whilst programmes such as the Foundation for Jobs were not designed in any way to deter young people from entering Higher Education, they did aim to present vocational education and apprenticeship opportunities as an attractive and beneficial alternative choice available to young people. There were views expressed that apprenticeships should have parity of esteem with Higher Education.

Members of the Group highlighted challenges around encouraging enough employers to offer apprenticeship opportunities, drawing reference to the fact that the National Youth Parliament had recently voted to make apprenticeships one of its top 3 priorities.

The value of business led initiatives in engaging with schools around such initiatives and activity was not recognised by Ofsted and therefore sometimes dropped when schools were in high difficulties – this was regarded as barrier and a disincentive on the basis that in some schools 'if it isn't inspected, it doesn't get done'.

## Engagement with Parents

Expert opinion has also raised the importance of ensuring that such schemes wherever they are introduced need to involve and engage parents as well as pupils as they continue to be a major influence on the career choices that young people make. Foundation for Jobs, for instance, has actively involved parents in key settings such as college open evenings as an opportunity to more meaningfully engage them, as well as generate interest and awareness of the FJJ programme and improve knowledge of job opportunities in key growth sectors such as digital and creative media.

The findings of a recent report (May 2014) commissioned by the Association of Colleges states that parents play a key role in their children's career decisions, but their views are often out of date and badly informed. 70% of young people trust their parents for job advice states the report, based on survey results carried out earlier this year which included interviews with parents, children and careers specialists at colleges in Middlesbrough, Barking and Dagenham and Weymouth. The report prepared for the AoC states that from a survey of just over 2,000 secondary pupils in England, only 49% felt well informed about what jobs are available. The AoC says that young people interviewed wanted 'drastic changes' to careers advice, including better links with employers, the chance to 'have a go' at real jobs, longer-term experience and relevant local information. The researchers say young people interviewed were aware of career opportunities in jobs they had actually seen in their daily lives such as teachers, police officers and hairdressers. They had little idea, however, of what jobs were available to them locally or which companies and industries were the largest employers. In 2012 schools were given statutory responsibilities for giving independent careers information to students. The report says there is no systematic checking on the statutory duty and raises concerns that students are not getting enough information about vocational routes such as apprenticeships or courses offered in further education colleges.

The need to adopt a more innovative and outward looking approach to providing teaching staff with information, knowledge and insights into key labour market and employment issues through site visits to businesses which they can take into the classroom was also raised by Task and Finish Group members as an issue to be addressed.

## Recommendations

- Use local authority channels to create and enhance awareness and understanding of initiatives and programmes that are working well locally and that have the potential to be scaled up across a wider economic area (NB the Esh '*Building My Skills*' model has already been scaled up to encompass all 12 North East authorities).
- Local authorities to use their local knowledge and contacts and role as facilitators to continue to make connections between businesses and schools and, in response to evidence heard, to target SMEs in their areas.
- Local authorities to work with schools within their areas to encourage and promote positive attitudes, cultures and leadership roles in relation to programmes aimed at providing good careers advice, knowledge of local labour markets and supporting young people into work.
- Local authorities to make representation to Ofsted in support of providing incentives and encouragement for high quality schemes (such as Building My Skills) that are adding value and having a positive impact on work ready skills, bringing together knowledge of local labour markets and insights into the world of work.
- Engage with locally led initiatives aimed at adopting a more innovative and outward looking approach to providing parents and teaching staff with information, knowledge and insights into key labour market and employment issues through site visits to businesses which they can take into the classroom.
- Promote awareness of opportunities for working more closely with the Voluntary and Community Sector, including through stronger engagement between the VCS and the two Local Enterprise Partnerships in the North East.
- Local authorities to continue to make the case for adequate resources for the North East to enable funding to support apprenticeships and access to work based learning to continue, including working through LEP geographies to access EU funding and making the case to Government in the lead up to the Budget and next Spending Review.
- Maximise opportunities for highlighting, building on and sharing best practice at an EU level, including through the EU Framework for Youth which has already recognised a range of positive action taking place across the North East.

## Theme 2: The Role of Councils in Improving Educational, Work and Life Chances

### North East Education Challenge

#### Context

North East schools and learning providers have sustained significant improvements over the last 10 years however there are a number of significant areas that need to be addressed in the North East where performance is ranked as some of the worst in the country.

Task and Finish Group members heard that North East schools and learning providers have sustained significant improvements over the last ten years:

- In relation to primary education the region performs above the national average in relation to the percentage of children achieving L4 at KS2, and to the percentage of primary children attending good and outstanding schools.
- At secondary level the region has sustained year-on-year improvements in the percentage of students achieving 5A\*-C including English and maths, from a very low base.
- The percentage of 16 year olds progressing into apprenticeships is well above the national average.

