



Northern Ireland
Assembly

**COMMITTEE
FOR EMPLOYMENT
AND LEARNING**

**OFFICIAL REPORT
(Hansard)**

**Inquiry into Young People not in
Education, Employment or Training
(NEETs):
Department for Employment and
Learning**

13 October 2010

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Training (NEETs):
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Members present for all or part of the proceedings:

Mrs Dolores Kelly (Chairperson)
Mr Jonathan Bell (Deputy Chairperson)
Mr Sydney Anderson
Mr Paul Butler
Rev Dr Robert Coulter
Mr Chris Lyttle
Mr David McClarty
Mrs Claire McGill
Mr Pat Ramsey

Witnesses:

Ms Nuala Kerr) Department for Employment and Learning
Ms Frances O'Hara)

The Chairperson (Mrs D Kelly):

I welcome Nuala Kerr and Frances O'Hara from the Careers Service. You will have five or 10 minutes to make a presentation, after which members will comment and ask questions. Thank you for your written briefing.

Ms Nuala Kerr (Department for Employment and Learning):

Thank you for the opportunity to talk about the work of Careers Service in relation to your inquiry.

The Careers Service is well integrated within the Department for Employment and Learning (DEL), particularly in the skills and industry division. Members will be aware of various aspects of the work of skills and industry division in relation to apprenticeships, management leadership and other support activities for individuals and businesses. The Careers Service has an important part to play in guiding young people towards appropriate careers, providing them with independent advice and guidance that allows them to make the right choices, and providing them with support at various points while they are in school or training and as they progress through life.

Our service is not just for young people, although that is the part that is most familiar. We also offer careers advice and guidance to people of all ages at all stages in their careers. In the main, we have free and easily accessible careers facilities that allow people to gain for themselves the information that they need and to seek advice as they need it in our careers advice structure.

Our objective is to develop effective career decision-makers so that young people and others have appropriate engagement in education, training and employment. We offer that service through two teams that work within the Careers Service: the Careers Service operation and delivery activity and the careers policy and strategy. Ms O'Hara heads up the Careers Service operation and delivery, which is the area that the Committee will want to focus on particularly.

There are the equivalent of 163 full-time staff in total in the Careers Service, of which the equivalent of 100 are full-time professionally qualified — postgraduate qualified — careers advisers, and they are based in jobcentres, jobs and benefits offices and careers offices throughout Northern Ireland. The services are free to whoever wishes to avail themselves of them, whether they are young people or adults. It is recognised that clients who are vulnerable to social exclusion should have a high priority, and the Careers Service focuses particularly on those clients. I know that the Committee wishes to consider that area today.

In addition to the offices and locations that I have talked about, we have a direct service available through our website. We have developed an extensive range of information about

various industry sectors with the sector skills councils, and the Committee is probably aware of that already. We also have partnership arrangements with others, in particular the Educational Guidance Service for Adults, which provides an outreach service for adult careers guidance. That includes work with people between 19 and 25 who are disengaged. That contract is worth around £700,000 per annum.

The Committee is interested in three areas: the overview of the work done with young people, which we will talk about in a little more detail; the work we do at year 10; and the partnership arrangements we have with others to deliver services to people who become disengaged or who are at risk of being not in employment, education or training (NEET). We also want to talk about the quality standards and how we track and monitor NEETs.

Ms Frances O’Hara (Department for Employment and Learning):

The Committee asked three specific questions: an overview of the work done with young people at schools; whether there is a new strategy for those who are not in employment, education and training; and how we monitor and track young people who are not in employment, education or training.

The objective of what we are trying to deliver in schools has four key aims. It is to support the delivery of impartial careers education advice — the whole guidance programme that is offered in partnership between us and the Department of Education; it is, as Nuala said, to enable learners to make well-informed and appropriate career decisions; it is to intervene at pivotal points in the transition process and the decision-making process; it is to provide tailored education, information, advice and guidance, to promote inclusion, and to increase appropriate participation in education, training and employment, which is particularly relevant to what we discuss today; and it is to support continuous improvement in delivery of the education, information, advice and guidance services. Those are the key aims of our work in schools.

