

“Entry to Employment” (E2E) programme

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March, 2021

Key Features of the Entry to Employment Programme

Operation Date: 2002 – 2010

Target Population: Young people Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) age 16 – 19 years

Purpose: To support transition through a work-based programme for young people not ready for employment, apprenticeships, further education or training, with low or no qualifications and high social disadvantage

Introduction

The ‘Entry to Employment’ (E2E) programme was targeted at young people who were not ready to take up an apprenticeship, Level 2 structured education or to secure employment, and who were at risk of, or were already NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training). E2E was a partnership between the Learning and Skills Council (LSC)¹, Connexions,² Local Authorities and a range of local agencies. E2E was piloted in 2002 and ran from 2003 to 2010. The programme offered learning opportunities through ‘three interdependent strands: basic and key skills, vocational skills and development, and personal and social development’ (Spielhofer, 2003, p.1). At its introduction, E2E was suggested to be innovative and adaptable to support a successful transition to employment because of its individualised and flexible provision for young people (Spielhofer, 2003). E2E brought together the Life, Skills and Preparation Training programme and Level 1 vocational programme into one programme, to improve transitions and onward progression to further training or employment. However, the programme was later criticised for continuing a narrow framing for young people of individualised responsibility for securing employment, a lack of employer engagement and for a lack of progression to recognised qualifications (Simmons, 2009; Ofsted, 2010). E2E was replaced in 2010 by the *Foundation in Learning* provision which required learners to work towards recognised qualifications (Ofsted, 2013).

¹Learning and Skills Council funded and planned post 16 Further Education and was abolished 2010

²The Connexions service was disbanded in 2013, being replaced by the coalition government by school led responsibility for careers information and guidance (CIAG)

Context

E2E aimed to make a significant contribution to reducing the number of young people who were NEET by offering them access to individualised, flexible provision. During E2E's delivery from 2002-2010, the school leaving age was 16 years. Most young people continued in post-16 education and training. Youth transitions were becoming more complex, particularly for young people who did not follow an academic route, and who left compulsory education with few, if any, qualifications (Simmons, 2009). E2E supported 50,000 young people in the first year. Young people on the E2E programme were suggested to be some of the most vulnerable in society, predominantly from high socioeconomic disadvantage and often with complex social and educational needs. These included prior exclusion, youth offending, Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND), low confidence, severe personal problems, and those who were undecided or drifting between options (Simmons, 2009). But evaluations contested this simple, underclass narrative, suggesting nuanced strengths in these cohorts (Simmons and Thompson, 2011). E2E attempted to support a range of eighteen factors representing complex, sometimes generational barriers:

- **Education and employment:** participation; achievement; basic skills; key skills; life skills; aspirations
- **Social and behavioural development:** identity and self-image; attitudes and motivation; relationships within family and society; risks of (re) offending
- **Family and environmental factors:** capacity of parents/carers; family history and functioning; social and community factors; housing; income
- **Personal health factors:** physical health; emotional wellbeing; substance use issues.

Practitioners worked one-to-one with young people, aiming to build strong personal relationships and trust. Learning pathways included outward bound activities, team-building exercises, IT skills, programmes that led to certificates, work experience and help in job searching. Active Labour Market Programmes (ALMPs) such as E2E form part of government intervention to support disadvantaged young people's transition to the labour market. But there is limited evidence of the efficacy of ALMPs and concerns that such programmes funnel young people into low skill, low-value work (Simmons, 2009).

Evaluation

E2E was evaluated between 2003 and 2010, focusing on young people's perceptions of the programme, and practitioner views and practice. Although initial evaluations of E2E were positive about the personalised support and relationships developed by the programme, later evaluations took a more critical view of the progressions and employment outcomes for this group of young people (Spielhofer, 2003; Simmons, 2009). A qualitative study was carried out by NFER in 2003 for the Learning and Skills Council. Interviews took place in six pathfinder areas, with one hundred and twenty-seven young people aged mainly 17 years. Participants had very low expectations of E2E, because of their prior education experience. The study found E2E was effective in reengaging young people in education through personal one-one support and practical help from advisers which built trust. However, E2E was criticised for not fully engaging all young people in programmes, not accurately assessing baseline skills, and a lack of progression. (Spielhofer, 2003).