Equally, however, it was reported there are a number of significant areas that need to be addressed if we are to shape the education and skills system required to equip our young people for life and work and to stimulate job creation and growth across the whole of the North East.

#### Key Issues

The following key issues were highlighted as being critical:

- The early years of a child's life are central to their growth and development and supporting children's learning starts pre-birth therefore ensuring children between the age of 0-3 can form good attachments is essential to child development and early language acquisition. Children who do not get off to a good start will not acquire the skills and confidence to be 'school ready' and will struggle throughout their school career. The North East has the lowest figures for the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile across the country, with a very high level of assessed need for speech, language and communication difficulties. Whilst the North East has been improving year-on-year since 2008, other areas of the country and the England average have seen faster improvements.

Tackling these issues will require collaboration and integrated commissioning across clinical and public health, social care and education to provide the right kind of family support that enables children in their early years to be ready for school. It will also require a better and shared understanding of the factors that promote child development and language acquisition in the early years.

- Whilst a high percentage of the primary pupils in the North East are able to attend a good or outstanding school, this area of the country is ranked second bottom for the percentage of pupils attending a good or outstanding secondary school. There is also wide variation across the North East on this indicator from 56% to 84.1%. Ensuring every child or young person can attend a good or outstanding school and make good progress from KS2-KS4, and onto KS5 is highlighted as an urgent and high priority.
- There is also substantial evidence that school and college leavers are struggling to enter the job market or higher education. The North East is the worst performing in the country in relation to the percentage of 16-18 year olds who are not engaged in education, employment and training and the percentage of 19-25 year olds who are unemployed is the worst in the country.
- The North East has the lowest level of 19 year olds achieving a L3 qualification and is performing below the national average in relation to the 19 year olds progressing to Higher Education. Driving improvements in standards in 16-18 provision is as important across the region as improving pre-16 education.
- More also needs to be done to realise the potential of the education and skills system in the North East to equalise life chances. This is particularly the case in relation to how well the North East does in relation to poorer children and young people. At KS2 the performance of the North East in relation to Free School Meals (FSM) is in line with the national average. However at KS4 we have the second highest FSM gap in the country with all but one authority performing below the national average. The FSM gap translates into a worsened position in relation to progression to Higher Education at 19 years. It was also reported that the North East is the worst performing in the country on this indicator and no local authority in the region performs above the national average.
- It was proposed that we need to be ambitious for our young people to achieve the high level

qualifications that will be required in the changing global and regional economy. This means encouraging students to take challenging qualifications at KS4 and KS5, particularly in STEM related subjects and modern foreign languages. It will also mean ensuring our young people can go to the best universities and progress to high quality high-level apprenticeships. However, destination data suggests that the North East performs badly in these areas. It performs below the national average in relation to participation in STEM and modern foreign languages, and well below the national average in relation to achievement of the higher grades in these subjects.

- It is now well established that the prevalence of child poverty is a key determinant of education, health and social care outcomes. The North East has the second highest rate of child poverty in the country and the increase in child poverty in the North East is the fastest in the country. Not surprisingly, the key indicators relating to the health and wellbeing of children in the region place the North East as the worst performing in the country and we have seen the greatest regional increase in the proportion of children and families becoming subject to statutory social care interventions.

## Key Findings of the Group

### Potential for Transformation

Members heard that it is the education and skills system, working in partnership with health, social care, employers and universities that has the potential to transform the prospects of the children and young people of the North East.

Given the scale and importance of the challenges for the North East in the areas outlined, local authorities are giving priority to driving forward a North East Education Challenge – a programme focusing on delivering a world class education and skills system that will equip young people in the North East for life and work in a changing global and regional economy.

A vision for education and skills in the North East is taking shape which identifies a strong education and skills system as fundamental to delivering economic growth and a cohesive and healthy society.

It is proposed that strong local authority leadership be given to a North East wide approach to providing a good school place for every child and young person,

access to excellent teaching and a rich and challenging curriculum so that all young people will have the skills, knowledge, creativity and attributes to succeed in life and work in the 21st Century.

Task and Finish Group members were supportive of the North East Education Challenge and the need to be ambitious to make our education and skills system amongst the best in the world, so that North East young people can compete successfully for the best university and advanced apprenticeship places and high quality jobs. Members referred to the North East Education Challenge as being ‘the spur that moves the North East towards being a learning region that can encourage young people to adopt a lifelong learning attitude and support both formal and informal learning’.

### Sharing Good Practice

Members of the Group emphasised the importance of highlighting and sharing examples of good practice, where schools have successfully turned performance around from under-achieving to good and excellent schools. It was reported that the proposed North East Education Challenge is likely to recognise that there are strong examples of schools, businesses and other partners working together and that there is a tremendous opportunity to ensure that access to learning from best practice become more widespread.

