

# Report to Children's Services and Education Scrutiny Board

13 November 2023

<b>Subject:</b>	Post 16 Pathways
<b>Director:</b>	Director of Children and Education Michael Jarrett
<b>Contact Officer:</b>	Skills and Employability Service Manager, Kelly Harris Kelly_harris@sandwell.gov.uk

## 1 Recommendations



- 1.1 That the Board considers and comments upon the post 16 pathways available to Sandwell young people.
- 1.2 That the board considers what other measures could be put in place to tackle NEET or youth unemployment particularly for those aged 19-24.

## 2 Reasons for Recommendations

- 2.1 It is essential a variety of post 16 pathways are available to young people in Sandwell.
- 2.2 The period of transition from full time education to post 18 destinations is important to help guide young people to achieve their aspirations. Education, Employment and Training figures are generally good in Sandwell at 16-18 but are more of a challenge post 19.



### 3 How does this deliver objectives of the Corporate Plan?

	Best start in life for children and young people – Post 16 pathways are a key transitional period in young people’s lives. Good quality advice and guidance along with a range of educational and employment pathways are integral to career and aspirational prospects.
	A strong and inclusive economy – Labour market information is used to help shape advice and guidance and provision delivered as part of the post 16 offer for young people

## 4 Context and Key Issues

### 4.1 Education, Employment and Training monitoring

4.2 The Council has a statutory duty to provide targeted careers support to vulnerable young people (Section 68 of the ESA 2008). Connexions Sandwell provides a career service for young people which has a particular focus on 16-17-year-olds and those who are NEET. Within the overall cohort of young people supported, some groups are vulnerable and more likely to be unemployed due to their personal circumstances. This includes young people involved in the youth justice system, those with attendance issues, Children in Care, children with SEND and those with family issues.

4.3 The Council has a duty to ensure that young people are participating in education or training as a result of the raising of the Participation Age (RPA). This is under sections 18 and 68(4) of the 2008 Education and Skills Act (ESA 2008) in relation to sections 10, 12 and 68 of that Act. Connexion’s data relating to participation, NEET and delivery of the September Guarantee are statutory returns and are made available on the DfE website. ([www.explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk](http://www.explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk))

4.4 **Connexions Sandwell** provide a targeted careers guidance service to the most vulnerable (5-10%) Year 11 young people in every Sandwell school including Pupil Referral Units and special schools. Connexions personal advisors also offer support to young people who are Children in Care, Youth Justice Service and have Special Education Needs. Many Sandwell schools also receive a traded service which enhances the



careers education students receive and supports the schools to fulfil their statutory obligations.

- 4.5 Connexions track all 16 - and 17-year-olds (over 9,000) in Sandwell. There are data sharing arrangements in place with regional Local Authorities and local/regional training providers and colleges who notify Connexions of starters and leavers. Connexions contact young people at least once per year to confirm their destination, and whether they are in Further Education, apprenticeships or employment. Young people who enter employment without recognised training are contacted within 6 months of their start date because research shows that they are likely to leave within 6 months.
- 4.6 Connexions have a strong engagement programme with young people and parents including the New year New Start annual event, which this year had over 50 stands and attracted over 1800 attendees.

#### 4.7 **NEET and EET Statistics for Sandwell**

- 4.8 Sandwell's 16/17-year-old NEET/Not Known percentage performance is ranked in Quintile 1 (the top 30 LAs in England, out of 150) for the 3rd year in a row. Over the last 3 years the percentage figure has improved from 2.6% NEET/Not Known in 2020-21 to 1.7% this year. This has also meant that in terms of actual ranking, Sandwell has moved from 13th in 2020-21 to 7th this year. In comparison to statistical neighbours, Sandwell is the best performing with the average for the statistical neighbours at quintile 3.
- 4.9 Sandwell's performance for 2022 for the Government's September Offer of a suitable place in Learning for Y11 and 12 is below:

	Total Y11 Guarantee	Offer made	% Offer made	Total Y12 Guarantee	Offer made	% Offer made	Combined %
<b>ENGLAND</b>	609273	590123	96.4%	608035	563617	92.6%	94.5%
<b>WEST MIDLANDS</b>	68515	67029	97.8%	68751	64935	94.4%	96.1%
<b>Sandwell</b>	4371	4357	99.7%	4561	4530	99.3%	99.5%