Traditionally, that work has focused on year 12 in order to intervene at a time when most young people make fundamental decisions about where they go for post-primary education. In total, careers advisers spend about 60% of their time in schools. The balance of their time is then spent dealing with adults. As Nuala said, our guidance service caters for all ages, which is unique in the UK. Northern Ireland offers a complete, impartial advice and guidance service to all.

Therefore, advisers spend the remaining 40% of their time dealing with adults and young people in further education colleges and talking to young people who have gone into training organisations. Indeed, the service is also available to anyone else who wants to change job or move around the system.

Historically, the work has focused on year 12. However, increasingly, we have to deal with youngsters much earlier than that, particularly those in year 10 who are making decisions about the courses and subjects that they want to hold on to and progress in. Therefore, from this year, we have developed a partnership agreement with the Department of Education. You have been given a copy of that. It articulates the range of services that we provide to schools, which go right back to before year 10, to years 8 and 9, although there is little activity in those years. Certainly, there is careers education activity, which we want see reflected in the partnership agreement. Our advisers intervene at year 10. This year is the first that we have taken a structured and focused approach in year 10.

We undertake a bit of work in year 11. Then, resources are concentrated in year 12 and sixth form. Delivery of that is through an initial class for all of them, after which they fill in application forms. From what they have said in their applications forms, we determine who needs help and when, and what type of help they might need. There is very much a partnership arrangement with careers teachers in schools.

This year is the first of the new partnership agreement. It is very much a formalisation of what we have had before. However, we see it as ensuring that schools are aware of the range of services that are available to them across all year groups. It is entirely up to schools to decide how they make best use of the resource that we offer them. They can decide to concentrate the resource on a particular year group or to spread it across year groups. Certainly, we will advise on that, but it is for schools to decide how to use the available resource.

Will I move on to questions 2 and 3?

The Chairperson:

Just go on, please.

Ms O'Hara:

Your second question was about specific actions in the careers strategy that relate to NEETs.

Mr P Ramsey:

I am sorry to interrupt you. The noise outside is very distracting.

Ms O'Hara:

Am I speaking too quietly?

Mr Bell:

No, there is a machine working outside. You are fine. Keep going there. It is very good.

Ms O'Hara:

OK. We have already mentioned that a key issue for us in the careers strategy is the introduction of the partnership agreement. We are pleased that that has been a successful collaborative arrangement between us and the Department of Education. As I said, this is the first year of the agreement. Other things that are dealt with in the strategy are year 10 work, which we will see more of this year. Hopefully we will see the fruits of that coming through. We see that as an opportunity, not only to advise youngsters about the implications for their vocational futures of taking on particular subjects or dropping others, but to intervene earlier with youngsters who may be at risk of dropping out of the system. Sometimes, when we intervene at year 12, a lot of them simply are not there, so we cannot make an impact. We see the fact that we can now intervene at year 12 as an opportunity to work with the teachers to see if there are any at-risk youngsters there and give them the help they need.

The other thing mentioned in the strategy is the need to have closer working relationships with other agencies and other Departments. We have a very good working relationship with the health and social care trusts, which have an employability scheme to deal with people who have a range of problems. That is working very well at the moment. The other thing we are particularly proud of is the Give and Take project, which is a community and voluntary-based project that deals with youngsters who have particular social and other issues that may affect their attainment.

In relation to the other things mentioned in the strategy, we are doing work on vulnerable groups, and we see those as falling into two categories: people with a disability and people who

have other social barriers. We are developing policy to improve our services for those two specific areas.

We are also looking at quality standards, because we know that we need to assess how effective we are and whether we are getting things right. We do questionnaires and ask people how they feel about our services and whether we are doing everything to expectation, but we feel that we want to introduce more robust quality standards, and we are working on that. We are also working on the impact of the advice we give. We are looking at impact assessment and at best practice across Europe for that. Those are some of the things from the strategy that we are currently working on and that we want to see developments on over the next year.

