



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Employment and Learning

OFFICIAL REPORT (Hansard)

Transitional Support for NEETs: Include
Youth Briefing

6 November 2013

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

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Members present for all or part of the proceedings:

Mr Robin Swann (Chairperson)
Mr Thomas Buchanan (Deputy Chairperson)
Mr Phil Flanagan
Mr David Hilditch
Mr Fra McCann
Ms Bronwyn McGahan
Mr Alastair Ross

Witnesses:

Ms Sara Boyce	Include Youth
Mr John McComb	Include Youth

The Chairperson: I welcome Sara Boyce, who is Include Youth's policy coordinator; and Mr John McComb, who is the employability manager. You are very welcome. Thank you for hosting us here this morning and for providing this facility.

Ms Sara Boyce (Include Youth): Thank you, Chairperson. Include Youth thanks the Committee for this opportunity to brief it on the issue of young people making a successful transition from being considered not in education, employment or training (NEET) to no longer being NEET. We are particularly pleased to be able to do this in our Omagh offices, and we look forward to members joining us later this morning for the launch of our pilot project on transitional support services. John and I will take you through the presentation, which I know you have a copy of, and as we do so, we will, hopefully, try to bring it to life. We look forward to engaging in a discussion with you all afterwards.

At the outset, I would like to make a few key points. Our Give and Take scheme is aimed primarily but not exclusively at young people in or leaving care. Other organisations work with young people who are considered core NEET. Those are young people who have barriers to participation and who need to make the transition from supported employability programmes into mainstream placements. In that regard, members should note that our evidence this morning is based on our qualitative and quantitative data and research, although anecdotal evidence indicates that our experience is echoed by other training and employability providers.

I am aware that members are probably more familiar with the concept of transitions in the context of young people with disabilities moving from children's services into adult services or moving from education into adulthood. A great deal of valuable work has been done on that issue to date, and we know that the Committee will be turning its attention to it very soon. We hope that there will be some transferable learning, in practice and policy, from that work.

Transitions can mark a turning point in young people's lives, but, depending on the support structures, the available resources and the individual young person themselves, those transitions can be for the better or the worse. The impact of an unsuccessful transition into mainstream education, training or employment can have a profoundly negative impact on a young person who is NEET, but the cost to society of young people moving between options and programmes but ultimately remaining in the NEET category, described as the phenomenon of "churning", which members are probably familiar with, is also very high. It is estimated to cost an average of £56,000 in public finances per young person before retirement age, and when opportunity costs are factored in, that rises to more than £100,000. It is a huge cost for society and the economy. It is precisely for those reasons — the impact both on the young person and on wider society and the economy — that the Department for Employment and Learning (DEL) and the Executive have invested considerable resources in reducing the number of young people who are NEET. That commitment is embodied in the Pathways to Success strategy. Funding for employability programmes, such as the Give and Take scheme, represents a key element of the Government's commitment. We know that significant numbers of young people are engaging in those employability programmes. The programme funded by the European social fund (ESF) has a target of 4,500 young people, while the Collaboration and Innovation fund that has come in under the Pathways to Success strategy has a target of 6,400 young people to engage in programmes before the end of 2015. All the available evidence demonstrates that funding is well spent. On average, between 70% and 80% of young participants progress to further training, education or directly into employment.

As with other employability programmes, our flagship Give and Take scheme has a strong track record in supporting young people into mainstream education, training and employment. Our most recent figures, from December 2012, indicated that approximately three quarters move into mainstream placements, such as a further education college, the Training for Success programme or directly into employment. That success rate compares very favourably with mainstream government training programmes, such as Training for Success.

Although that is extremely positive, we have, nonetheless, been concerned for some time about how well and for how long young people sustain their mainstream placement post-Give and Take — when they leave our programme. Our staff have identified a pattern whereby some young people, having progressed into mainstream placement, were turning up on our doorstep looking for help and support as they struggled to maintain their new placements in education, training or, sometimes, employment. As a first step to addressing that issue, we carried out a tracking exercise in an attempt to identify what was happening with those young people who left Give and Take. In the period from 1 April 2010 to the end of December 2012, we had 112 young people who had positive move-ons from our scheme and went into further training, education or employment. Of those 112, 73% went into mainstream placements, and 27% moved into other supported placements, which are usually provided by other voluntary organisations. Of the 82 people who went into mainstream placements, 60% — almost two thirds — maintained their placements for at least six months. Thirty-eight percent did not maintain their placement for the first six months. The destination of 2% was unknown to us. Significantly, of the 38% of placements that broke down, almost all did so within the first three months; we tracked them in months 1, 2 and 3. The pattern was largely similar for the number of young people who went into supported placements as their onward move.

