



**NIACRO'S EVIDENCE TO THE COMMITTEE
FOR EMPLOYMENT AND LEARNING
INQUIRY INTO YOUNG PEOPLE NOT IN
EMPLOYMENT, EDUCATION OR TRAINING
(NEETs)**

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1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 NIACRO welcomes the decision by the DEL Committee to hold an inquiry into young people classified as NEET. We are hopeful that the terms of reference outlined by the Committee will ensure the Department of Education and Learning (DEL) develop a full education, training and employment strategy, inclusive for all young people, particularly those on the margins of society. Therefore, NIACRO welcomes the opportunity to respond to the invitation to make a submission to the Employment and Learning Committee's inquiry into young people not in education training or employment.
- 1.2 *Our Children and Young People-Our Pledge*, the ten year strategy issued by the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister states: "There is evidence that despite significant investment by government over many years, there is insufficient progress being made to improve the lives of our most marginalised and disadvantaged children and young people." It goes onto say: "where targeted interventions are needed to remove or narrow the gaps for particular groups of children and young people, they too, must be available".
- 1.3 To NIACRO, this pledge highlights the need for a Northern-Ireland specific strategy to deal with NEET. Young people involved in the criminal justice system are more likely to be socially excluded and marginalised. It is time Government adopted a consistent approach to meeting the needs of this vulnerable group and afford them equal opportunity to be educated, trained and employed. A NEET Strategy should be supported by the whole of the Northern Ireland Executive and should act as a key to a wider strategy to reduce crime and its impact on people and communities.
- 1.4 NIACRO wishes to note that we believe the acronym NEET is pejorative. We prefer the terminology refer to the full title of young people not in education, employment or training. However, as NEET is the preferred term, we will refer to it as such in this submission.
- 1.5 NIACRO's response is based on practical experiences working with young people who are involved in the criminal justice system and those at risk of offending. The recommendations we make are borne out of 40 years of experience working with vulnerable young people, classified as NEET.

"I didn't like school, so I didn't go back after my third year. Nobody came to see me or my mother, so I just played my X-box or went into town" (Male 16yrs)

**"I didn't go to school much after I left my primary. I went to secondary school until Christmas. A teacher came to see us but I didn't go back. I went to EOTAS for about 4 weeks and left. I'm okay at writing, but I can't read big words"
(Female, 17 yrs)**

"I wasn't doing any GCSE's so I was told not to come back after Halloween, so I didn't. Nobody came to see me so I just ran about the estate with my mates." (Male 16yrs)



2. BACKGROUND

NIACRO

- 2.1 NIACRO, the Northern Ireland Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders, is a voluntary organisation, working for 40 years to reduce crime and its impact on people and communities. NIACRO provides services under the headings of; working with children and young people who offend; providing services to families and children of offenders; supporting offenders and ex-prisoners in the community and working with prisoners.
- 2.2 NIACRO receives funding from, and works in partnership with all the main criminal justice agencies in Northern Ireland.

OUR SERVICES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE WHO ARE NEET

Youth Employability Programme

- 2.3 A service for young people referred to us by the Youth Justice Agency and the Probation Board for Northern Ireland (PBNI). It is funded by the Youth Justice Agency and the Department of Justice with an additional grant from PBNI.
- 2.4 The Youth Employability programme receives approximately 170 referrals per annum of young people who meet any or all of the following criteria - :
- Leaving the Juvenile Justice Centre.
 - A juvenile released from Hydebank Wood Young Offenders Centre.
 - May be subject to Bail Conditions.
 - Under the supervision of a Probation Officer.
 - Under the supervision of the Youth Justice Agency's Priority Youth Offender Programme (PYOP).
 - Subject to the conditions of a Youth Conference Plan or Order.