The third point relates to how youngsters not in education, employment or training are tracked and monitored. That is an issue for us, which I think you are aware of, in that we need to make sure that we have a complete data set on all the young people who will be leaving school at any given time. We are working closely with the Department of Education to try to overcome the difficulties with sharing data. There are obviously legal implications, and the schools are, quite rightly, nervous about passing over information unless they are legally entitled to do so. The Department of Education has been very helpful and is co-operating well with us on that. It intends to write to schools to see if it can do anything to overcome those issues. Over the next year we will be working on that. Both Departments share a common aspiration of sharing data that is in the best interests of the youngsters, and that is what we are working towards.

We currently have a list of young people whom we have seen in schools and who are eligible to leave in June of any given year. We have data on some of those who have moved into DEL-funded training organisations or programmes and further education colleges, so we are able to track some of those. We know others who have stayed in further education within their schools, and there are others that we are just unable to track. This is a period that is quite fluid, with a lot of movement, but we will wait until things settle down some time towards the end of October or beginning of November to see where the young people are and track those that we have no record of. The issue for us is that that is not necessarily a comprehensive list, which is why we have to get the class lists from the schools.

Of those that we are able to trace, from last year's figures we were able to engage with around half of those who were deemed as being NEET at the end of October. We appreciate that we

need to do more work on understanding where the other half are and, indeed, what happened to the half that we did engage with. Did they go into training? Did they stay in training? Are they still at risk? We accept that we have more work to do on tracking and monitoring, and that is something that we are going to progress over the next year.

The Chairperson:

Thank you very much for that, Frances. You have covered many of the salient points that have cropped up in numerous evidence sessions and the areas that need strengthened.

Mr P Ramsey:

Good morning; you are very welcome. You made some interesting points. Does somebody independently evaluate Careers Service's work with the schools, in particular? Are there measureable outcomes? Are there year-to-year targets? The evidence that Careers Service has not been able to trace or track almost 50% of people is worrying in itself. The earlier points and all the language are connected, and early intervention is obviously what we are after. How does Careers Service identify vulnerable groups?

Yesterday morning, I went to an event at Barnardo's about the 40,000 young people across Northern Ireland who are NEET. However, there was a careers fair in Derry a few weeks ago — Claire will be interested in this point — that, from the Department's perspective, was an absolutely tremendous success. I am sure that you understand the point that I am getting at. Nevertheless, I was concerned because there were three companies there from the IT sector, and one had something like 100 vacancies, but it could not get the people to fill those vacancies. Then we had the other side: hundreds of people were queuing to apply, in desperation, for Christmas jobs at Primark, Tesco and Sainsbury's.

In terms of trying to evaluate, the point that I am getting is that there are careers education programmes there. Is there one template across Northern Ireland? I imagine that if I went to Coleraine I would not find the same people looking for jobs. There would not be the same companies — there might not be the need for the IT sector, but there could be another area. I am wondering whether there is a regional package fit for purpose to meet the needs of a particular area. Derry is very different from west Belfast or north Belfast.

We always talk about audits and information and looking at best practice and models, and

some of those models have come from the community and voluntary sector, but the biggest complaint is that there is no-joined up thinking between DEL, the Department of Education and the other Departments. I am wondering how we get to the stage where the Department comes along and says: “This is where we are going to now, and this is what we want, but this is where we are getting frustrations and blockages.” I am not getting that from the Department at any stage. We know where we want to get to, but there is a bit of —

The Chairperson:

Maybe that is just one of the obstacles.

Mr P Ramsey:

A wee bit of weight has to be put on some of those things. They say that they know in particular in terms of looking at best practice. You referred to the Give and Take project, which we have heard from. However, there are a lot of other projects that do tremendously good work. Getting back to the questions, how does the Careers Service identify vulnerable people? How does it trace those people, and what interventions does it make directly?

The Chairperson:

The other question was about independent evaluation and auditing.