In the context of the educational challenges outlined above, members highlighted the importance of financial literacy to level 3 as a minimum needs to be a key priority as the ability to apply skills at this level is one of the key ‘building blocks’ for moving into adulthood. The importance of focusing on STEM subjects as part of an overall range of interventions and measures to improve attainment and employment prospects of young people was underlined by Task and Finish Group members.

### Leadership

Members of the Task and Finish Group heard that initial analysis suggests the need to formulate a North East wide programme against the following five key themes:

- Better Beginnings – Better Futures
- Every School a Good School
- Excellent and Inspiring Teaching
- Closing the Gap
- Preparing Young People for Life and Work.

Whilst the role and funding authorities has changed significantly over the last few years, it was noted that authorities and partners will need to work across geographical boundaries, including the two Local Enterprise Partnerships, Schools North East, colleges, the EFA, the SFA and OFSTED in delivering shared goals.

## Recommendations

- To deliver the step change in performance that is needed to improve educational, work and life chances local authorities take a strong leadership role in shaping, overseeing and ensuring the delivery of the Education Schools Challenge across the North East.
- Local authorities to address the fragmentary approach to careers advice and guidance and to explore the early introduction of careers advice and guidance into all schools, as part of the North East Schools Challenge programme.
- To provide focus, leadership and energy in the following areas:
  - Support individual local authorities in their school improvement responsibilities.
  - Act as champions for delivering a curriculum for life, whereby every child has the opportunity to fulfil their potential.
  - Establish a North East framework for co-ordinating effective school support around schools causing the most concern and developing common solutions to shared problems.
  - Establish a regional steering group involving local authorities, schools, FE colleges, Higher Education, Ofsted and LEPs to improve the co-ordination and targeting of existing resources and best practice.
  - Provide master classes for local authorities focused on strengthening the role of councils in school improvement through the sharing of best practice and developing shared services to tackle capacity gaps.
  - Work with partners to identify the most vulnerable schools across the North East and ensure effective support is directed at developing solutions that can be scaled up to tackle common problems.

## Young People's Perspectives

### Context

Members of the Task and Finish Group invited representatives from Youth Focus North East (formerly the North East Regional Youth Work Unit) to share their perspectives on youth unemployment, based on research carried out by young people themselves and the subsequent development of a youth led training programme based on a peer education approach.

The 'Reducing the Gap' research undertaken by Youth Focus North East to provide data and evidence to help understand the issues related to youth unemployment from a young person's perspective was designed to inform policies, strategies and services seeking to improve the employment opportunities of young people.

In total 237 young people participated in the research with over 200 young people completing a questionnaire and 92 participating in 9 focus groups.

### Key Findings of the Group

Members heard that the key findings of the 'Reducing the Gap' research across 5 key themes were as set out below. Perhaps unsurprisingly, these largely mirror the findings of the Group from the evidence it heard in earlier sessions and therefore the recommendations arising from this session are entirely complementary.

#### Skills

- Access to opportunities to gain employment skills and experience is important to young people. However, the quality and opportunity to do so is inconsistent across the North East.
- A substantial number of young people do not feel they are being equipped with the skills and knowledge that employers are seeking.
- Young people welcomed the opportunity for work experience and for visits, either to or from, outside agencies to inform them of the world of work and employment opportunities.
- Young people would welcome more feedback from employers on their applications and interviews, especially when they are unsuccessful.
- Young people would welcome more business and employer engagement to supply them with the

relevant skills and experience that both parties require.

### Information, Advice and Guidance

- A substantial number of young people expressed dissatisfaction with the careers information, advice and guidance they receive.
- The Internet was identified as a key method for young people to access information. However, this is in relation to accessing information and not in regard to learning more about what to do and what skills are needed to gain employment.
- There is a requirement for more local delivery and engagement with services to meet the needs of young people.
- The vast majority of young people are not aware of the Government's Youth Contract.

### Barriers

- For a notable number of young people (welfare) benefits are a major consideration and in some cases a barrier when making decisions regarding employment.
- The majority of young people who did not rate employment as a high priority had a range of personal issues (childcare, caring responsibilities) they were dealing with that took a higher priority.

### Apprenticeships

There are a number of issues relating to apprenticeships:

- A significant number of young people (25%) had little or no knowledge of apprenticeships.
- The majority of young people who are aware would consider an apprenticeship.
- Benefits again posed a barrier to some young people.
- There is an issue related to the value that young people place on apprenticeships – ie, they do not see the long term benefit.