And who are:-

- Aged 16-18 years.
 - Disengaged from education, training or employment.
- 2.5 In 2009/10, the programme has dealt with 171 young people. Of this number - :
- **45%** were early school leavers.
 - The average age of the school leavers was **13.5 years**.
 - **50%** had no qualifications.
 - **74%** sit at Entry Level 3 or below for numeracy and literacy skills.
- 2.6 On average, a young person has engagement with the programme for approximately six months. However, we can engage with a young person for up to 18 months, depending on their individual needs. With an increasing number of referrals coming from PYOP, whose needs are more complex, the amount of time service users will spend with NIACRO is expected to intensify.
- 2.7 The programme has also responded to requests from the Youth Justice Agency to prioritise two key areas.



The first is the Greater Belfast area, where we are focussing on those who are considered to be priority youth offenders (PYOP.) The second is the area considered to be rural South (Banbridge, Newry, Craigavon, and Armagh) where we are focussing on young people deemed to be medium to high risk of reoffending.

- 2.8 The programme has a budget of under £180,000. NIACRO is seeking additional resources to make this service available across Northern Ireland, at a cost of an additional £75,000. Current resource limitations mean that the scheme is only available to young people in the community primarily in the south and east of Northern Ireland. However, it is also available to all young people leaving custody.
- 2.9 Below is a list of the outcomes of the 171 young people NIACRO has engaged with in 2009/10 through the Youth Employability programme. It should be noted that the 11% who were remanded in custody or in custodial sentences engaged with the programme while awaiting their appearance before the court.

OUTCOME	NO.	%
Training	53	31
Education	10	6
Employment	24	14
No show for assessment	16	9
Non-compliant with programme	13	8
Breached by YJA / PBNI	8	5
Remand in Custody	9	5
Custodial Sentence	11	6
Unemployment	6	4
Other	21	12
Total	171	100

Jobtrack

- 2.10 Jobtrack is committed to assisting people with a conviction get back into employment following a sentence. It is funded by the European Social Fund and supported by the NI Probation Board and NI Prison Service. Each year, Jobtrack deals with almost 1000 offenders and ex-prisoners.
- 2.11 Participants come to NIACRO via a referral system from either the Prison Service (NIPS) or Probation Board (PBNI.) They fall into the medium to high risk offending category.
- 2.12 In 2009/10, PBNI referred 359 service users aged between 18 to 24 years and NIPS referred 101 service users to NIACRO. This age range accounted for 43% of all service users on the Jobtrack programme.



2.13 From these 460 service users, 421 left the programme. The remaining 39 are still with Jobtrack. From those who left the programme, outcomes are as follows:

OUTCOME	PBNI	NIPS
Employment	57 (16%)	12 (21%)
Training	51 (14%)	5 (9%)
Unemployment	150 (41%)	21 (36%)
Custody	34 (9%)	5 (9%)
Other / Unknown	71 (20%)	15 (26%)
Total	363	58

Below are the outcomes achieved by 18-24 year old group who attended the Jobtrack programme. Many service users achieved more than one qualification.

QUALIFICATION	NO OF QUALIFICATIONS
Achieved City and Guilds	1
Achieved GCSE	1
Achieved IT Qualifications	16
Attained IT Unit / Module	3
Attained NVQ Units	4
Completed Pre-Vocational	19
Literacy Qualification	2
Numeracy Qualification	2
Obtained Driver's Licence	3
Obtained Forklift Licence	40
Other (Education)	25
Other (Training)	57
Total	173

These results are favourable, particularly when compared to the New Deal programme, whose main weakness was its 'one size fits all' approach and which placed less than one-fifth (16%) of its users into employment.¹

2.14 Of all 2,327 prisoners released in 2005, 995 were reconvicted within 2 years equalling 42.8%.² In comparison, NISRA (2007) figures suggest that, in the two years Jobtrack has been in place, only 24% of its total service users have gone on to re-offend.