Ms O’Hara:

I will deal first with your question about how we identify those at risk. It is accepted — I think that the strategy mentions this — that by intervening only or mainly with year 12s, there may be youngsters who have already disengaged with the system and that it may be too late at that point. The strategy addressed that, and we are now saying that we need to intervene much earlier, at year 10. However, intervention at year 10 may not be early enough either. That is why we have had the partnership agreement, looking at what happens in year 8 and year 9.

We see the careers education programme having a vital input at years 8, 9 and 10. It is essentially about making those youngsters, who are still quite immature in respect of their vocational direction, aware of the world of work and of how they can play their part, and encouraging them to have the aspiration and drive to achieve their full attainment. We work very closely with schools to try to identify those youngsters who are at most at risk and who need our help and intervention as early as possible. We are pegging that back to year 10, but we may peg

it back even further.

Mr P Ramsey:

If you are getting that information, can you tell me how many schools in the Foyle constituency have identified children who are at risk? That information must already be there if it has been identified. Perhaps we could get that information for all the constituencies.

The Chairperson:

We can come back to that.

Ms O'Hara:

Risk factors will certainly have been identified. For example, if a youngster's attendance is persistently poor or if the school knows about things in their family background that will have an impact on their attainment, that will be shared with the careers adviser. It is very much a partnership arrangement at that point, and we develop very close relationships with the health and social care trusts, for example. Although our advisers are professionally trained in giving vocational guidance and are very skilled at that, we need to understand that there are limitations to what they can do. They will need to work closely with other professionals and use their help to find posts and make sure that youngsters have access to all the other services that are available to them to deal with whatever problems are happening in their lives.

The arrangement that we have for partnership working with schools and the health and social care trusts involves a collaborative approach and tackles some of the arising issues. Making sure that we have an impact is recognised in our new strategy. We have to do some work on that to determine the effectiveness of the guidance and the intervention that we have at any particular point in time, and that work will be progressing over the next year.

There is no independent evaluation at the minute. At the end of every year we ask the schools and the young people how they feel about the service that has been provided to them, and we have figures to show that the feedback is very positive, but there is no independent evaluation at this point.

Mr P Ramsey:

How do you measure the outcomes?

Ms O'Hara:

We measure the outcomes on the basis of the satisfaction surveys that we get back from the people we deliver the advice and guidance to. There are two customers in that scenario: the schools and the young people. Both are asked at the end of any given year how they felt that our services matched their expectation, and the feedback that we are getting is very positive.

Mr P Ramsey:

Can you share that information with us?

Ms O'Hara:

Yes, we can share the survey information with you.

Mr Bell:

I am particularly interested in what you said about evaluation. Are you getting any direct feedback from the young people themselves as to how valuable this is, on both an immediate and a long-term basis? Are we getting any indications from young people who have not been successful on what areas they would like to see improved?

Ms O'Hara:

We are currently producing our annual report, which shows results for student satisfaction. Of students in years 12, 13 and 14 who participated in careers guidance interviews and completed a student satisfaction questionnaire, 98% rated the helpfulness of the careers advisers as either good or excellent, and 91% rated the usefulness of the getting connected profile — that is the form that we have been asking them to fill in at the beginning, to determine how vocationally aware and mature they are — as either good or excellent. The usefulness of the summary of guidance, which is the information that they get at the end of the interview, and that of the action plan was rated by 94% of respondents as either good or excellent. Furthermore, 96% of the respondents felt that the interview had helped them to move forward with career plans. So we are getting positive feedback from young people.

Mr Bell:

I welcome that information; it is important that it is written into the record.

How futuristic is your planning for careers? Clearly the market five years from now is going to be different from the market now. I was very struck by one leading educationalist who told me to teach my children Mandarin rather than French, because there is going to be a whole new range of job opportunities opening up in Asia. He had all these figures for how many million were going to move into the middle classes in Asia and open businesses. How futuristic is your careers planning, in order to cope with those emerging markets?

Ms O’Hara:

Yes. Careers advisers have an ongoing professional development programme that involves six sessions a year where we bring in people from the industry to tell them what is happening in growth areas. That is a key area for us in ensuring that our advisers are up to speed with what is happening in the labour market.