### Attitude

- The vast majority of young people want to work and see this as a major priority.
- A substantial number of young people place experience to work above financial gain.
- The majority of young people are not looking to blame others and want to take responsibility for their own future and career.

- The majority of young people are keen to work and are applying for employment when opportunities become available.
- Only a small number of young people did not rate employment as a priority.

### Youth Led Training Programme

Subsequent to the 'Reducing the Gap' research, Youth Focus North East channelled time and energy into developing a new youth led training programme. It aim is to:

- Equip young people with further knowledge and understanding of the skills delivered within the programme which covered communications, team working, time management and professionalism/attitude.
- Develop young people's ability to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding of the skills covered within the programme – as above.
- Develop young people's ability to apply the skills within the programme in a working environment.
- Provide young people with the skills and tools to gain employment.

### Recommendations

In the discussion involving young people and members of the Task and Finish Group, the importance of the following were highlighted, mirroring the findings and recommendations of the Group's earlier sessions:

- Improve access to careers advice and guidance alongside information on work experience and apprenticeship opportunities – particularly at a time when current policies are moving away from such provision.
- Advocate for Careers Information, Advice and Guidance to be given prominence and re-instated as a fundamental part of the education system.
- Support for activities aimed at developing 'work ready' skills and provision of real work experience opportunities to develop knowledge of the work place.
- Encourage employers to be more proactive in engaging with schools and young people to be clear about the skills and opportunities that are available, to share this information more widely and to invest in the education and training system.

## Local Authorities Supporting Apprenticeship and Employment Opportunities

### Context

Given the focus of the Task and Finish Group on looking strategically and practically at how councils can support apprenticeship and employment opportunities, Members were keen to highlight the importance of local authority procurement practices and procedures as an opportunity for creating jobs and training in local labour markets.

In this context, Members heard from the North East Procurement Organisation (NEPO) which undertakes high-value procurement in major strategic areas of spend such as construction and energy on behalf of the 12 North East local authorities and a range of associate members. It has recently undergone a review following which NEPO becomes part of ANEC although the branding will be retained. The NEPO Construction Works framework was of particular interest given the upturn in the construction industry and the potential for job creation.

The inclusion of Social Value clauses in the procurement and contracting procedures adopted by North East local authorities to stimulate employment, training and apprenticeship opportunities in local labour markets was also highlighted as an important opportunity.

Members of the Task and Finish Group were keen to gather evidence and highlight the approaches that all councils in the North East were taking, aimed at creating apprenticeships and related job training opportunities, with a view to sharing and disseminating good practice.

### Key Findings of the Group

Based on feedback from councils it is clear there is already a significant amount of work being led by authorities on which to build and maintain momentum.

### Sharing Good Practice

- Over 1500 apprenticeships were created by councils between 2010 and 2013 across a wide area of services and activity including

regeneration and economic development, child and adult services, administration, care services, engineering and vehicle mechanics.

- While most of the placements were within councils some were linked to key partners including Fire and Rescue Services, shared services partnerships and arms-length housing companies.
- Stockton Borough Council has a specific recruitment policy in place whereby some entry level roles will be ring-fenced for young people.
- Councils are not working alone in delivering apprenticeship opportunities and have identified colleges, training providers, the National Apprenticeship Service, Jobcentre Plus, Trade Unions and local delivery partners as supporting this activity.
- Hartlepool Youth Investment Project has helped to reduce the town's youth unemployment rate by 7.3% in less than 2 years and bring it below 10% for the first time in more than six years. The HYIP brings together all of Hartlepool Council's youth employment initiatives and those of partners, including schools, colleges, Jobcentre Plus, the NAS, work based learning providers, the VCS and key employers.
- Through various mechanisms, councils are influencing the creation of job and apprenticeship opportunities but most specifically through their procurement and planning policies. These include the use of section 106 clauses, adoption of the Targeted Recruitment and Training programme and direct engagement with local private sector employers and supply chains.
- Sunderland City Council has indicated that in order to support job creation and apprenticeship opportunities that it is to develop a systematic tool to consider Social Value when setting evaluation criteria, contract scope and performance regimes.
- Funding for apprenticeships has mainly been via the government Youth Contract and Apprenticeship Grant for Employers (AGE) although this has been limited. Some have used internal departmental recruitment and training budgets alongside varying annual corporate allocations.
- Northumberland County Council has reported it has a corporate budget for apprenticeships allocated up to March 2016 of over £1million.
- Councils have identified a number of ways in which the recruitment and retention of

apprenticeships could be improved including extending wage subsidy schemes like AGE, mainstreaming apprenticeships into future recruitment and working with schools and colleges to better prepare young people for the move into work.