2.15 Jobtrack works, because it understands the challenges that ex-prisoners and offenders face when seeking employment. Most ex-prisoners and offenders want to be employed, but are unable to do so due to employer suspicions, numeracy and literacy issues (71% of Jobtrack service users have a Level 1 or below qualification when they enter the programme) addictions, mental health issues and self-esteem difficulties. Of the total 297 offenders in 2009/10 who completed the programme, over 61% went into training or employment.

¹ Public Accounts Committee (November 2009) Report on Review of New Deal 25+, ISBN 978 0 339 60312 7 (Belfast)

² www.nisra.gov.uk



Family Links

- 2.16 Being the family of a young person who is NEET can be stressful and challenging. Often the young people we engage with has a close family member who is or has been in prison.
- 2.17 Research suggests that those prisoners who were visited by a partner or family member have a significantly lower reoffending rate (52%) than those who were not visited (70%). In 2006, more children were affected by the imprisonment of a parent than by divorce in the family.³
- 2.18 The NIACRO Family Links service is a Northern Ireland wide programme which supports this research. It is offered to the families of all prisoners in Northern Ireland and provides both practical and emotional support in coping with what can be a lonely and difficult experience and assisting the family in preparation for a loved one coming back into the community. The Family Links team works closely with the Jobtrack and Youth Employability programmes.

THE YOUNG PEOPLE WE WORK WITH

- 2.19 The young people we work with are - :
- At higher risk of social exclusion;
 - More likely to be involved with the care system;
 - More likely to be involved in criminal activities (due mostly to boredom, peer pressure and a lack of positive role models);
 - More likely to have poor educational experiences;
 - More likely to be in unstable living situations;
 - More likely to be misusing drugs and/or alcohol and undertaking harmful activities.

3. CHALLENGES FACED BY YOUNG PEOPLE INVOLVED IN CRIMINAL JUSTICE

EDUCATION

- 3.1 Many of the young people referred to NIACRO programmes have complex and chaotic lifestyles. This group traditionally struggle within the formal education system, which can fail to recognise the difficulties faced by these young people.
- 3.2 As a result, young people consider the school system irrelevant to their future prospects, and fail to adhere to the norms within the formal system. More often than not, this group become labelled as 'troublemakers' causing them to become further alienated from the system.
- 3.3 The correlation between young people disengaged from education and youth offending behaviour has long been recognised. However, in our view, there remains a large gap between youth justice and educational provision.

³ Prison Reform Trust (November 2009) Bromley Briefing, www.prisonreformtrust.org.uk



- 3.4 NIACRO recommends that all future educational training and employment strategies need cross departmental support and agreement to ensure all young people, particularly those on the margins of our society, have access to equality of opportunity.

HAVING A CONVICTION

- 3.5 Significant anecdotal evidence suggests that the employers and the FE sector, including private training providers, can be reluctant to engage with young people who have a conviction.

John, aged 17, applied for a TFS Construction course at his local college. The NIACRO Youth Employability programme supported him with disclosing his offending behaviour both in written form and we also advocated on his behalf with the course tutor.

The college informed John that he met the entry criteria for a place on this course. A few weeks later, he received a letter requiring his presence at an interview on campus.

On attending the panel, John was interviewed by 3 members of college staff, who focussed mainly on his offending behaviour. Following this interview he was informed that he didn't meet the criteria for the construction course.

NIACRO attempted to advocate on his behalf and were informed that the course was oversubscribed. However, youth employability staff were told by friends of John, they had been able to join the same course at a later date.

We brought this to the attention of the college, but have yet to receive a satisfactory response as to why our service user had his offer withdrawn.

- 3.6 In addition to experiences reported by our service users, as an organisation, NIACRO has experienced discrimination from the sector against young people with a criminal conviction.

- 3.7 The multiple barriers faced by youth employability service users mean they require colleges to deliver a flexible, needs-based form of learning. However, FE colleges do not operate in this way. The Head of our Youth Employability programme has noted –

“Many of our service users have been put off accessing FE college courses because they see it as an extension of their school experiences. The inflexibility of course timetables doesn't help.