We have also developed much better labour-market intelligent information in leaflets and advice sent to advisers and available to young people. That has developed significantly over the past couple of years, because we appreciate that there is a changing market and we need to let people know, right back to third-form choices about subjects to pursue or drop. If the right decisions are not made at that point, everything connected to a young person’s career direction can be affected. The answer to your question is that we have done a lot over the past few years to improve labour market information and identify trends — in so far as we can, because things can change very quickly.

Ms Kerr:

It is also important that the careers service is embedded in skills and industry division. We are responsible for the skills strategy, the STEM strategy and our other forward-looking activities in the Department. The connection between the services and the interventions that we fund, and the close relationship with our being part of that division and that activity, are important. Careers Service is close to any change in thinking about what industry and business will need in the future.

The Chairperson:

All politicians love to hear officials say “we are responsible”, because it is good to come back on.

Mr Butler:

Is it fair to say that tracking and monitoring is not as robust as it should be? That issue keeps coming up in the inquiry. Right across Europe, people fall out of education and training, and there is no robust tracking and monitoring system of where they go. You said that you have contact with half the people in the system. Is that fair to say? You mentioned legal difficulties about post-primary pupils, but what way is that going to roll out over the next couple of years? This is a key theme of this inquiry that is coming up all the time.

Ms O'Hara:

You are right. It is not as robust as it should be, and that is recognised. The scoping study has spotlighted that type of activity and we now know that we need to do more. The Department has analytical services people — economists and statisticians — who are working with us to try to find a system that will monitor and track young people so that we can access and offer help to all of them.

As I said earlier, we know that there are issues, but they are not insurmountable, they are not show-stoppers. We need to ensure that we share data with the Department of Education appropriately and legally. Schools are, rightly, nervous about sharing personal information about pupils, even though that information would be relevant to us and to training organisations or other schools that those pupils may move to. However, we will work through those issues over the next year, and I am confident we will find a workaround. The key is to share data between the school and us.

Mr Butler:

At present, would you know where somebody is a year or two from now? Are so many other people coming into the system that you cannot track them?

Ms O'Hara:

Young people are most vulnerable when they are below the radar of the benefit system, which is when they are under 18. Between the ages of 16 and 18, if they do not avail themselves of education or training, they could simply be not doing anything, they would not necessarily be anywhere. That is the age group that we really need to look at. Those under 16 should obviously still be in school, and the education system should be making sure that they are there. I know that that is not always the case, but at least they are on somebody's radar. Between the ages of 16 and

18 is a very vulnerable period; that is the time when a lot of damage can be done to someone's career aspirations and what they do for the rest of their lives. That is the key point.

The people that we have identified as being NEET at this particular time — around the end of October or beginning of November — represent a snapshot. We pick this time because there is a lot of fluidity between when they started in September and now, but youngsters move in and out of education, training and work right through the year. Of the people we have seen in school — which is most of the school leavers — the careers adviser who was responsible for them in school is responsible for trying to keep contact with them right up until they are 18.

That system is in place, but it is not as robust as we would like it to be, because we do not know that we have all of them. We have not necessarily seen all of them in school, but of the ones that we have seen in school, the careers adviser will trace them and try to keep in contact with them until they are 18. If they change address, we lose contact, or they simply do not respond to our invitation to come in to talk to an adviser, there is not much we can do, but there is a system at the moment.

The Chairperson:

I would appreciate brevity in both questions and answers if possible, but I am grateful to you for giving a comprehensive answer.

Mr S Anderson:

Thank you, ladies, for your presentation. I think my question has been answered. The Minister mentioned in the Chamber yesterday that there was concern about the number of young people leaving school without even the basic skills of reading and writing. You touched on the need for a proper database for early intervention, and the legal implications with that. Is there a real difficulty in getting that proper database? If you do not achieve that, there will be quite a number of young people who will still fall out of the system, and they are probably going to be the most vulnerable. We need to get to those young people. Do you see big problems with getting that database and working with the schools?

