



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Employment and Learning

**OFFICIAL REPORT
(Hansard)**

Pathways to Success

25 January 2012

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

Committee for Employment and Learning

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Members present for all or part of the proceedings:

Mr Basil McCrea (Chairperson)
Mr Thomas Buchanan (Deputy Chairperson)
Mr Jim Allister
Ms Michelle Gildernew
Mr Barry McElduff
Mr David McIlveen
Mrs Sandra Overend
Mr Pat Ramsey
Mr Alastair Ross

Witnesses:

Ms Sara Boyce	Include Youth
Mr Paddy Mooney	Include Youth
Ms Koulla Yiasouma	Include Youth

The Chairperson: We will now move on to our briefing sessions, the first of which is Include Youth's evidence on the draft Pathways to Success strategy. I remind members that this session will be recorded for Hansard, so care must be taken to ensure that electronic devices do not interfere with the recording.

I welcome the representatives from Include Youth. Koulla, are you going to introduce your team to us? That said, it is not as though many of us need much introduction to you. We are all, or at least the Chair is, very frightened about the prospect of this coming up. Members have copies of a tabled paper on the session, which was sent to us yesterday. That paper is an update of Include Youth's briefing paper, and members may want to look at it. Koulla, I will hand over to you so that you can introduce your team.

Ms Koulla Yiasouma (Include Youth): Thank you, Basil. I thank the Committee for agreeing to meet us today. My colleagues are Sara Boyce, who is the policy co-ordinator for Include Youth, and Paddy Mooney, who runs our Give and Take scheme, which is Include Youth's main employability service for young people.

As the Chair rightly pointed out, you have a copy of our executive summary to the submission that we made to Pathways, as well as, I think, our speaking notes for today. Please indulge us, because we have continually revised all those things, so we may go off track. We will try to keep this brief, because I think that, like you, we are probably more interested in having the conversation with you about our views on the proposed Pathways to Success strategy.

The first thing I want to do is commend the Committee and its predecessor Committee, as well as members as individuals, for the high priority that you have given to the issue of young people who are not in education, employment or training (NEETS). Given that almost one in five of 18 to 24-year-olds in Northern Ireland is now unemployed, it is vital that that work is continued and afforded the same level of priority, particularly following the proposed abolition of the Department for Employment and Learning (DEL) and the transfer of its functions to other Departments. As I said, our evidence will be brief and will focus on our submission, which made 30 recommendations to DEL's proposals. We will highlight a number of concerns that our partners and our young people, in particular, raised. We would also like to share with the Committee those recommendations that we believe, if actioned, would make a significant difference to the young people who are at risk of becoming NEET or who are currently not in education training or employment. I will hand now over to Paddy to continue.

Mr Paddy Mooney (Include Youth): By way of background information, Include Youth is an independent NGO that has been in existence since 1979. We promote and protect the rights and best interests of disadvantaged young people. Our Give and Take scheme aims to improve the employability and to increase the self-esteem of young people from across Northern Ireland who are in need or at risk. Each year the scheme works with approximately 135 young people who, for a variety of reasons, are unable to access any sort of mainstream training or employment programme. We work with a further 750 young people on our other projects.

The following quotation from a participant on the scheme should help to give you a sense of the barriers that those young people face and how the Give and Take scheme works with them to overcome those barriers. Lucy, aged 18, said:

"It's a good place for support and stuff. It's flexible and works around the best ways for individual young people. It's brilliant that they ask for young people's opinions on what way things work or should work, like the different programmes and things. The mentoring is really beneficial for young people who need someone there to help them and talk about things. I would recommend the Give and Take scheme for anyone who doesn't think that they would stick at mainstream education".

Despite the huge barriers that they face, two out of every three young people will achieve essential skills qualifications in literacy and numeracy, and more than half will move into mainstream training, education or employment on completion of the Give and Take scheme. With much of the initial groundwork having been covered in the Department's scoping study and the Committee's inquiry, coupled with the extent and urgency of the issue, our expectation was of a high-level, co-ordinated strategy based on an in-depth analysis of the economic and social context and one that included detailed actions, including a range of new and creative initiatives, with clear targets, time frames and resources attached. Regrettably, the consultation document that was produced did not contain the type of detail that we fully expected to see.