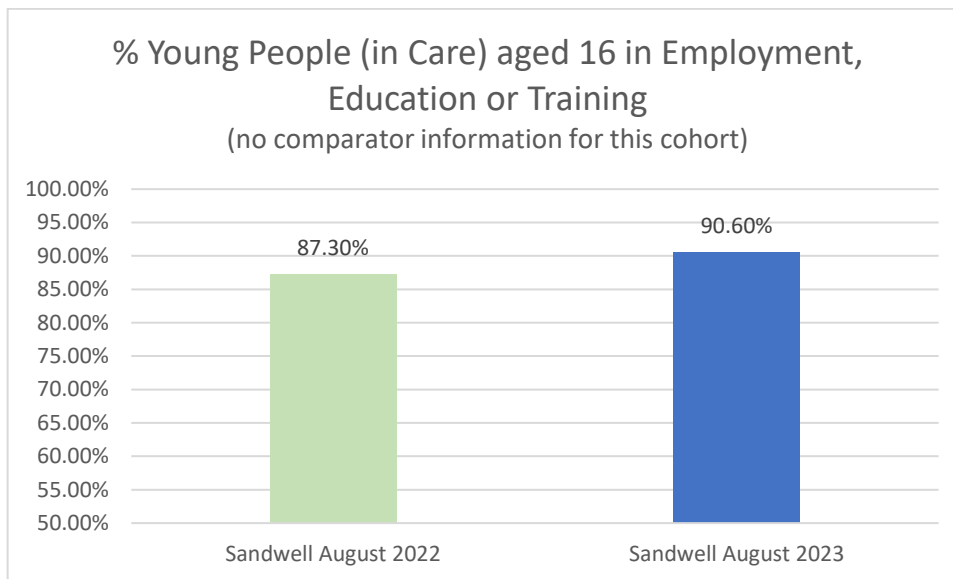
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## 5.0 Children in Care/Care Leaver NEET

### 5.1 16 Year Olds

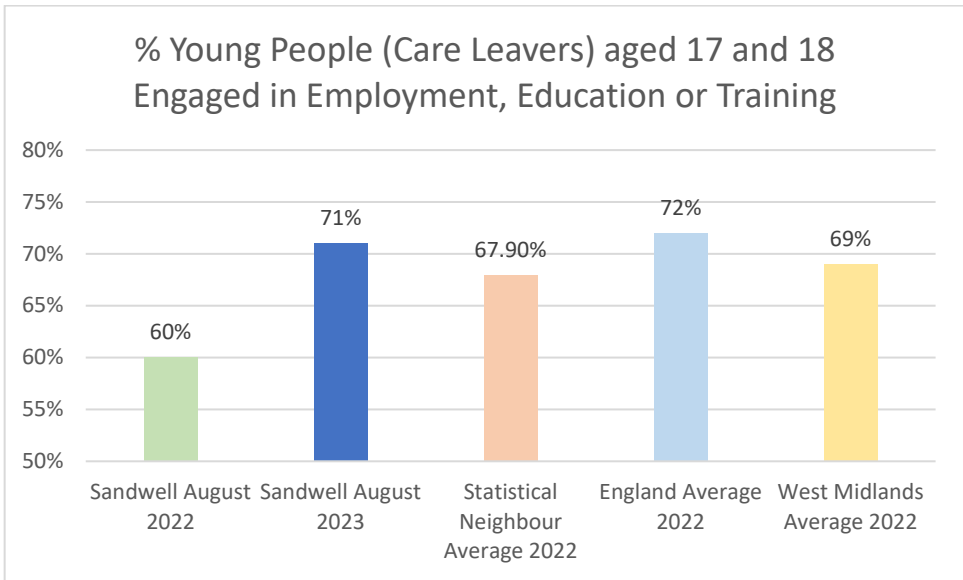
- As of 31<sup>st</sup> August 2023, there are 75 Children in Care aged 16; of these 68 are engaged in employment, education or training which equates to 90.6%, an increase of 3.3% since August 2022 when the figure was 87.3%. There is no comparator information for 16-year olds against England, Statistical Neighbour Average or West Midlands