“On the other hand, the attitudes of some college staff further disadvantage this group of young people. It is difficult enough to get this group engaged in re-entering the education and training system. However, it is NIACRO policy to ensure our service users disclose their conviction and they invariably face attitudinal barriers when they do so.”



CHALLENGES TO EMPLOYMENT

- 3.8 The evidential link between employment and successful resettlement is unequivocal. Research shows that people with convictions who get into – and stay – in jobs are significantly less likely to engage in criminal behaviour than those who don't. Employment can reduce re-offending by between a third and a half.⁴
- 3.9 In Northern Ireland an estimated 100,000 people have criminal convictions in a population of 1.7million. To exclude such people significantly reduces the labour pool. However, major barriers remain to the ability of ex-prisoners to gain consistent education and employment.
- 3.10 In 2002, the Home Office noted that 60% of ex-offenders are refused jobs because of their criminal record, **regardless of age**. In the ten years since this research was published, little has changed.⁵ In fact, it has become more difficult for ex-prisoners and offenders to gain consistent employment.
- 3.11 With few skills, a lack of motivation and lifestyles not conducive to employment, many young offenders are likely to have had little or no experience of legitimate employment.

YOUNG PEOPLE IN CUSTODY

- 3.12 Young people living in custody, such as the Justice Juvenile Centre (JJC) and Hydebank Wood Young Offenders Centre (YOC) are at a very real risk of losing permanent access to any form of education and training.
- 3.13 This group are also more likely to come from a care background. More than half of young people leaving care (53%) leave school without gaining any qualifications⁶ and 9.6% of children in care aged 10 or over have been cautioned or convicted for an offence, almost 3 times the rate for all children of this age.⁷
- 3.14 Young people in care have access to state supported services such as Training for Success until they are 22 years of age. However, this ceases when a young person goes into custody.
- 3.15 It impacts particularly on young people who enter Hydebank Wood or the JJC and are not released until after they turn 18 years old. As this group are in custody during the qualifying period, they often miss the opportunity to access Training for Success or similar learning opportunities.
- 3.16 The Careers Service has a statutory responsibility to offer advice to young people up to the age of 18 years. However, in NIACRO's view, this service has not been integrated into the criminal justice system.

⁴ Home Office (2002), Breaking the Circle: a report on the review of the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act, London: Home Office

⁵ Home Office (2002), Breaking the Circle: a report on the review of the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act, London: Home Office

⁶ DHSSPS, (2009) Northern Ireland care leavers 2007/08, Statistical Bulletin, April.

⁷ Department for Children, Schools and Families (2007) Care Matters: Time for Change - White Paper, London: DCSF



In fact, the service has only become involved with this group of young people through the NIACRO Youth Employability programme.

- 3.17 NIACRO recommends the Department of Justice, Department of Education and Department of Employment and Learning develop a protocol to ensure the Careers Service has access to and properly supports young people who are in custody, which is followed up on their release.

4. RELATIONSHIP WITH FURTHER EDUCATION (FE) SECTOR

FLEXIBILITY IS THE KEY

- 4.1 For a vulnerable young person, it can take time to access and finish a course that is right for them. For many, their experience with the formal education system has been negative and unsuited to their needs. Further education colleges follow a similar fixed format, and their lack of flexibility, based on outcomes, sets this group of young people up to fail.

- 4.2 Very few of NIACRO's service users choose to undertake full-time college-based study. Training providers offer over 80% of the qualifications completed by this group. Worryingly, NIACRO understands that these providers are planning to reduce the element of 'roll on, roll off' learning, crucial to the group of young people with which we work.

Should this become the case and also result in training providers removing those learners who have 'rolled off,' it will be disastrous for our service users.