We are concerned that the draft strategy's initial focus will be limited to young people in category B — that is, those young people with an identifiable barrier — while the biggest grouping, group C, which constitutes 66% of the NEET population, will not be a priority for the strategy. We were disappointed to hear departmental officials indicate — as recently as last month to this Committee — that, having borrowed the statistical categorisation from England, they simply do not know who the young people in category C are.

We are also strongly of the view that much greater emphasis should be placed on preventative work for the pre-16s. Aside from a proposed assessment of the overall impact of current interventions, including preventative early interventions, the draft strategy does not reflect an adequate emphasis on early intervention and preventative work. Include Youth recommends the inclusion of a strategic objective that is specifically targeted at preventative work with pre-16s, similar to that in the Scottish Government's NEETs strategy. Despite the stated commitment to a cross-departmental approach, that objective is not reflected in the draft strategy. Unfortunately, it does not convey a sense of interconnectedness or alignment with other high-level strategies. Indeed, in our view, there would appear to be a lack of an integrated and co-ordinated policy response in DEL to the issue of young people who are NEET.

We would also have expected to see a much greater emphasis on the need to develop high-level engagement with employers and businesses. The increasing difficulties in securing work placements for young people as a result of the recession underscores the pressing need for that. The benefits of work placements for young people are significant and are illustrated by the following quote from David, who said:

"Homebase has been good, I like getting the experience of work, and I have good craic with the staff. They have been good at showing me what to do, they teach me new things and have made me feel like part of the team. So far I've enjoyed the experience."

I will now hand over to Sara, who will continue with our presentation.

Ms Sara Boyce (Include Youth): The lack of any financial support from government for their efforts to move into mainstream education, training or employment is one of the biggest issues for young people who go on the Give and Take scheme. Our concerns about education maintenance allowance (EMA) centre on the current discriminatory situation whereby young people on pre-vocational schemes such as the Give and Take scheme are not eligible for a weekly non-means-tested allowance, unlike their peers on Training for Success programmes.

The Department has stated that the consultation options for the future of EMA relate to means-tested EMA as it currently operates only. That would effectively exclude the young people with whom we work from consideration in the consultation. The Department has also stated that benefits legislation means that young people on pre-vocational schemes are not entitled to a non-means-tested allowance. In our view, that position is clearly unfair. The principle remains that those young people who are most in need of financial support that would allow them to participate in and achieve from education and training should be the first to receive it, rather than being the very ones who are denied it.

We urge the Committee to examine the provision of EMA in Scotland. Following a major consultation exercise, the EMA programme there was revised to ensure that it is better targeted at those young people who are from the lowest income families, as well as those who are considered to be vulnerable. Scotland's EMA guidance makes it very clear that young people on pre-vocational schemes are eligible to receive EMA. The guidance says that programmes of learning in a community and voluntary setting that prepare young people to enter training or further learning in a more formal setting are recognised for the purposes of EMA. It also defines vulnerable students as those who are at risk of non-participation or of underachieving, and it stipulates that there should be a degree of flexibility when administering EMA for that group of young people. That flexibility should include matters such as attendance, qualifications and the eligibility period.

We previously called on the Minister for Employment and Learning to address the deeply inequitable position here and to ensure that EMA is targeted to meet the needs of the young people who are most vulnerable, including those on pre-vocational schemes. That could be done in the context of the upcoming EMA consultation or some other way. We encourage the Committee to ensure that the issue is addressed without delay. The young people on the Give and Take scheme would also welcome an opportunity to discuss the issue with the Committee.