Our consultation with young people and with our project staff indicated that differing, overlapping factors contributed to placement breakdowns. These included practical problems associated with commencing a new placement — applying for grants, bus passes and understanding timetables — and also problems of a more psychological or emotional nature, such as anxiety or nervousness about going into a new class, being under pressure in class, needing space and time to talk things through and difficulties with self-motivating. The young people also highlighted to us other, more serious and deep-seated difficulties that they were dealing with during the transition period, such as disruptions caused by foster-placement changes or moving from residential care into independent living, which often coincided with the young person's turning 18. There were issues with bullying, mental health, the impact of trauma that was experienced in early childhood, the effects of addictions or the young person's engaging in offending behaviour.

Our sample was small: the number of young people whom we tracked was 112, so we must be careful not to over-interpret that data. However, it appears to us that there is a small, but significant, minority of young people who struggle to maintain progression into mainstream placement. Our view is that unless the issue is addressed, the end result will be that there is a group of young people who continue to churn through programmes without ever really moving out of the NEET category. That is undesirable for the young people themselves and also for government in their attempts to reduce the number of young people who are NEET.

In keeping with our commitment to bring about positive change in the lives of the young people whom we work with directly and also in the wider group of young people in or leaving care, we have begun to address the issue both at policy level and at practice level. I will talk briefly about the policy work that we have done. I will then hand over to John, who will talk about the practice side.

On the policy level, one of the significant issues that has emerged is around data collection and monitoring in mainstream placements — further education and Training for Success — in relation to access, participation, retention rates and outcomes achieved by this group of young people who are in or leaving care. We should point out that all the health trusts and the Health and Social Care Board collect and collate information on the engagement and progression of young people from care into education, training and employment. However, there is a real difficulty with the identification and tracking of young people in or leaving care in further education and Training for Success. Without the collation of baseline data, it is difficult to see how education and training providers can tailor effective supports and services that will meet the needs of those young people in care to support them in their journey through further education or training. It is an issue that further education colleges are actively grappling with, and the achievement by four of the six further education colleges of the Buttle quality mark for commitment to care leavers should, hopefully, provide the necessary momentum and the support to help to resolve this issue. We also know that DEL's training branch is aware of the lack of availability of disaggregated data on this group of young people. We note that the two upcoming reviews, the planned youth training review and the review of further education, provide excellent opportunities to address this issue as part of those overall reviews. I will hand over to John now to talk about the practice side.

Mr John McComb (Include Youth): Thanks, Sara. On the practice side, a key element of our response has been the establishment of a two-year pilot project on transitional support. Without wishing in any way to pre-empt the launch of the project later this morning, which I hope some of you will be able to attend, I will give you a brief overview of its purpose and how it works. During the launch, you will have an opportunity to hear directly from the project staff as well as from a young person who has benefited directly from the service.

The purpose of the pilot project, which commenced only in July 2013, is to demonstrate the effectiveness of providing transitional support to young people progressing from supported employability programmes, in this case the Give and Take scheme, into mainstream provision. The project is staffed by two transitional support workers, who work across all five health and social care trusts. They will work with each young person for six months after the Give and Take scheme and then track their progress for a further six months. Collaborative working is central to the transitional support service, and a partnership approach is taken. For example, transitional support workers will work closely with the young person's careers adviser, and I suppose that we see the strengthening of the Careers Service's role envisaged under Pathways to Success as something to be welcomed as, in our view, careers advice can make a vital contribution through supporting and signposting young people into opportunities matched to their needs. The ongoing work on enhancing DEL's client management information system so that it functions as a tracking system in the short term should also help to ensure that young people who transition between programmes do not fall through the cracks, as it were.