E2E was also evaluated in 2008-2009 by the University of Huddersfield (Simmons and Thompson, 2011). This qualitative study involved interviews with sixty-three participants (learners, tutors, Connexions staff) and eighty-seven hours of observations in two Local Authorities. There were high levels of personal commitment for young people by practitioners, but "practice was often constrained by the social matrix in which E2E operates, and the resource constraints of supporting learners with multiple forms of disadvantage" (Simmons and Thompson, 2011 p. 449). The learning culture was affected by the prevailing social discourse to young people NEET at the time. By 2008 the programme was strongly classed, traditionally gendered and was suggested to stigmatise the young people involved. E2E was described as a 'sink course' and for 'troubled teens' by parents, but learners were more positive (Simmons and Thompson, 2011, p.449). Importantly, the evaluation highlighted that the E2E cohort had strengths and heterogeneity often missed in policy discourse of young people who are NEET; "half have experienced paid work, only a quarter had no GCSE passes, and nearly half the learners had at least passes at level C and above. All had specific aspirations for employment or Further Education, and some aimed at university or professional occupations", reflecting 'ordinary families' rather than an underclass (Simmons and Thompson, 2011, p. 448).

Lessons Learnt

Entry to Employment (E2E) provides a range of lessons for policymakers and practitioners who seek to support young people who are NEET into employment. Policy narratives of young people NEET as a homogenous group who are hard to reach, challenging and affected by multiple disadvantages hid many positive behaviours including educational achievement, gifted and talented young people failed by the school system, engagement with prior work experience, and high aspirations including for university or professional qualifications. E2E was valued for the personalised pathway of support offered for young people. Positive relationships were built by committed professionals working one-one with young people who had often had negative school experiences. Short courses allowed disengaged learners to connect and achieve. However, E2E directed young people into lower skill, small steps personalised training, rather than mainstream qualifications. Progression and qualifications were not central to E2E, which risked young people being trapped in low work-no work cycles (Spielhofer et al, 2003; Simmons, 2009; Ofsted, 2010).

At a local level, positive outcomes came from a shared vision to reduce the proportion of young people NEET across a range of partners to deliver provision, from area-based targeting of resources alongside individual provision for young people. Connexions played a key part in coordinating the partners and monitoring the engagement of young people. (Simmons, 2009; Ofsted, 2010). Vocational education and training provision was patchy, fragmented and not joined up for young people with learning difficulties or disabilities. E2E reinforced already classed and gendered occupational stratification in vocational routes. Employers were not sufficiently engaged in the work-based programmes and curriculum opportunities lacked the skills and work experience needed for jobs (Keep and James, 2015). Policy pressure to reduce the number of young people who were NEET meant that any job could be considered a policy success, including 'poor quality jobs. Researchers also highlighted the lack of longitudinal data on long term employment trajectories of these cohorts of young people (Simmons and Thompson,2011; KCL, 2021).

In conclusion, where E2E schemes were successful in supporting young people into employment, education or training, there was high coordination of resources in Local Authorities. E2E and policy narratives underestimated the prior education, work experience and ambition of some young people who were NEET, and their capacity to engage in mainstream provision (Lupton et al, 2021). Although E2E was successful in supporting progression to employment, the jobs secured tend to be low paid and/or low skilled. Higher focus is needed by programmes such as E2E on local demand for labour, and how progressions and qualifications could support access to quality jobs for young people (Simmons, 2009; Simmons and Thompson,2011; Ofsted, 2010).

Relevance to Current Policy

Young people who spend time NEET are at risk of long-term unemployment, low paid or low-quality work across adulthood, with risks for physical and mental health (Powell, 2018). Covid-19 has disproportionately affected employment for young people, alongside significant disruption to education. The most disadvantaged young people, and with the lowest educational qualifications are most at risk of becoming or remaining NEET during Covid -19 (Gustafsson, 2020). The percentage of young people who are NEET remains historically low, at 11.6%, but had the highest rise Oct-Dec 2020, with large numbers of young people still furloughed (ONS, 2021). Vocational education and training (VET) pathways remain fragmented and complex, particularly for the lowest attainers, or for young people with complex needs (DfE, 2020a).

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