I will now turn to the recognition of pre-vocational schemes such as the Give and Take scheme. Specialised programmes, such as ours, work successfully with young people who are NEET. Independent evaluation has concluded that it is a model that works and that should be sustained, yet those schemes do not get the recognition that is accorded to Training for Success programmes and to further education colleges. We suggest that there is considerable merit in the Department's reviewing its training provision system with a view to enhancing the current system so that all training is provided through a recognised training organisation. That would mean that we could move to a more inclusive model that supports a continuum of service provision that encompasses mainstream training and specialised pre-vocational training programmes such as the Give and Take scheme.

It is clear that the implementation of the strategy must be high on the Executive's agenda. Although the draft Programme for Government contains a welcome commitment to support people into training and employment by providing skills and training, with an emphasis on young people, in our view, it does not seriously address the issue of young people who are NEET. We urge the Committee to ensure that

the implementation of the Pathways to Success strategy is more explicitly prioritised in the Programme for Government. At the moment, it is referenced as a building block around NEETS, but there is no specific delivery target for the strategy, which is something that we would like to see in the Programme for Government.

We do not have very much detail on the proposed implementation mechanism. However, we would expect that those with responsibility for the strategy would have the benefit of the learning that Departments that have implemented other cross-departmental strategies gained. We are actively involved in the NEETs strategy forum, and we are supportive of the proposed forum group for stakeholders and of its being represented on the joint steering and implementation body. The importance of parity of representation from the voluntary and community sector and others on that body must be emphasised.

Looking at the next steps, we are concerned by the protracted nature of the process in developing this cross-departmental strategy. The consultation ended in June last year, yet officials recently indicated to this Committee that the final strategy and associated action plan are not expected to be agreed by the Executive until March or April this year. In the interim, as we know, youth unemployment figures have remained stubbornly high, underlining the urgency of finalising a strategy and a detailed implementation plan. We urge the Committee to continue to monitor the development of the strategy and action plan very closely and to impress on the Department the need to expedite that work.

Ms Yiasouma: In conclusion, we want to leave you with a young person's words on the supports that are required.

Sarah was 17, and, due to alcohol misuse and domestic violence in the home, she had a care history since she was 11. Before I go on, I will point out that the names that we have used have obviously been changed and that we have used the quotations with the permission of the young people involved. Sarah dropped out of school despite being very able academically, but she was described as a rebellious young girl who found it difficult to comply with boundaries.

Sarah was referred to our scheme and was found to be hard to engage with. Include Youth staff reported that they found working with her to be extremely challenging, as she would not communicate with them for many months. However, over time she began to trust the staff and to open up to them. She told them that she wanted to work in childcare. Staff set up a work experience opportunity with a childcare business, and, after an initial taster day, Sarah took up the work experience placement two days a week. She was also working towards her essential skills qualification and was considering going on to college to study for a childcare qualification.

Sarah's mother and her social worker praised the Give and Take staff for not giving up on her. That sort of flexibility is a core component of what many pre-vocational programmes offer young people. It is vital that the Executive commit collectively to ensuring that the Pathways to Success strategy is successful so that the Lucys, Davids and Sarahs that you heard about today, and all the other young people who constitute the part of the population that are called NEET or are at risk of becoming NEET, are supported so that they reach their full potential. That is as much as we have to say formally, and we are obviously very happy to take questions.

The Chairperson: Thank you very much.

Mr P Ramsey: Good morning to you all. I must say, it is reassuring to see a group whose contributions to the well-being of young people are so good. This Committee visited Include Youth's Give and Take scheme as part of its inquiry, and there is absolutely no doubt that they are making a difference in young people's lives.

A couple of key areas have been identified, one of which I mentioned in our earlier discussion about the end of this Committee. We invested a huge amount of time and energy into a NEET strategy. We had some study visits to Scotland and Wales, and Scotland in particular had imaginative approaches, which worked exceptionally well, to creating employment and training for young people. They worked exceptionally well because they were creative and made a difference. In our submission on the

Programme for Government, we will have to be explicit about targets for NEETs. There has to be a much more collaborative approach, and as Sarah said, explicit priorities are needed.