Ms O'Hara:

We do not, actually. I absolutely agree that those youngsters are the people who need our help most, and it is vital that we find out who they are and offer them help. The Department of

Education shares that view, and we have a common goal in trying to overcome that problem, so I think that is a great starting point. As well as that, everybody is aware of the issues about sharing data, and those rules are there for a reason — to protect. We have to find a workaround, but I think we will.

Mrs McGill:

Thank you for your paper; you are both welcome. I welcome the research that has been carried out on social inclusion projects, disability and other social barriers. Is there a time frame for that?

Ms O'Hara:

We hope to have something that we can share towards the end of this financial year. The scope for that is quite broad at the moment, and it is a question of scaling that down a bit to see where we can make the biggest impact, but we hope to have something by the spring or summer of next year.

Mrs McGill:

I have a question to follow that, and I will be brief.

It is vitally important that the transition planning meetings are robust and structured. You mentioned partnerships, which are key, a number of times. You also referred to the trusts. My experience is that the provision for people with a disability who move from a particular kind of school into, perhaps, an adult centre was not as coherent or robust as it should have been. Adequate funding did not come from health to make sure that those people had training and skills. I note that on page 30 it is stated that:

“The Careers Service **must** be invited to all Transition Planning Meetings.”

However, it is then stated that:

“Careers Advisers will endeavour to attend all Transition Planning Meeting where possible and where it is considered appropriate.”

Is that a watering down of what seemed to be a very robust intention? If the Careers Service is to develop in the way that it should, rather than being an add-on, it should certainly be present at that kind of meeting.

The Chairperson:

That is a very valid point. Well spotted.

Mrs McGill:

Thank you, Chairperson.

Ms O'Hara:

We will note that point.

The Chairperson:

Are you not able to answer?

Ms O'Hara:

I am not aware of there having been any issues of non-attendance at transition meetings. The special needs careers officers largely attend those meetings, but I will check to see whether there are issues with advisers attending.

The Chairperson:

Mrs McGill is also asking why it is watered down from "must" to "will endeavour".

Ms O'Hara:

I do not know.

The Chairperson:

Is it a get-out clause?

Ms O'Hara:

It could be that it is essential that the special needs careers adviser attends some transitional meetings but not others. It is all down to making the best use of available resources. As Ms Kerr said, we are an all-age guidance service. There are lots of priority groups. I would be concerned if there were significant numbers of non-attendants at those meetings. I have not heard that that is the case, but I will look into it.

Mrs McGill:

I am pointing this out because I have had experience in my area of young people transferring from a special school to an adult day centre. The Health Service was involved. As I said earlier, according to the information that I had, the provision did not seem to be there for those people to

progress. That is important if the Careers Service is to be the robust mechanism that we all believe that it should be.

Ms Kerr:

It would be helpful, Claire, if you could share those details with us. We could then make a specific enquiry in that regard. We expect attendance at all of those transition meetings. I take your point about the seeming dilution. We are separating out the practical issues, but we will come back to you with the detail and we will happily investigate the case to which you referred.

The Chairperson:

That would be most useful. Thank you.

Mr Lyttle:

Thank you for your presentation. Careers guidance is an issue that is raised frequently as being extremely important. There is a lot of detailed information and a wide-ranging menu of services and options for the schools. The schools decide how to use those resources, so how do we know the efficacy of the menu that each school decides to use and the outcomes? Despite the satisfaction survey responses that you received, I continue to receive feedback from young people that the careers guidance that was provided to them was not necessarily as helpful as it could have been. One flippant but trying-not-to-be-flippant question: are we teaching our children Mandarin?

Ms Kerr:

There is sometimes confusion about the difference between careers education and careers information, advice and guidance. The school has the responsibility to develop the career decision. It is there to support young people in the school and education environment. We then come in with our professional and technical information and provide the independent advice that allows them to make the decision. Quite often, what young people see as careers advice is a mixture of those activities.

We see a high level of satisfaction with the specific things that we offer, so it is not always clear later on what it is that has made a young person's experience unsatisfactory. That will always be an issue for us; trying to unpick what the young person reports as their experience of what careers advice has meant to them.