- 4.3 With so many barriers in their way, this group of young people require more intervention and support to enter training and/or education. Often, they enter a course and, due to a return to custody or other reasons, are unable to finish it the first time they begin. However, many choose to return and finish at a later stage. In the past year, 17% of our service users have been unable to rejoin a training course on release from custody. If training providers do not offer this opportunity, we predict a continual and – potentially an increase – in the number of young people designated as NEET.

Sean, aged 17, was in custody for three months. Prior to his sentence, he was undertaking a course with a local training provider. NIACRO liaised with the course supervisor regarding the possibility of Sean rejoining the course following his release.

The Youth Employability worker was informed that due to the time of year and the stage course participants were now at, Sean had missed too much to be able to catch up. The course was not available at any other organisation, so Sean agreed to attend an alternative course with a different training provider.

Sean left this course after three weeks and has not returned to training.



ROLE OF THE VOLUNTARY SECTOR IN CHANGING ATTITUDES

- 4.4 The voluntary and community sector has a key role to play in ensuring young people who may otherwise fall through the net, are maintained in the system.
- 4.5 A key success of the Youth Employability and Jobtrack programmes has been the advocacy work undertaken by NIACRO staff to overcome attitudinal barriers. At a local level, there is good working relationship between NIACRO and a number of providers. The providers depend on our programmes to:
- Share appropriate information;
 - Provide a risk assessment on relevance of career choice;
 - Provide ongoing intensive support to ensure successful engagement with the young person;
 - Offer a quick intervention where it breaks down.
- 4.6 NIACRO recommends that any protocol developed regarding education and young people in custody should contain an action plan to allow a young person, where possible, to continue any course they were undertaking prior to their sentence. The voluntary sector should become involved, whereby a young person can remain with a relevant organisation, during any transition period prior to entering education and/or training.
- 4.7 In particular, the relationship NIACRO (and others in the voluntary sector) have built with the DEL Careers Service has made a difference. The careers staff themselves, who work in flexible manner with us, challenge colleges and training providers. However, this solution relies heavily on personal relationships and offers only an ad-hoc resolution to a wider cultural problem.
- 4.8 To deal with this issue, a NEET Strategy should look at developing an FE sector that allows a more flexible approach to dealing with disadvantaged young people, particularly those with a conviction. This means both colleges and training providers should incorporate a 'roll-on, roll-off' form of learning model.

ACCESSING EDUCATIONAL MAINTENANCE ALLOWANCE

- 4.9 The Educational Maintenance Allowance (EMA) is very useful to young people, particularly those from disadvantaged areas. NIACRO does not dispute the need for the Department to quality assure a provider before paying out the allowance, but we do believe the allowance should be paid quickly.
- 4.10 Individual young people should not be financially disadvantaged simply because they wish to learn. Our Youth Employability programme has had extensive experience of young people living outside the Greater Belfast area, who have had to wait 5-6 months for EMA to be paid out to them.
- 4.11 Approximately 15% of our service users refuse to consider FE College courses, due to the amount of time it take for EMA approval. They choose to attend courses delivered by training providers, because training allowances are paid to them immediately.



- 4.12 Coming mainly from rural areas, these young people are from areas of social deprivation and are more likely to come from families who are unemployed, suffer from addiction and/mental health issues and have histories of alcohol and drug misuse.
- 4.13 Faced with such barriers, this group of young people are not able to afford the travel to college without the support provided by EMA. The waiting period of 5-6 months for payment has led to our service users dropping out of college courses.

Sarah, aged 16, was living in challenging family circumstances. Her parents were estranged and her mother was a habitual drug user. Benefits were the only source of family income.

Sarah received the grades necessary to do a course at an FE college, which was only accessible by a train journey. It was not offered elsewhere. A month before the course was due to commence, NIACRO assisted Sarah in her application for EMA.

After four weeks, the Youth Employability programme contacted the college and were passed to an office in Glasgow, who informed the team that the claim wouldn't be approved for at least four to five months.

Sarah began the course, but two months into her studies, the financial cost of travel became a drain on the family income. Around this time her attendance became erratic to the point, where three months in, Sarah left the course.