I understand that the Give and Take scheme will deal with 100 young people a year who do not have any incentive as a result of the situation with EMA. That will be reflected across all the other groups in Northern Ireland. I posed a question about that the previous time departmental officials were at the Committee, and, if I remember correctly, I was told that the policy unit was examining a possible change to the situation. We should firm that up with the Minister in writing.

As we come to the end of our time as a Committee, we have to appeal to the Minister, Dr Stephen Farry, as he departs, to set up a dedicated unit in the Department to prepare a strategy as soon as possible. Work on that strategy should include joined-up thinking with the Department of Education; the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister; the Department for Social Development; the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety; and all the Departments that have influence in the area.

Include Youth does exceptionally good work. However, it is difficult for it when young people — the most vulnerable in society — are not getting EMA because they are doing pre-vocational training. Scotland made the step forward, and young people in pre-vocational training there now receive that incentive. The Committee should have another discussion on the NEETs strategy and the direction in which we want to see it going. It is our legacy.

The Chairperson: There was no question there, just a statement of support. We will deal with the EMA issue.

Mr McElduff: My comments will be along the same lines as Pat's. I also commend the work of Include Youth.

In your presentation, you identified the major issue with EMA as being the “current discriminatory situation”. How successful do you feel that you have been to date in lobbying on that matter? In your presentation you state that you have:

“previously called on the Minister for Employment and Learning”.

Will you tell us a bit about the direct or indirect engagement that you have had with the Department and the Minister on the matter?

I agree with Pat that this is a priority issue that the Committee could deal with in a legacy document.

The Chairperson: We have accepted that. You have asked a question; let us get an answer.

Ms Yiasouma: This has been going on for some time. We worked with the previous Committee for Employment and Learning. Young people spoke to the Committee, and it agreed to table a motion for debate in the House for the then Minister, Reg Empey, to scope out in a review of EMA whether young people on pre-vocational programmes would ever be eligible for the allowance. After that, it all went very quiet, but we have now reignited the debate.

Sometimes the adults and the young people who are involved in Include Youth do not always agree, but on that issue we are as one. The young people on pre-vocational programmes have told us that the situation is unfair. They ask why their friends on mainstream programmes, whom they work as hard as, get EMA, while they get only what is called volunteer expenses.

As I said, we have reignited the debate, and the young people have written to the Minister and his officials. Sara can tell you about the sort of responses that we have been getting, but we are now more confused than when we started the process. Sara, do you want to talk about the responses that we have had from the current Administration?

Ms Boyce: As Koulla said, young people on Give and Take schemes in the different centres in which we operate across the North have written to their MLAs and to the Minister, Stephen Farry. They got a

fairly standard response, and, given that some of the young people have essential skills difficulties, it is quite difficult for them to work through the responses and make sense of them. So far, the responses have set out the current position with means-tested EMA, which will be consulted on shortly, and with non-means-tested EMA — the training allowance.

As Koulla also said, the young people on Give and Take schemes are particularly exercised about that issue. We routinely consult the young people whom we work with: they are involved in the policy work and their views are fed through. Discussions about Pathways to Success and NEETs are more nebulous and removed from their lives, but the issue around EMA is real, tangible and concrete. It would make a real difference to their lives.

We were very encouraged to see what happened in Scotland, and that is well worth careful scrutiny by the Committee. We want that position to be accepted by the Department and the Minister. We also want them to recognise the additional vulnerability of the kinds of young people with whom we work. We are trying to promote the principle of that issue.

The Chairperson: You have stated your case, and we understand that. Barry, do you want to add anything?

Mr McElduff: I am content.

The Chairperson: Please do not think that I am stopping you for the sake of it. We agree with what you have said.

Ms Gildernew: Sara, you have sold it to me. We are talking about the most vulnerable young people in our society. I was disappointed when, a few weeks ago, we received a presentation from the Department, and the title of the official on the paper was “head of the migrant workers division in Europe”, or something like that. We challenged the official on whether he was the children’s champion and the person who was taking the matter forward.