## Local Authority Procurement and Use of Social Value

NEPO reported that it was working alongside Construction Excellence North East and the Construction Industry Training Board (CITB) on the development of a shared apprenticeships scheme for the construction industry in the North East of England. As highlighted in the draft business plan for the initiative, there appears to be a good market demand for a shared apprenticeship scheme, given that the construction sector workload in this area of the country is in the order of £4billion per annum. Continuing market uncertainty and short-term work packages, however, deter many companies for taking full-term apprentices. The benefits of the shared apprenticeship scheme would be that the selection, employment and management of the placement of construction trade apprentices into any eligible company would provide organisations with a hassle-free, cost-effective, low-risk mechanism to:

- Find and trial construction apprentices – gaining priority rights to offer permanent employment
- Increase productivity of existing skilled crafts people whilst also increasing their delegation and supervision skills.
- Fulfill contractual, planning consent or corporate and social responsibility obligations.

The existing construction frameworks in the North East would provide a strong launch mechanism initially for a shared apprenticeship scheme for the North East and no meaningful competitor currently operates a similar scheme in the area that has CITB recognition.

The draft business plan developed for the scheme indicates that 18 construction trade apprentices would be recruited by SASNE and placed with companies by December 2014; a further 24 such apprentices would be recruited and placed each year. Initially all apprentices recruited by SASNE would be 16-19 year olds working towards Level 2 to reflect government funding priorities. Careful selection and induction processes would minimise

Year 1 drop-out to 10-15%; 75% of Level 2 apprentices would successfully continue to complete Level 3.

As it is proposed that the scheme helps connect businesses with quality apprentices, companies would always be actively encouraged to offer permanent employment.

## Recommendations

- Through NEPO, pursue the development of the business plan for delivery of a shared apprenticeship scheme for the North East to unlock the benefits of a collaborative arrangement between companies and apprentice and ensure that an effective monitoring framework is in place to measure and evaluate the impact and outcomes.
- Encourage councils to apply Social Value clauses into tendering and procurement practices aimed at creating jobs and apprenticeship opportunities in local labour markets.
- Encourage councils to explore collaborative approaches and share best practice.

## Theme 3: Removing Barriers for Young People with Challenging Needs and Circumstances

### Context

For many young people, the challenges of accessing employment, work experience or work ready skills can be even more difficult due to particular challenges they face whether through physical or mental health issues and in respect of living environment. Recognising this, members of the Task and Finish Group were keen to explore actions that would help young people, including through working with partners aimed at supporting young people with particularly challenging circumstances.

Research shows that having a disadvantaged or challenging background, coupled with lower qualification attainment and a lack of parental advice on employment opportunities, can also lead to problems moving from education to employment and a greater risk of becoming not in employment, education or training (described by policymakers as NEETs). Evidence highlights that in such circumstances, additional support is required to help young people who have more challenging lives to achieve in education and in the labour market.

To inform the Group's considerations Members heard presentations from senior representatives from Citizen's Advice Bureau, Changing Lives and Barnardo's North East.

### Key Findings of the Group

#### Changing Lives Employment Service

Changing Lives employment service is delivered across the North East in conjunction with Business in the Community's national 'Ready for Work' programme. The service helps people with some of the biggest barriers to the job market to get employment ready and secure sustainable jobs. They also work with businesses to provide quality placements.

Members heard how the employment service delivers a support package to help clients from a range of backgrounds and with a variety of skills and experiences get back into work. They work with people over the age of 18 years who have experienced homelessness and other forms of disadvantage. The offer to clients include, pre-employment training, motivation and confidence building, work placements, job coaching, CV writing and interview skills.

Since it launched in 2010, the Changing Lives employment service has successfully supported more than 175 clients in the North East. Client careers have included roles in IT, finance and construction in a wide variety of supporting businesses. It has been reported that around 65% of clients who finish work placements find and keep a job. A key principle of the service is that businesses are part of the solution. Their matching service for employers ensures they connect the right clients with the right business.

#### Citizens Advice Bureau

Task and Finish Group members heard how the Citizen's Advice Bureau is experiencing an increasing number of young people seeking help, particularly from those who are on benefits. The changes brought about by the programme of welfare reforms such as the 'bedroom tax' and changes to housing benefit qualification are impacting disproportionately on younger working age people. Data from their operations on the increasing numbers and profile of their clients seeking advice and support show an accelerating problem for these young people in looking to find employment as an option for addressing their financial problems.

In addition to providing frontline support to disadvantaged young people seeking advice, CAB also offers apprenticeships and other work experience opportunities to these clients and have recently signed up to a work experience programme aimed at under-25s.

#### Barnardo's

Members also heard from Barnardo's, as a major voluntary sector organisation that is very experienced and active in supporting children and young people across a range of difficult and challenging circumstances and provides a range of targeted support services in helping them to overcome these.