### 5.2 17 – 18-Year-olds

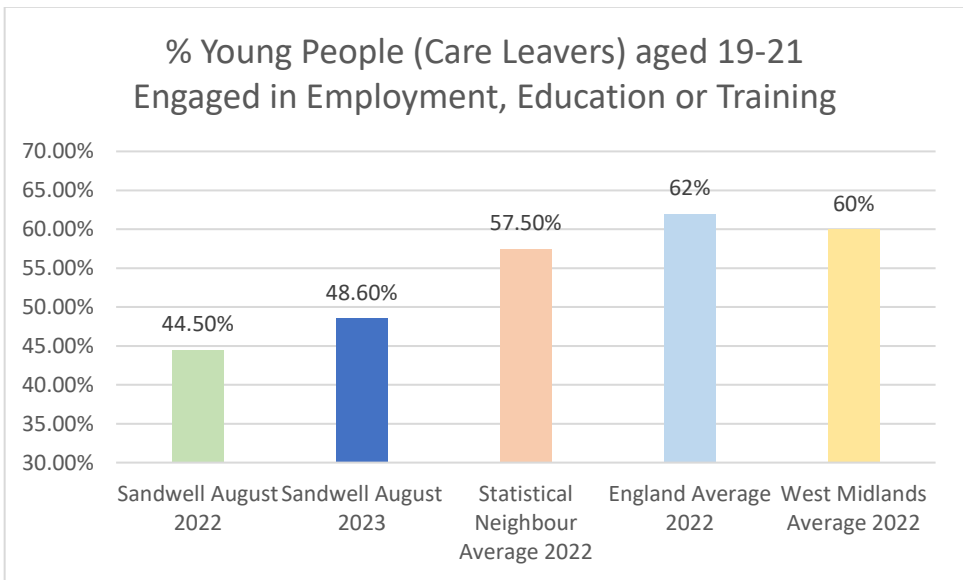
- As of August 2023, there are 152 Children in Care/Care Leavers aged 17-18; of these 108 are engaged in employment, education or training which equates to 71%. This represents an 11% increase since August 2022, when the figure was 60%.
- There is comparator data for this cohort, showing that Sandwell is currently 3.1% above (better) Statistical Neighbour Average, 2% above West Midlands Average, although 1% below England Average.





### 5.3 19 – 21 Year olds

- As of August 2023, there are 206 Care Leavers aged 19-21, of these 100 are engaged in employment, education or training which equates to 48.5%. Performance has improved by 4.1% since August 2022, when performance was 44.5%, but is still a concern as emphasised by the comparator figures below.
- When comparing the August position against latest comparator averages Sandwell is currently 8.9% below (worse) Statistical Neighbour Average, 11.4% below West Midlands Average and 13.4% below England Average.



## 5.4 Children in Care/Care Leavers EET Activity

- 5.5 The Connexions Service provides a bespoke **careers advice and guidance programme for Children in Care**, including those who are transitioning from post 16 education. Careers are also highlighted at an early age, with career options discussed from year 7 onwards. The Aspire to HE offer for Children in Care is aspirational and showcases HE pathways to Children in Care at year 8 and 11. As of 31<sup>st</sup> August 2023, 343 Care Leavers aged 17-21, 108 are attending further education (College/University), which equates to 31.5%. This compares to a statistical neighbour average of 35.5% and 39% England average.
- 5.5 Care experienced young people are offered apprenticeship opportunities within the council that are generated to match their individual aspirations through 'ring fenced' vacancies. These are made accessible by a relaxation of the Maths and English requirements (if necessary), and by an individualised application process. Where an opportunity is matched to a young person, working with an advisor, they can access a period of work experience, and receive support to complete the application form and undergo an informal interview.
- 5.6 A multi-agency approach is taken when supporting Care Leavers who are NEET to become EET. **NEET Panel** meets monthly and is well attended by partner agencies including Sandwell Children's Trust, Connexions, LACES, Employment and Skills, Think Sandwell, Urban Regeneration, Participation Team and Youth Offending. The main focus of the panel is to support an action plan for young people who are NEET. The panel is chaired by a CIC or Care Leavers Team Manager from the Trust and each manager including partner agencies is responsible for identifying any young people who are NEET or who may be EET and need additional support to fulfil their aspirations. Young people referred to the panel are regularly reviewed, and panel members may be set tasks to complete in order to prepare and promote individuals access to EET. The nature of the panel enables individual needs to be considered in order to maximise success and this includes the exploration of bespoke plans. The panel is attended by the allocated social worker or SCT Personal Advisor, who will then feedback any ideas, actions or advice directly to the young person.