The Department has been very poor on the issue and has not prioritised it nearly as much as it should have. A lot of very good points have been made, and we should revisit the Scottish model. I make a formal suggestion that we take an all-party Committee motion to the House on the issue to highlight it and put additional pressure on the Minister to recognise that these are the most vulnerable children and young people. There is an equality issue here.

The Chairperson: We will deal with that proposal when we have heard what other Committee members have to say. I will not put the Question at this stage. Are there any other questions?

Ms Gildernew: I do not have any further questions on what has been said so far. We need action now.

The Chairperson: We shall come back to your proposal. Any other questions?

Mrs Overend: It is interesting to hear that there has already been analysis done. You talked about the Scottish model. We should dig that out and look at it. I am new to the Committee this mandate, but perhaps more analysis is needed.

You said that you felt that there needs to be a higher level of engagement with employers. How do you propose to do that?

Ms Yiasouma: We thought about that. There are many different types of models. One is about incentivising employers to take on young people. The health and social care trusts have been working in partnership with the Equality Commission with the young people coming out of care to give them placements and training and not let them fall foul of some of the employment equality legislation.

One of the first things that we suggest is that employers, both private and public, be included on the steering group to discuss the development of a NEETs strategy. Although young people have to be encouraged to fulfil their strengths and meet their aspirations around the work that they want to do — of course they must — there must be a connection with the workplace and the economy. We can only

be sure about that once the employers are at the table. We have not seen much evidence of employers. Government is a huge employer, yet it does not do that much to bring in young people and make it easier for them, particularly the hardest-to-reach young people, by giving them those opportunities.

Employers need to be brought to the table. We can have the conversation about whether they should be incentivised or whether it is more about corporate social responsibility, which we would argue that it is. We know that all the employers who work with us do so voluntarily. They give of their time. It is the best experience for the employer, whether it be in the private sector in a big company — you heard about Homebase — or in a one-person operation in a village in County Fermanagh. There is a connection, and the young people get so much out of it. They just love going to work. Employers have demonstrated a willingness: they just need to be invited to the table.

Mrs Overend: It is about finding a way to get that information out to employers. That might be done through existing organisations in government that feed into businesses —

Ms Yiasouma: You talked about Invest NI, which has been very receptive. When Invest NI talks to new businesses, surely, without forcing its business proposals, it can make it some sort of requirement to look at how they can work with young people and give them entry-level jobs that have prospects.

Mr D McIlveen: Thank you for your presentation. We have spoken privately, and, hopefully, I come from a friendly perspective on this. However, I wonder whether I could play the bad cop for a minute or two. One of the girls whom you spoke to said that she would:

“recommend the Give and Take scheme for anyone who doesn’t think that they would stick at mainstream education.”

The real world, if we can put it that way, functions through people who have stuck at mainstream education. Employers are looking for people who have stuck at mainstream education. On the other side, it was interesting and encouraging to hear that the likes of Homebase get involved. When you send your pupils to those places of work, they quite enjoy it and get a lot of good experience out of it.

It is putting the cart before the horse, because it is almost too late at that stage, and the young people will have missed their opportunity to do well in mainstream education. Could some sort of work be done with the Department of Education, for example, on trying to eliminate the problem before it becomes a problem? What do you see as being the challenges in taking that strategy forward? Is that something that has been considered, or would you be willing to consider it in future?

Ms Yiasouma: I will ask Paddy to talk to you about the young people whom we work with and why mainstream education has not worked for them. Then I will answer your question about working with DE.

Mr Mooney: Mainstream training and mainstream education works for a substantial number of young people, but it does not work for a significant number of young people. Those young people require additional support, as there are multiple barriers preventing them from settling into mainstream education and training.