Two weeks later her EMA was approved but NIACRO was unable to persuade her to re-engage with the course.

- 4.14 NIACRO recommends DEL institute a review of the EMA criteria process, with a view to speeding up the process for young people who come from deprived areas.

ACCESSING TRAINING FOR SUCCESS

- 4.15 Over 80% of our service users access Training for Success. A key reason for this is that training allowances are paid almost immediately. Another is that the practical form of learning appeals to young people who have not coped with traditional education establishments.
- 4.16 However, difficulties remain with such provisions. NIACRO has already outlined the challenges faced by young people who require the 'roll on, roll off' form of learning model and young people in custody who do not have their education needs assessed and maintained.



- 4.17 The young people involved with NIACRO often experience a break in their training and have difficulties transferring to another course, or reconnecting with the previous programme. As this results in young people being forced out of training, NIACRO recommends DEL institute a review of the system used to calculate training credits. The review should aim to create a greater degree of flexibility and allow for credits to take into account the 'roll on, roll off' learning model.

5 RELATIONSHIP WITH DEL

LEVEL OF ENGAGEMENT

- 5.1 NIACRO has a strong and long-standing relationship with the European branch of DEL. Their support has allowed us to pilot various employment models, which have shaped the current Jobtrack programme. The branch also assists us in promoting our expertise and a unique model across Europe.
- 5.2 Unfortunately, we do not have the same level of engagement with the remaining branches of DEL. In our verbal evidence to the Committee, NIACRO noted that we have, on numerous occasions, attempted to engage the Department. We have invited the Department to become involved in the Youth Employability programme, even in a strategic capacity via the Advisory Steering Group, but with little success.
- 5.3 However, the biggest difficulties arise with the Steps to Work and Training for Success schemes. Both programmes deal with those who are at the lowest risk of re-offending. However, it is those who are at medium to high risk of offending who are most in need of interventions such as education, training and employment services. In our experience, this group is not being incorporated into DEL programmes.
- 5.4 NIACRO recommends DEL develop an agreed position on a level of engagement with all the programmes, outside its own department, with which it has a strategic or financial link.

UNDERSTANDING LEGISLATIVE REQUIREMENTS

- 5.5 There appears to be little awareness amongst the staff regarding best practice and requirements of assisting people with a conviction enter employment, education and training, despite the fact that they have made some provision for ex-offenders in their Steps to Work and Training for Success programmes. NIACRO sees this as a risk to the department, which could lead to unsafe practice. This is particularly relevant with current and changing legislation, which places restrictions on the areas in which an ex-offender can work.



Anne, aged 18, was accepted on a childcare course with a local college. However, she was not informed by the course supervisor that her conviction would be a barrier to work placement. NIACRO believes this was due to college being unaware of existing legislative requirements dealing with someone who has a conviction, as opposed to overt discrimination.

As a result, Anne was unable to complete the practical element of the course and dropped out.

- 5.6 If educational establishments are not aware of the vetting requirements for their students, it will prove costly when these same students cannot achieve employment. Not only have they taken a place that could have gone to another student, but they may require further training elsewhere, causing additional costs.
- 5.7 NIACRO recommends DEL put in place proper guidance to raise awareness amongst all training providers, careers staff and relevant college personnel of the legislation that affects ex-offenders and their training and education opportunities.

This includes the Rehabilitation of Offenders (NI) Order 1978, the changes to the Security Industry Authority licensing procedures, Access NI processes and the Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups (NI) Order 2007 (in whatever its final format might be.) This is necessary, in order to offer correct advice to students and NIACRO is happy to assist in the process.

