

Nuffield 14-19 Review / Rathbone “Engaging Youth Enquiry” New Approaches to Engaging Youth: Understanding the problems and implementing the solutions

Each year, around 200,000 young people in England and Wales leave education between the ages of 16 and 18. They are often poorly qualified and either enter low paid employment or enter the NEET group – those not in education, employment or training. Such young people are a major challenge for public policy as research has consistently shown they are more likely to suffer longer periods of unemployment, poorer health and engage in criminal activities than their peers.

To their credit, Conservative and Labour Governments over the last twenty years have introduced a range of policies intended to encourage such young people to remain in education or training. The intention behind such policies has always been good. However, despite this raft of policy measures, the proportion of young people who leave education and training between the ages of 16 and 18 has remained practically constant over the last 15 years.

This is a persistent problem, as recognised by the House of Commons Education and Skills Committee in its 14-19 Diplomas report, released on May 17th 2007. According to the report, increasing participation levels at post-16 is a “major concern, given England’s low staying-on rates for education and training post-16, in international terms” (2007, p. 9).

Such concerns have led to the current collaboration between the Nuffield 14-19 Review and Rathbone to launch this enquiry. It aims to:

- Develop a better understanding of the young people who are the targets of policy: Who are they? Why do they leave the education and training system early? What are **their** aspirations and what do they see as **their** needs?
- Identify effective types of intervention and understand why they work in collaboration with practitioners and young people
- Work with providers and policy makers to develop suggestions for practice and how these can best be supported by national and local policy

The evidence submitted by the Nuffield 14-19 Review to the select committee outlined the following:

- *Participation in education, training and employment among 16–18-year-olds.* Despite an increase in the proportion of 16–17 year-olds in full-time education between 1992 and 2003, and taking into account the increase in the size of the cohort in recent years, considerably more 16–17 year-olds were not in education and training in 2003 than in 1992.
- *How many young people are outside education, employment and training?* The proportion of 16–18-year-olds outside education, employment or training increased from 10% at the end of 2004 to 11% at the end of 2005 (to a total number of approx. 220,000 at the end of 2005). Certain groups of young people are overrepresented in this category.

- *Why young people move out of education and training post-16.* Decisions post-16 are mediated by a range of factors and the process is often far from linear and rational, and may rely on unpredictable factors such as informal networks, peer group influence and serendipity.
- *Young people classified as NEET (not in education, employment or training).* Efforts should be made to counteract the pejorative and homogenising force of this term. The groups of young people of concern are much more heterogeneous in their reasons for leaving the education and training system early and in their needs for support than is recognised in policy.
- *Categories of young people as policy priorities; young people in jobs without training.* Creating better education and training provision for those in work without training at 16–17 should be one of the main policy priorities, as well as providing for those (negatively) classified as “not in education, employment or training”.
- *What is available to encourage young people back into education, training and employment? Recent initiatives— impact and limitations.* There is a plethora of current initiatives to encourage young people back into education and training, or into employment (from active labour market policies to education-based policies and area-based policies), but they form a fragmented picture and had limited impact.

As the extract from the evidence submitted to the select committee shows, we have already made some progress. For example, we now know that there is considerable regional variation in the scale of the problem which reflects long term changes in local labour markets and the impact of globalisation at a local level. This means that policy needs to be more sensitive to both personal needs and local context. However, much remains to be understood in order to facilitate the development of such evidence informed policy.

The Nuffield/Rathbone enquiry will gather evidence from a variety of sources, structured around four sets of questions:

- **The life circumstances of young people** (Workshop in Manchester, 1 November 2007)
 - What can we learn from case histories of young people who are outside education, employment and training or in jobs without training?
 - What kinds of strategies for supporting these young people are successful?
- **Teaching and learning** (Workshop in Cardiff, February 2008)
 - What is the impact of the complexity of the education and training system in England and Wales on these young people?
 - What kinds of learning opportunity should be made available to motivate and engage these young people?
- **The regional perspective** (Workshop, May 2008)
 - What are the effects of regional variation?
 - To what extent can effective collaboration between stakeholders in a particular context provide solutions for young people outside education, employment and training, or in jobs without training?
- **Policy implications** (Workshop in Oxford, September 2008)
 - How is issue of engaging youth articulated in the policy discourse?
 - How does current policy relate to the current situation?
 - What are the policy implications of the current situation?