I will give you a profile of the type of young people who are at the halfway stage of the Give and Take scheme: 100% of the young people are NEET; 77% come from a care background; 74% have essential skills difficulties; 67% come from economic and social deprivation areas; 62% have experienced mental and emotional health problems; 60% have experienced abuse or neglect; 57% have unsettled accommodation issues; 56% did not complete mainstream education — over half the young people have not completed formal education; 42% have alcohol and substance misuse issues; 36% have offending backgrounds; 24% are at risk of suicide or self-harm; 17% have learning or physical disabilities; 18% are at risk of involvement with or threats from paramilitaries; and 9% are young parents.

Therefore, you can imagine the complex nature of some of the barriers that those young people face. They are unable to maintain a place because of the rigidity and inflexibility of some of the programmes

that education and training offers them. However, after approximately a year with us, half those young people will move into formal education or training. The work that we are doing is acknowledging the fact that what is required is additional support to get them to the point at which they can benefit.

Mr D McIlveen: I do not have statistics to hand, but I would not be surprised if the statistics that you gave differ vastly now from what they would have been 20 years ago. Ultimately, there is a problem, and it needs to be fixed. There is no argument about that, but is there a possibility that it could be a generational thing? Again, this goes back to the point that I made originally: how can we eliminate the problem or at least work towards eliminating it before a young person becomes one of your statistics?

Ms Yiasouma: You will have no argument from us on that. I have worked for Include Youth for nearly 14 years, and we have worked on the development of a children's strategy, working in partnership around integrated planning processes. The next evidence session is on child poverty and the suggestion that poverty is not connected to those young people. We have an education system, and I will not get into the details of it — I would be happy to if you could give us an extension of another hour, Basil. We have an education system that cannot meet the needs of those young people. Therefore, do the young people fail at education or does education fail them? We argue that it is the latter. We would prefer those issues to be dealt with when the young people are wee. We are strong advocates of early intervention and family support and of removing structural inequalities in our society, recognising that sometimes when children act up at school, they are not acting up because — excuse the language — they are bad wee buggers. They are acting up because of some trauma that they experienced and are continuing to experience at home. Until we are able to see those children differently and, therefore, meet their needs within mainstream education and training, we are going to see more and more need.

Everyone says to us that they do not want to be doing that work. However, I can see, from all the things that have come before us, that we are going to get more and more need for the young people in category C: young people with unidentifiable barriers. That is ridiculous. We should absolutely be working with those children when they are young, in their communities as well as with their families.

It is about poverty. It could be about generational inequalities and discrimination. We have to do that work. We work on a number of processes. There is a question around the strategy for children and whether it has delivered a united and integrated approach. Without wanting to use the cliché, it is about joined-up government.

Ms Boyce: To add to that, let me bring it back to the Programme for Government, which is what we are looking at. Koulla mentioned early intervention and prevention, which were behind your question on intervening at an earlier stage so that those young people do not end up falling into the NEET category. That is part of the NEETs strategy and one of its dual aims. However, we would like to see a much greater emphasis placed on early intervention and prevention in the Programme for Government. That needs to happen now.

The other bit of the jigsaw for us is the newly established Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership. It has made a very clear commitment to prioritising early intervention and prevention, but that needs to go back up the chain to ministerial level. If there is to be a subcommittee on NEETS, as officials indicated, there needs to be a strong focus in that committee on early intervention and prevention.

Ms Gildernew: I suppose, David, that society has to be fixed. If you are an 11-year-old child and your father is creeping into your room three nights a week, you are not going to do well at school. Frederick Douglass, the anti-slavery campaigner, said that it is much easier to build a strong child than to fix a broken adult. It all goes back to the beginning, before children are born and then their development. This is about much more than we can fix, but we have to make that point.

My supplementary question is to you, Paddy. Many of those children whom you mentioned will have multiple indicators. One indicator that you did not mention, and one I am curious about, is children who are carers. Have you any evidence that some young people are coming to you because they have been responsible for looking after a parent?