6. CONCLUSION – WHAT DOES NIACRO WANT IN A NEET STRATEGY?

- 6.1 It is clear the marginalised group of people NIACRO works with have been let down. They are more likely to be socially excluded and have been failed by the formal education system, if the average age of our early school leavers is an indication.
- 6.2 These young people are more likely to be in unstable living situations and involved in the care system. With such experiences, it is little surprise they become involved in criminal activities, bought on by boredom, peer pressure and a lack of positive role models.
- 6.3 In order to prevent these young people becoming NEET, any strategy must ensure there is a consistent approach to young people in care and in the criminal justice system and their ability to access supportive education and training opportunities.
- 6.4 This group of young people require intervention prior to disengagement from the system. NIACRO agrees one form of intervention could be a formalised tracking and monitoring system focussing on reaching those young people whose attendance records are low.
- 6.5 However, the Strategy should also look at the reasons for their disengagement from education and work to develop a supportive and flexible educational and FE structure that specifically identifies young people who face barriers to inclusion.



- 6.6 Specifically, the Strategy should look at ways to meet the needs of young people involved in the criminal justice system through alternative work-based or vocational learning that is made available to them at any point, even in custody.
- 6.7 Young people in custody who are NEET have the right to access proper training and education provision and the Strategy must include this right.
- 6.8 In order to succeed, the Strategy requires targets and the engagement of all Government departments. Therefore, NIACRO believes it should set targets specific to socially excluded young people and should also include an action plan, to which every relevant department should commit.
- 6.9 The action plan should include suggestions, such as, formalised links between schools, DEL Careers Service and employers for those young people who would benefit from flexible training (DE, DEL, and DETI.) There is also a strong need for young people in deprived rural areas to access allowances to assist them in studying (DEL, DARD). A further aspect should be the provision of education and careers services to those young people in custody (DOJ, DEL.)
- 6.10 The voluntary sector is vital to the success of a NEET Strategy. The Government must work with us to develop proper outcomes for success for those young people who face barriers to participation and achievement.
- 6.11 Young people classed as NEET require a flexible, creative approach to unlock their potential. A successful NEET Strategy should outline how best to do this on a cross-departmental basis, along with shared Government responsibilities and targets. Along with a proper partnership with the voluntary sector, these young people should have better access to better, stronger opportunities and find themselves in worthwhile education, employment and training.



7. SUMMARY OF NIACRO RECOMMENDATIONS

- 7.1 NIACRO recommends that all future educational, training and employment strategies need cross-departmental support and agreement to ensure all young people, particularly those on the margin of society, have equal access to opportunity.
- 7.2 NIACRO recommends the Department of Justice, Department of Education and Department of Employment and Learning develop a protocol to ensure the Careers Service has access to and properly supports young people who are in custody, following this up on their release.
- 7.3 NIACRO recommends that any protocol developed regarding education and young people in custody should contain an action plan to allow a young person, where possible, to continue any course they were undertaking prior to their sentence. The voluntary sector should become involved, whereby a young person can remain with a relevant organisation, during any transition period, prior to entering education and/or training.
- 7.4 A NEET Strategy should look at developing an FE sector that allows a more flexible approach to dealing with disadvantaged young people, particularly those with a conviction. This means both colleges and training providers should incorporate a 'roll-on, roll-off' form of learning model.
- 7.5 NIACRO recommends DEL institute a review of the EMA criteria process, with a view to speeding up the process for young people who come from deprived areas.
- 7.6 NIACRO recommends DEL provide proper guidance to the FE sector to raise awareness of the legislation pertaining to those with a conviction. This is necessary, in order to offer correct advice to students. NIACRO is happy to assist in this process.
- 7.7 NIACRO recommends DEL develop an agreed position on a level of engagement with all the programmes, outside its own department, with which it has a strategic or financial link.
- 7.8 In order to succeed, the Strategy requires targets and the engagement of all Government departments. Therefore, NIACRO believes targets should be set, which are specific to socially excluded young people. The Strategy should also include an action plan, to which every relevant department should commit.
- 7.9 The voluntary sector is vital to the success of a NEET Strategy. The Government must work with us to develop proper outcomes for success for those young people who face barriers to participation and achievement.