Finally, based on our work to date, we want to make the following suggestions on the future development of policy and practice around transitional support for this group of young people. We feel that greater attention needs to be paid to this issue than has been the case to date in the interests of providing the most effective support to young people and on delivering the Pathways to Success strategy, vision and action plan. We must all work to ensure that these young people obtain the necessary support to make successful transitions.

We know that the Committee has invested considerable time and resources in addressing the issue of young people who are NEET. As a follow-on from its hugely important inquiry, we encourage the Committee to engage with the issue of transitions and take what steps it deems appropriate to ensure that no young person ends up simply being churned through various programmes. The progression by young people who are NEET from supported programmes into mainstream provision needs to be fully researched. Information is required on the rates and duration of retention with mainstream placements, and analysis carried out of the critical factors involved. Models of successful provision from elsewhere should be researched. We feel that serious consideration should be given by DEL, in its preparation of the next ESF funding programme for 2014-2020, to the resourcing of transitional support as an integral element of employability programmes in the same way as personal development or essential skills elements, for example, are funded. The further education and training sectors need to be supported and encouraged to address issues around data collection, monitoring

and the tailoring of support for young people coming from a care background. Thank you for your attention; we are happy to answer any questions that you may have.

The Chairperson: Thanks, Sara and John. Sara, you referred to some of your own research at the start. How was that collected and over what period?

Ms Boyce: I will let John talk about that, because he led on it.

Mr McComb: It was over a period of two years and nine months. We went back through our files. We have a database that collects the information on the young people and where they have moved on to. We have always attempted to track the young people after the Give and Take scheme for three months, six months and 12 months after they have left us, which is not easy. It can be difficult to find some of the young people months after they have left the service, but we use our database to do that, as well as our staff, who stay in contact with the young people once they have left the scheme. We picked a period of two years and nine months, and we collated our information over it.

The Chairperson: You said that 27% or so dropped out within the first three months. Where did they go?

Mr McComb: It is a bit of a mixed bag. Some of them re-engaged with other programmes, but a significant number did not. They were going back to not being engaged in any programme; they were signing on. It is a pilot programme that we are running, so the learning is going on now, but we feel that our transitional project will put in quite intensive support for that first three months to try to enable those young people to maintain their placements. The support will continue for a further three months, and then we will start to try to taper it off so that the young people can engage with the natural supports that are around, because we will not be around forever. The first three months are critical.

The Chairperson: In regard to young people who are not in employment, education or training, there are a lot of programmes from the Department and from other Departments. Is it a case of the Department looking at an issue rather than an individual?

Ms Boyce: I think that it might be. It may be more of a pattern or systemic.

The Chairperson: Has it come up with an acronym to challenge rather than the individuals? Have they just got a block now called NEET that everybody wants to solve without actually working with individual cases to try to get to the root of the problem?

Ms Boyce: Where we are coming from, we say that you always need to work with the individual; that is the strength of programmes such as Give and Take, as well as other employability programmes. It is tailored to the individual, and they have an action plan. That is a positive development from the Pathways to Success strategy. The Department is now, with careers, putting in place an individualised action plan for each young person. That is something that we advocate.

As we said, and as the figures demonstrate, it is 60% of the young people, so we do not want to exaggerate the scale of the issue. Almost two thirds of those young people, with intensive support through a programme such as Give and Take, make a positive move on and successfully transition into the mainstream. However, it is about looking at that other group of young people. That is how the transitional support service is built. It is about working with each individual young person and working out what level of support that young person needs. As you will hear later, for some of the young people it may be just a phone call once a week to check how they are getting on in college; others, however, particularly in the first month or two, may need a level of intensity, perhaps a phone call in the morning when they go to college and in the evening to check in with them again. It has to be tailored.

Mr McComb: We target only young people moving on from Give and Take into mainstream provision. We are not offering transitional support per se to young people moving into other ESF-funded programmes, which should have good support packages built around those young people. We are looking to support young people moving into colleges, training organisations and employment, not other ESF-funded programmes, because that would be duplication.

Mr Buchanan: Just to follow on from that, it appears that, although a lot of work has already been done for the NEETs category, transitional support is now key in order to progress that. Looking at the

Pathways to Success strategy, vision and action plan, are you satisfied that the proper structures are in place to provide that required support? If not, what do you feel the Department should be doing to provide the extra support that is required throughout the transitional period of the people who are NEET?