Members of the Task and Finish Group heard how the current economic climate and the impact of welfare reforms are having a major impact on the most vulnerable, including young people struggling to secure employment as a way out of poverty.

#### Smiling Cat Ventures and Able Politics

The ANEC Directorate also listened to the views of Smiling Cat Ventures which is an innovative organisation focusing on projects that positively

influence the lives of people with a physical or mental health condition. The charity is also engaged in activities aimed at helping people deal with challenging circumstances. 'Able Politics' is an initiative currently being developed to help make politics more accessible and to help people with disabilities to become more politically able.

## Key Findings of the Group

The introduction of Universal Credit is expected to result in a worsening situation in the future and the impacts are likely to be disproportionately felt by vulnerable young people.

It was reported that the challenge for young people with a difficult background in accessing employment, training and apprenticeships was even more challenging.

Evidence of discrimination in access to interviews or job offers based on an undesirable postcode, discrimination against young people with a mental health history, and those with the difficulties of a complex benefits system were all cited as barriers.

For young people who are carers, young parents or struggling with life transitions requires a significant amount of direct and one to one support and funding for barriers to be removed, which is challenging to deliver given budget reductions affecting such early intervention measures. Young parents struggling with the cost of child care and the absence of support structures to help provide basic skills in areas such as opening a bank account were also cited as being barriers to overcome.

The ability of the jobs market to accommodate young people in challenging circumstances at a time when there are increasing numbers of out of work graduates with higher qualifications was also highlighted as a barrier.

## Role of the Voluntary and Community Sector

In the context of considering such barriers, which includes young people with mental and physical disabilities and needs, it was reported that the Voluntary and Community Sector is actively engaging in ways to provide support that will help young people develop work ready skills and provide them with the motivation, tools, structures and confidence to access employment opportunities.

The ability of the Work Programme to address those who have particularly challenging family and personal backgrounds was called into question. It was felt that the Work Programme, as a national delivery model, bypasses the local VCS – unlike its predecessor the Future Jobs Fund, which was more flexible and delivered through local bodies.

Instead, the evidence given by representatives highlighted the importance of VCS initiatives, working with the wider public sector and business community that were producing real and tangible outcomes for young people that with adequate resourcing could be scaled up.

It was felt that in order to effect real change, there needed to be a fundamental shift in policy that recognised the unique role of the VCS in reaching young people in challenging situations and the value of locally led partnership approaches that were able to tap into local knowledge, local expertise and local contacts. Changing Lives Employment Service, for example, offers structured work experience chances for young service users from difficult backgrounds and has been very effective in attracting high profile private sector businesses. The advisers and coaches on the programme also operate as role models for the young people who will come from a range of difficult circumstances and with very limited prior work experience. It was reported that catching young people early enough, to provide high quality work experience opportunities that increase confidence and build self-esteem to help them demonstrate and apply their skills and qualities in a work place setting was key.

In the context of the evidence outlined, members of the Task and Finish Group felt that it was important to present and highlight the experience of charities working with vulnerable clients to inform dialogue with the main political parties to inform their respective manifestos and in the lead up to the next General Election. It was proposed that there needed to be a much greater understanding of the challenges for many young people in accessing employment, the steps that charities are taking to provide support with the aim of supporting all young people into employment.

## Recommendations

- North East councils to work closely with the Voluntary and Community Sector in the North East to develop common messages aimed at communicating the challenges and policy shifts that need to happen by central Government to better support young people into work, with a particular focus on those with challenging circumstances.
- Advocate for greater understanding of the challenges for many young people in accessing employment and the steps that charities are taking to provide support with the aim of supporting all young people into employment.
- To provide a body of evidence to the main political parties of the barriers to employment and examples of locally-led initiatives that with adequate funding devolved from the centre to localities could be scaled up to make a real difference in tackling unemployment with some of the most hard to reach groups.
- To maximise the Autumn Party Conferences and the lead up to the General Election to inform national politicians of both the challenges and opportunities for addressing youth unemployment.
- To highlight with the LGA, North East MPs and other key opinion formers such as think tanks and policy research institutes evidence, case studies and alternative solutions that would help areas of the country such as the North East – which was the only area to see an increase in unemployment levels during the last quarter.

## Next Steps

Across the three themes considered in the Supporting Young People into Employment Task and Finish Group report, there are a number of recommendations which are outlined in the report and summarised in Annex A. The recommendations of the report are aimed at a range of audiences at local and national level, including local government, central Government and partners in the public, private and voluntary sectors.

In respect of exercising leadership and taking action in areas that Members considered would make a real difference and have significant impact, the following were identified as immediate priorities.