Ms O'Hara:

That is right. There are a variety of reasons why young people may not see it as particularly positive. It may be that they have not got out of it what they wanted, but we want to know if that is the case. We want to know if they had an expectation that they were going to get something and it did not materialise. There is an opportunity to articulate that through the survey.

Mr Lyttle:

I accept and understand that it is difficult, given that it will be a number of years after the service is provided before an assessment is made of how helpful it has been. It sounds like research is being done into tracking; that might be something we can look at further. How significantly does the menu of services adopted vary among schools?

Ms O'Hara:

It is a bit early to tell, because it was only introduced in September. The agreements are being worked out with schools as we speak. I think that there will be a fairly standard approach to concentrating the resource available. There is a finite resource available to each school, and it is entirely up to the school to decide how it is used. However, our advice would be that you still need a considerable concentration of resource at year 12, but also that we want to see more activity in year 10. That is something that we are in agreement with the Department of Education on. We have fought to get additional resources through. We would certainly like to see year 10 activity. The activity can be outside or on either side of those two years; it will vary from school to school depending on the type of school and, sometimes, the expertise of the careers team in the school.

For example, if someone has a lot of experience in dealing with youngsters who are applying to higher education, and has built up that expertise over the years as a lot careers teachers have, they may see that as their role and want to hold on to it. They will not necessarily see our advisers as being involved in that. Equally, however, if a school has a reasonably new careers teacher, that teacher may feel that they want to use our advisers for that because it is very important. So, it will vary depending on a range of factors, such as the type of school and the expertise available, but it is a bit early to tell yet how well it being used and whether there is a huge variance across Northern Ireland in how it is being used. This is the first time we have had this menu, and we should be getting good things from it.

The Chairperson:

It might be useful to do a mapping exercise of schools in each constituency that use the careers advice service. Arguably, it should not be left to the schools to make that decision; surely it is a matter of parental and individual choice? We would be interested to see those statistics so that we could take them up elsewhere. Also, can you provide us with some idea of the cost of the service overall?

Ms Kerr:

We are in the process of finalising an annual report on the careers activities. We produced one for last year, and I can make that available to the Committee. In total, we spend around £5.75 million on careers activities.

The Chairperson:

Is it just DEL that spends that money?

Ms Kerr:

Yes, it is.

The Chairperson:

We would be very keen to see that mapping exercise. It would need to be done across constituencies and differentiate between year 10 and year 12 intervention. We would be very keen to hear anything further that you have to say on where some of the obstacles lie with the provision of services at year 10, which seems to be much more sensible, and where the blockages are.

Ms Kerr:

Chris raised a point that struck me; it was about the long-term impact of careers advice. The point that we want to make is that careers advice is available throughout someone's career. We offer a gold standard service, because we offer a greater range of services both to young people and to adults. People who have left school and completed their initial training can still come and get advice if they want to change careers, jobs or the direction of their lives. If they feel that they have made a mistake early on, we still have advice to give and guidance to offer.

The Chairperson:

It does not seem that there is a lot of public awareness about that. There should be a campaign to raise greater public awareness about that, particularly in these straitened times when many people find themselves redundant or find that their career progression has been stunted.

Ms Kerr:

We take that point. We have pilot resource centres located in Ann Street and in Derry. People can come off the street to look at books, use the facilities or get direct advice from an adviser. That is interesting for people, particularly in places where there is a high footfall and where there is an opportunity for people to know that the centres are there; they walk past, see them and, some day, call in.

The Chairperson:

How long will the pilot last and when will there be a report on it?

Ms O'Hara:

We are looking at how we could extend the model that we are delivering in Richmond Chambers and in Ann Street in Belfast to other parts of the Province. Although that model works very well in an urban location where there is high footfall and where that concentration of resources can be justified, we need to look at how we can deliver that model in other, more rural locations.

The Chairperson:

We will come back to you about that. I am very conscious that your brief was to come here to give evidence about the NEETs inquiry. Thank you both very much indeed.