Do you have any pointers for the Department so that it knows what gaps need to be closed in the transitional period?

Ms Boyce: Yes. The information and evidence that we are giving this morning are based solely on the work that we have done ourselves; we also add the proviso that it is a small number of young people. However, it tells us that there seems to be an issue. Part of the reason why we are doing the pilot is to test out our hypothesis. As well as giving the group of young people support, we are monitoring and evaluating its impact closely. At the end of two years, if our hypothesis is right, we will see an increase in retention. However, what is needed is more research and scrutiny and much more examination of what is happening across the board because we have looked only at our own project. It is based on more than 25 years' experience of providing Give and Take programmes to young people, but we think that it is something that the Department needs to turn its attention to more. There is a real opportunity here, with the next ESF funding round, to develop the programme from 2014 to 2020. We are convinced that, in the same way as essential skills, personal development or work placements are part of a programme for a young person, we cannot bring them to the end of their 12 months or 18 months and say, "The best of luck in college". There needs to be some attention paid to that to get them over that bridge.

We are primarily working with young people who are in or leaving care. Other young people usually have a family support mechanism around them in their community who check in with them when they come back from college or work and give them practical and emotional support. The young people whom we work with often do not have that, so we will be arguing, based on our work to date, that it needs serious attention. We recommend that the Department give serious consideration to looking at that. Otherwise, longer term, it will ultimately be counterproductive.

There has been much more longitudinal, small-scale research done on it in England, and one of the principal researchers in the field is Professor Robin Simmons from Huddersfield University. On 21 and 22 November, he will be speaking at DEL's ESF conference on young people who are NEET. He has led a great deal of research, and, hopefully, we will talk about the evidence from that research. One of the small-scale projects that they looked at over a two-year period followed a group of 15 young people. Of those 15 young people, 10 were NEET at the end of the two years, so it is not very encouraging at all. Three of them went on to another course, one was doing voluntary work and one was in paid employment. That will be published in book form next year, but, hopefully, Professor Simmons will talk about it. The same level of research has not been done here that we think needs to be done. The resourcing needs to go into that critical transitional period.

Mr Buchanan: I suppose that the key to success is those young people moving on. Apart from research, what support does the Department need to provide to get those people moving on rather than dropping off at the very edge after the two years? You are saying that the Department needs to provide support, and it is all right doing your research, but what type of support is required? Can you point to specific support that is required to take them on after that two-year period?

Ms Boyce: I will respond, and then John might talk more about the type of support that we see works. We have the pilot project in place, but there are many players involved in supporting a young person to transition successfully. In further education or Training for Success, there have been positive developments. Four out of the six colleges have a Buttle quality mark, and, across the UK, further education colleges and universities, such as the University of Ulster, have it. In order to get that accreditation or quality mark, the college or university has to be able to demonstrate how it will support a young person from a care background. Some of that can be financial support, which a lot of these young people need because they do not have family support. That can be in the form of bursaries. The University of Ulster recently announced that it has doubled its bursary, to £1,000. That financial support can be used for accommodation. However, a lot of the support for young people comes in the form of a mentor, who can help them to solve problems in the early months at college or in a training placement so that those problems do not become insurmountable and cause the young person to drop out. It is not just down to the Department, but the training organisations, Training for Success and the colleges, etc. The Careers Service also has a role to play. It is about bringing together and co-ordinating those types of support.

Mr McComb: As we mentioned earlier, there is, hopefully, an opportunity in the next round of ESF funding for 2014-2020 for organisations to share some of the learning from the pilot programme and build in packages to support young people to maintain those move-ons. It is all right to get to the stage where they move on but, if significant numbers are falling away in the first three months, they end up coming back to us as re-referrals or we lose them, and they sign on and do nothing. We definitely feel that that is a live issue and that we need to do something about it. We need to work in partnership with the organisations that the young people have moved to — the training organisations, the Careers Service, the colleges and employers — to actively support young people once they move on. If you are available to attend the launch later this morning, you will hear what that means on a practical level on the ground. When we talk about intensive support, it is exactly that for the first three months. If that is what helps young people to get through that period and successfully maintain their move-ons, it is well worth doing.