## Priority Areas for Action

- Councils, LEPs and Schools North East to collaborate to deliver a North East Education Challenge to deliver a world class education and skills system.
- Councils to continue to engage with successful VCS and private sector-led initiatives, such as the Esh Building My Skills, model and explore all opportunities for extending the scale of these across wider boundaries.
- Local authorities to be a role model in delivering apprenticeships and, through NEPO, take forward the business plan for the delivery of a shared apprenticeship scheme for the construction industry in the North East.
- Member authorities to work closely with the Voluntary and Community Sector to build strength of voice in areas in making representation on the particular challenges facing young people with higher needs and challenging circumstances.
- ANEC to maximise all opportunities in the lead up to the General Election and in the first 100 days of a new Government to highlight the key issues for the North East, including funding, in relation to supporting young people into employment.
- Member authorities to continue to engage with young people through councils' youth forums, youth parliaments and organisations such as Youth Focus North East to ensure that the voices of young people are at the heart of policy and decision-making.

# Membership of the Supporting Young People into Work Task and Finish Group

## ANEC Members:

Councillor **Cyndi Hughes** (Lab),  
*Darlington Borough Council*

Councillor **Neil Foster** (Lab),  
*Durham County Council (Chair)*

Councillor **Angela Douglas** (Lab),  
*Gateshead Council*

Councillor **Marjorie James** (Lab),  
*Hartlepool Borough Council*

Councillor **Charles Rooney** (Lab),  
*Middlesbrough Council*

Councillor **Linda Hobson** (Lab),  
*Newcastle City Council*

Councillor **John O'Shea** (Lab),  
*North Tyneside Council*

Councillor **Scott Dickinson** (Lab),  
*Northumberland County Council*

Councillor **Lynn Pallister** (Lab),  
*Redcar & Cleveland Borough Council*

Councillor **Lynne Proudlock** (Lab),  
*South Tyneside Council*

Councillor **Ann McCoy** (Lab),  
*Stockton on Tees Borough Council*

Councillor **Michael Mordey** (Lab),  
*Sunderland City Council*

## Chief Executive Advisers:

**Gill Alexander**, *Director Child and Adult Services, Hartlepool Borough Council (Feb-Apr 14)*

**Gill Rollings**, *Chief Executive, Middlesbrough Council (Nov 13-Jan 14)*

## ANEC Directorate:

**Hilary Knox**, *Deputy Chief Executive*

**Keith Lamb**, *Policy Manager*

## Contributors to Evidence Gathering Sessions:

**Scoping Session:** Perspective from the two Local Enterprise Partnerships in the North East, November 2013.

**Michelle Duggan**, *Skills Advisor, North East LEP*

**Sue Hannan**, *Employment, Learning and Skills Manager, Tees Valley LEP*

**Evidence Session 1:** Promoting Work Ready Skills and Access to the World of Work (Business Focus), January 2014.

**Darush Dodds**, *Co-ordinator of the 'Building My Skills' Programme, Esh Group*

**John Rossi**, *Assistant Head Teacher, Trinity Catholic College, Middlesbrough – one of the participating schools in the Building My Skills Programme*

**Stephanie Rose**, *Policy Manager, Sunderland City Council*

**Karen Wilkinson-Bell**, *Project Consultant, The High Tide Foundation, PD Ports*

**Evidence Session 2:** Engaging with Young People in Challenging Circumstances and Communities: Identifying Barriers to Accessing Work Based Learning (Voluntary and Community Sector Focus), February 2014.

**Shona Alexander**, *Chief Executive, Citizens Advice Bureau (Newcastle Branch)*

**Ross Waldie**, *Employment Services Manager, Changing Lives (formerly known as The Cyrenians)*

**Sue Curry**, *Children's Services Manager, Barnardo's North East*

**Jonathan Wade**, *Managing Director, Able Politics (an initiative being developed to help make politics more accessible and to help people with disabilities to become more politically able)*

**Evidence Session 3:** The North East Education Challenge, Foundation for Jobs and North East Procurement Organisation (Local Authority Focus), March 2014.

**Gill Alexander**, *Director Child and Adult Services, Hartlepool Borough Council and adviser to the Task and Finish Group*

**Owen McAteer**, *Co-ordinator, Darlington Foundation for Jobs*

**Michael Curtis**, *Regional Category Specialist for Construction and Fleet, North East Procurement Organisation (NEPO)*

**Evidence Session 4:** Youth Focus North East and Government Perspectives (Young Person's and DWP/JCP Focus), April 2014.