Ms Yiasouma: Not on our scheme, because we work a lot with young people in care, but there are others. Sometimes, those young people have come into care because their parents are unable to look after them because of their own conditions. We have sister organisations that work with dedicated young carers. I am going to get quite emotional, because those young people break my heart. It breaks my heart how we make them into adults at the age of 10. Yes, we need to keep them at home, but young carers is a massive issue. There is a lot of focus on that, but, again, that focus comes from health and social care and a little bit from education. We need to stretch that out so that people are more receptive.

Going back to your point, David, it is about the targets that we set for our children to achieve five GCSEs at age 16. Our young people have had difficulties in their lives, and we have done a lot of work around care, and so on. Those young people are not going to get five GCSEs at age 16. They may get them, with the right services and support, at 18, 19 or 20, and it is about how we make that OK and keep a continuum of service available. That may inform your deliberations around the functions of the Department. We need not to have rigid milestones and be measuring children and young people from a really difficult background against that five-GCSEs-at-age-16 target. That target may not be possible because of what they have experienced. We need to give them the chance to grow up. You are quite right, Michelle to say that young carers are a massive example of that.

The Chairperson: To conclude, a proposal is coming forward on whether we want to deal with the EMA issue. I will just highlight the strategic focus, which Koulla touched on again at the end. Category C constitutes 66% of NEETs. It is a real problem that we are not identifying the people in that category. You might want to put that in the proposal.

While the Committee deliberates on whether we want to propose a motion, I suggest, at the risk of pre-empting members, that we get the Committee Clerk to draft something and circulate it to you to see whether it meets with your approval.

Koulla, that was a very good presentation. We really appreciate it. Sometimes, the trouble when everybody agrees with everybody else is that —

Ms Yiasouma: I know.

The Chairperson: — you wonder what we will talk about. However, it is timely to bring the matter to our attention again.

You will have heard me talk earlier about Voice of Young People in Care and the event that we had. I am absolutely adamant that there is a challenge for our society to realise that those young people are not — to quote you, Koulla — “bad wee buggers”. There are severely damaged people out there, and we have to accept that they have difficulties. My experience with the vast majority of people is that, when you treat them as human beings, you form an attachment to them and feel obligated to go and deal with their issue. We need a collective communication exercise to challenge society’s understandable, but incorrect, preconceptions. We may look into that and take it forward.

The Committee is very committed to the issues that you raise and appreciative of the work that you do. Thank you all very much.

Ms Yiasouma: The feeling is mutual.

The Chairperson: You are free to go now. How do members feel about a Committee motion on EMA?

Mr P Ramsey: We talked about leaving a legacy. The legacy would be a debate in the Chamber to put a challenge the Executive. I would be very pleased to participate in that.

Mr McElduff: Effectively, you are talking about making a difference to the lives of around 135 young people. You are talking about making a tangible, concrete difference.

The Chairperson: Are members generally content, in principle, that we draft something to consider?

Mr D McIlveen: In principle, yes.

Mr P Ramsey: It would be very helpful to share the key summary points in the previous Committee's NEETs inquiry.

Ms Gildernew: And we should get information on the Scottish model.

The Chairperson: The Committee Clerk will have a chat with the Business Office to see when we can get a slot for the —

Ms Gildernew: It should not take very long, judging by some of the stuff that has been in the Order Paper this past while.

The Chairperson: I could not possibly comment.

EMA provision for those young people is inequitable, and we need to look at that. More precisely, there is a problem in that we do not really know who is in the NEET category. The ones in Include Youth are lucky, but there are other people out there.

A series of information has been requested. If we are going to propose a motion, we should get the NEETs strategy from beyond; write to the policy unit to see what it is doing; look to the Scottish model; and ask the Assembly's research people to produce a paper. If there is anything else that members feel that we ought to do, let me know. We will do all that, and I will come back to you on it next week.

Mr P Ramsey: Ensuring that some remuneration be given to young people in pre-vocational training is the number one priority for Include Youth. We should find out exactly how that was presented to the Scottish Parliament.

The Chairperson: I take it that we are agreed, in principle, that we will do all that.

Members indicated assent.