Ms Boyce: There is a very strong cost benefit argument for all this. The next ESF tranche is something in the region of £450 million to £500 million, but it will invest a considerable percentage of that in employability programmes for young people which, the evidence shows, are working. Young people are getting a 70% to 80% positive outcome from the programmes. However, it is about making sure that they successfully move on and maintain their placements. Not to do so would be the worst result for the young person, because it would damage their confidence and cause a backwards slide. Economically, it does not make sense to get them that far and then withdraw support abruptly. It is about tapering it off and helping the young person to identify and build up the natural supports around them. If they are in residential care, staff in the residential care home have a role and, obviously, foster parents support young people. It is about looking at the supports that exist and skilling people up, rather than having to put in huge extra financial resources.

Mr F McCann: I want to follow on from what Thomas said. I am interested in the whole project but, obviously, I have concerns that a huge number of people who are NEET drop off the edge and are left to their own devices. You have a particular focus on that group. Although there is a fall-off rate, you are, as you say, able to maintain the level at 70% or more, which is good to hear. You also said that a lot of what you do depends on quite a number of different partners, such as the Careers Service or care homes. Do you not believe, first, that there should be one focus on how to deal with people, and then bring in whatever expertise there is? When you have to rely on so many people, it lessens the impact that you hope to have.

You talked about your resource capacity. If you had additional resources, would you be able to reach out more and bring more people in? At the end of all this, it is not only about providing a level of training, but trying to ensure that people move into sustainable employment in the future.

Ms Boyce: I will try to answer the first question, and maybe John will answer the point about additional resources and whether we could do more if we had more money. You are right: young people in care or leaving care can be interacting or engaging with an awful lot of different agencies and services. For the young person, that is part of what the transitional support worker does. You will hear more about that later. It is about helping the young person to make sense of all that and helping the system to be a bit more coordinated. It is also about getting the other organisations and agencies to coordinate, rather than the young person having to make sure that they are much more coordinated in how the support is delivered. Is that what you were asking about?

Mr F McCann: Yes, it is about the response. When you are trying to reach out to so many different organisations, it can be confusing for the young person. If you have a programme, it can be confusing to use because, if there is a delay in one of the organisations, that has to impact on your capacity to be able to deliver the right programme.

Ms Boyce: Yes. It is very important that there is some type of brokerage among all the various agencies and organisations.

Mr McComb: Of course we would welcome any more resources that come our way. We are here to talk about the Give and Take scheme today, but we know from our colleagues who run similar programmes with other NEET young people that that is an area in which they would like to be able to do more work. However, until now, they have not had the opportunity to factor in costings for offering that transitional support.

Mr F McCann: I know that you are here to talk about the Give and Take scheme, but you should never miss an opportunity to argue the thing. The fact of life is that you particularly focus on a certain

group of people. There are, obviously, many more people out there who could benefit from the schemes that you are running. People are losing out; it is about how you cater for and encourage them.

Mr McComb: One of the big things that we want to do on the back of the pilot programme is to share the learning. We want other organisations doing similar work to take on the challenge of what we hope will be best practice. We want to stop young people successfully completing our programme, moving on, and then coming back to us. That happens, and it happens with all the other projects. We need to stop young people taking one step forward and two back.

Ms Boyce: Following on from that, the most recent figure for young people who are NEET is something like 41,000. It seems to fluctuate; it goes up into the 50,000s, and then it goes down to maybe 41,000 or 46,000 and back again. When you had a presentation from the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA), the statistician said that it was not particularly statistically significant if it moves within the range of 10,000 or 15,000 young people.

Mr F McCann: It is if you are NEET.

Ms Boyce: Yes. It certainly is for the young person. Include Youth's Give and Take programme is quite specialised; it is primarily for young people who are in care or are leaving care. They are referred by a social worker from the trust, so it is quite a specialised programme. It is very tailored, and there is a lot of intensive support. We have been taking the learning from the programme, because we know what works; we know the essential ingredients and how it works for the young people. We go out and work with other voluntary partners, particularly community organisations. We got funding under the collaboration and innovation fund for our START programme. That is operating in Lisburn, Ballymena and Poleglass with community-based partners: Alternatives in Ballymena, YMCA in Lisburn and Youth Initiatives in Poleglass. It is about building up capacity in communities so that they can hold onto those young people; they are better able, better equipped and have the skills to run the types of programmes that work with the young people.