**Neil Burke**, *Regional Development Officer, Youth Focus North East accompanied by 2 young people*

**Dave Wright**, *DWP, Jobcentre Plus Group Partnership Manager*

**Michael Armstrong**, *Senior Partnership Manager, Jobcentre Plus Northumberland and Tyne and Wear*

**Jason Livingston**, *Senior Operational and Partnership Manager, Jobcentre Plus Durham and Tees Valley*

## Theme 1: Promoting Work Ready Skills and Access to the World of Work

### Recommendations

- Use local authority channels to create and enhance awareness and understanding of initiatives and programmes that are working well locally and that have the potential to be scaled up across a wider economic area (*NB the Esh 'Building My Skills' model has already been scaled up to encompass all 12 North East authorities*).
- Local authorities to use their local knowledge and contacts and role as facilitators to continue to make connections between businesses and schools and, in response to evidence heard, to target SMEs in their areas.
- Local authorities to work with schools within their areas to encourage and promote positive attitudes, cultures and leadership roles in relation to programmes aimed at providing good careers advice, knowledge of local labour markets and supporting young people into work.
- Local authorities to make representation to Ofsted in support of providing incentives and encouragement for high quality schemes (such as Building My Skills) that are adding value and having a positive impact on work ready skills, bringing together knowledge of local labour markets and insights into the world of work.
- Engage with locally led initiatives aimed at adopting a more innovative and outward looking approach to providing parents and teaching staff with information, knowledge and insights into key labour market and employment issues through site visits to businesses which they can take into the classroom.
- Promote awareness of opportunities for working more closely with the Voluntary and Community Sector, including through stronger engagement between the VCS and the two Local Enterprise Partnerships in the North East.
- Local authorities to continue to make the case for adequate resources for the North East to enable funding to support apprenticeships and access to work based learning to continue, including working through LEP geographies to access EU funding and making the case to Government in the lead up to the Budget and next Spending Review.
- Maximise opportunities for highlighting, building on and sharing best practice at an EU level, including through the EU Framework for Youth which has already recognised a range of positive action taking place across the North East.

## Theme 2: The Role of Councils in Improving Educational, Work and Life Chances

### Recommendations

#### North East Schools Challenge

- To deliver the step change in performance that is needed to improve educational, work and life chances local authorities take a strong leadership role in shaping, overseeing and ensuring the delivery of the Education Schools Challenge across the North East.
- Local authorities to address the fragmentary approach to careers advice and guidance and to explore the early introduction of careers advice and guidance into all schools, as part of the North East Schools Challenge programme.
- To provide focus, leadership and energy in the following areas:
  - Support individual local authorities in their school improvement responsibilities.
  - Act as champions for delivering a curriculum for life, whereby every child has the opportunity to fulfil their potential.
  - Establish a North East framework for co-ordinating effective school support around schools causing the most concern and developing common solutions to shared problems.
  - Establish a regional steering group involving local authorities, schools, FE colleges, Higher Education, Ofsted and LEPs to improve the co-ordination and targeting of existing resources and best practice.
  - Provide master classes for local authorities focused on strengthening the role of councils in school improvement through the sharing of best practice and developing shared services to tackle capacity gaps.
  - Work with partners to identify the most vulnerable schools across the North East and ensure effective support is directed at developing solutions that can be scaled up to tackle common problems.

#### Young People's Perspectives

In the discussion involving young people and members of the Task and Finish Group, the importance of the following areas were highlighted, mirroring the findings and recommendations of the Group's earlier sessions:

- Improve access to careers advice and guidance alongside information on work experience and apprenticeship opportunities – particularly at a time when current policies are moving away from such provision.
- Advocate for Careers Information, Advice and Guidance to be given prominence and re-instated as a fundamental part of the education system.
- Support for activities aimed at developing 'work ready' skills and provision of real work experience opportunities to develop knowledge of the work place.
- Encourage employers to be more proactive in engaging with schools and young people to be clear about the skills and opportunities that are available, to share this information more widely and to invest in the education and training system

#### Local Authority Procurement and Use of Social Value

- Through NEPO, pursue the development of the business plan for delivery of a shared apprenticeship scheme for the North East to unlock the benefits of a collaborative arrangement between companies and apprentice and ensure that an effective monitoring framework is in place to measure and evaluate the impact and outcomes.
- Encourage councils to apply Social Value clauses into tendering and procurement practices aimed at creating jobs and apprenticeship opportunities in local labour markets.
- Encourage councils to explore collaborative approaches and share best practice.

## Theme 3: Removing Barriers for Young People with Challenging Needs and Circumstances

### Recommendations

- North East councils to work closely with the Voluntary and Community Sector in the North East to develop common messages aimed at communicating the challenges and policy shifts that need to happen by central Government to better support young people into work, with a particular focus on those with challenging circumstances.
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ASSOCIATION OF  
NORTH EAST COUNCILS