Equally, we have been involved over the past few years with the Youth Works programme. I do not know whether members have heard of that. It was funded by the Department of Education and the International Fund for Ireland (IFI) for 16- to 17-year-olds. It is run on a cross-community basis, so it has a community/good relations element built into it. There is a consortium of community partners. That programme has now come to an end. We cannot do everything; our programme is quite specialised, but it is about the learning and what works, getting that out there and supporting others to do it as well.

Ms McGahan: Most of my questions been covered, but I have one additional point on the placement breakdowns that you talked about. Do all of those young people go onto jobseeker's allowance?

Mr McComb: Not all of them; some come back into other supported employability programmes. They may be presented back to us to see whether we can do a bit more work with them. They may go into other programmes, or they may end up being —

Ms McGahan: Yes. I have a concern as someone who deals with welfare work in my Dungannon office. Somebody who has been taken off sickness benefits is asked to fill out a jobseeker's allowance form, and they have to sign a declaration about whether they are fit, well and able to work. If my constituents are not fit, able and well, I advise them not to sign that declaration, and there is nothing that they can do about it because the question is asked on the jobseeker's allowance form. You cannot sign that if you are not fit, well or able to work. I am concerned that young people suffering from mental health difficulties are signing on. They need to be advised that they should not be signing on, because they should not be forced out to work if they are not fit for it. I just wanted to make that comment. I think that that is a quite serious issue.

Ms Boyce: Have you talked to the likes of Citizens Advice or Advice NI to get their steer on that?

Ms McGahan: We engage with Citizens Advice, but, in our office, which deals with welfare work, if a constituent who has been taken off sickness benefits but is still on a slap of medication comes to me after being turned down at tribunal, I would say to them, "You are not fit to work, so don't be signing that declaration". They cannot be forced to go onto jobseeker's allowance. I just wanted to flag that

up with you. I think that that is something that needs to be drilled down on with respect to young people who are very vulnerable.

Mr Flanagan: Thanks for the presentation and the chance to be here; it is great not to have to go to Belfast for the day. *[Laughter.]* I have been told that the meeting started at 11.00 am because we have only one oral briefing, but I think that it is because the road from Belfast to Omagh is longer, apparently, than the road from Omagh to Belfast. Anyway, in Include Youth's work, how many clients, roughly, do you operate with at present?

Mr McComb: In the Give and Take scheme, we operate with approximately 140 young people a year, but, taking in the other projects that we are involved with, I am sure that the number is over 200 young people.

Mr Flanagan: What is the geographical breakdown of where those people come from? Are they everywhere or mainly in Belfast?

Mr McComb: We have contracts with all the health trusts and work right across Northern Ireland. Each of the five trusts have 12 contracted places with us.

Mr Flanagan: Are people referred by the trust?

Mr McComb: Yes, by social workers —

Ms Boyce: As well as our office below us here, we have offices in Derry, Belfast, Newtownards, Ballymena, Dungannon, Enniskillen, Armagh and Omagh.

Mr Flanagan: Is demand much greater than what you currently cater for? Are you turning people away? Are there people who are not being looked after but should be?

Mr McComb: At times, we have a small waiting list, but it is never anything more than small. Over the years — the Give and Take scheme has been going since 1988 — we have been able to work out what our capacity is and what the need is. Therefore, it is now fairly well balanced. When there is a waiting list, it is small. Even when a young person is on the waiting list, we invite them in and try to engage with them and offer them various programmes while they are waiting.

Mr Flanagan: What are the biggest barriers that need to be addressed that your clients, the people that you deal with, face?

Mr McComb: They face multiple barriers. We have talked a lot this morning about the care experience, which is a major barrier for young people. Most young people who join our scheme are aged between 16 and 18, so they are going through a transitional stage just by being in that age bracket, and coping with all the things that accompany that. Coming from a care background would be a fairly big barrier. We work with young people who have been using drugs and alcohol. We have young people with poor mental health. The vast majority of our young people have had a poor educational experience. The majority of young people who come our way have no qualifications. A core component of our scheme — we employ our own tutors — is to offer young people essential skills in maths, English, ICT and a whole range of accredited programmes to try to build up their portfolio of qualifications. Poor educational experience is a fairly big barrier, as is coming from a care background and some risky lifestyles that a number of our young people tend to engage with. A lack of family support is another big issue.

Mr Flanagan: So you deal with the most complex cases?

Mr McComb: Yes. If a social worker phones us to make a referral, our first question is this: can the young person cope with a mainstream placement? We ask whether they could go to college or to a training organisation. If they could, they should not be coming our way. We are at the stage before that. Our whole drive is to build up the young person's confidence, self-esteem and core employability skills and to get them moved on. That is the point of transition. We want them to move on and not come back.

Mr Flanagan: I will give you a tip for the next time you present to the Committee. We have heard from the Prince's Trust. It is all well and good hearing from people who are delivering the scheme, but I bet you that, if you asked any of the 11 Committee members who were there which person they remember, they will say it was the person who went through the scheme. So, the next time you are presenting to the Committee, bring somebody with you who has been through the scheme. That is the person who will stick out for us. I know that that is happening later, but this meeting is being reported by Hansard, and it will go on record. The next time you are before the Committee, bring somebody who went through your scheme.

Ms Boyce: We absolutely agree with you, Phil. It was something that we had thought about, and, in fact, Jason, who is a young person, will speak later. We did that back in March. We know that that is what works and that that is the voice that people remember. We are very conscious of that and of who members want to hear from. That makes sense. Two young people came up in March and gave evidence to the careers inquiry. That was very positive for not only the Committee but for the young people. They have had work placements since.

May I extend an invitation on the back of that? I know that some Committee members have been to see our Give and Take scheme and other things across Northern Ireland, but we extend an open invitation to members to come and meet the young people. Sometimes, that works best for them because, depending on the young person, it can be a little bit challenging for them to sit in front of a Committee like this. They enjoy it when Committee members or MLAs come out to our office and sit over a cup of tea. Hopefully, you will get to meet the young people when you go upstairs.

Mr Flanagan: Finally, if there were one message that you would like us to bring back to Stephen Farry, or any of the Ministers, what would it be? What is the one thing that you want to see being done?

Ms Boyce: If we have to narrow it down to one thing, at this point I think it would be around transitional support. We would say to the Department that it needs to start to pay attention to that and to recognise the need to put resources into it. Otherwise, there is a risk. The figures are starting to tell us that a proportion of young people will end up becoming NEET, which is not a result that anyone wants. We would ask the Department to look seriously at the issue and to make a recommendation at the next ESF funding round, because that is where the resources need to go for this population of young people. We are very keen for the Committee to bring that message to the Department and to the Minister.

Mr Flanagan: That is no problem. I will see what I can do.

Mr Hilditch: Thank you for your presentation. You mentioned your links with the community sector. What level of links do you have with the private sector?

Mr McComb: I suppose that a core part of the programme is around work experiences for the young people, so we engage with the employers to provide us with —

Mr Hilditch: How do you find that at the moment?

Mr McComb: It is always a challenge, but I am trying to build up a database of employers who will support our young people. We work at that continually. Very recently, we ran the "Blow Your Socks Off" employer campaign. Hopefully, all of you got a pair of socks. *[Laughter.]* The big drive behind that was to build up strategic partnerships with employers, as well as with others. We sent out lots of those to employers. We are following that up by meeting employers and asking them to provide us with work tours, tasters, which are opportunities for young people to do a day or two in the workplace, and longer-term individual work placements. We work with as many appropriate employers as we can — employers who are going to offer the right kind of support to the young people we are working with.

Ms Boyce: David, I know that your question was about the private sector, but we are also very focused on the public sector. We are focused on the trusts, in the first instance, but also on Departments and using any existing opportunities or models, such as social clauses in public procurement or any type of positive action measures. Include Youth delivers an employability programme on behalf of two trusts — the Western Trust and the Belfast Trust — for young people leaving care. We are contracted by those two trusts to deliver that service. It happens across all five trusts, and we deliver it for those two. Part of that is working with the trusts, as a public sector

employer, to provide work placements or to ring-fence posts for young people who come from a care background to try to level the playing field. We would like to see more development and more job opportunities in that sphere of public sector employment.

Mr Hilditch: Councils and local government.

Ms Boyce: Exactly.

The Chairperson: Sara and John, thanks very much for your presentation and for answering members' questions.