## 6.0 SEND NEET/EET

	In-learning	NEET	Not Known	NEET/NK combined
Sandwell (SEND)	85.5%	5.6%	2.6%	8.3%
West Mids. (SEND)	87.3%	7.8%	1.6%	9.4%
England (SEND)	87.2%	8.2%	1.5%	9.7%
Sandwell (SEN Support)	88.4%	5.3%	1.0%	6.3%
West Mids. (SEN Support)	84.8%	6.6%	4.3%	11.0%
England (SEN Support)	85.9%	6.3%	2.9%	9.1%

Source: Sandwell data is from our CCIS client database. Regional, statistical neighbours and national data is from DfE monthly releases and based on Local Authority statutory monthly returns.

- 6.1 Sandwell has lower numbers of combined NEET and Not Known across Y12 and Y13 compared to West Midlands, England and our statistical neighbours.
- 6.2 Sandwell has a slightly lower percentage of SEND in Learning in both Y12 and in Y13, compared to the West Midlands and England.
- 6.3 Sandwell has the highest percentage of young people (Y12 and Y13) with SEN support in Learning, across each age group and against West Midlands and England comparators. Sandwell has lower SEN support young people (in both Y12 and Y13) who are NEET/NK (6.3%), compared to the West Midlands and England.
- 6.4 The employment data on current employment for 18 to 25-year olds with SEND is not currently collected in one place and national data is not available. This includes young people aged 18+ who are in employment, those who go into employment from college, training, supported internships or those who are NEET.
- 6.5 Schools have the statutory responsibility for ensuring that young people with SEND are able to access personal careers guidance. Connexions provide a targeted service to children where they are identified as being



most at risk of NEET in year 11 in school. Young people in the target group are identified and agreed between Connexions and the school based on risk of NEET data. In addition, some schools commission a traded service from Connexions to meet the careers guidance needs of other students. If a young person with SEND is in the Connexions target group, they will be offered one to one independent careers guidance to identify short, medium and long-term career goals and appropriate routes and provision. Each young person seen will receive a careers action plan (Aspiration Career Pathway Plan if they have an EHCP). The information contained within this plan can inform the young person's EHCP, where one is in place.

6.6 If a NEET young person aged 18-25 with an EHCP keeps in touch with Connexions, they will continue to provide careers information, advice and guidance. This number is very small because young people engage with age appropriate agencies e.g. DWP, Social Services and SMBC SEN department. If Connexions are advised that the young person has started in employment that would be recorded on their client record.

### 6.7 **Supported Internships**

6.8 Supported internships are widely available as a pathway for young people with SEND at Westminster Special school and all local colleges. Supported Internships are structured study programmes for young people with an EHC plan, based primarily at an employer. Internships normally last an academic year and wherever possible, will support the young person to move into paid employment at the end of the programme.

6.9 In Sandwell, there is a unique offer for NEET SEND young people to apply for a DFN Project Search supported internship sites and if they are accepted their EHCP is re-instated.





## 7.0 Youth Unemployment

Youth unemployment is defined as people aged 18 – 24 who are claiming out of work benefits (Universal Credit). The data is collated nationally utilising claimant data held by DWP.

7.1 Youth Unemployment has for a long time been an area of concern for Sandwell, with the percentage of young people claiming benefits being higher than the regional and national average.

The below table shows the performance over the past four years

	Sandwell %	West Midlands %	Great Britain %
Jan 2020 (pre pandemic)	7.3	5.0	4.0
Aug 2020	14.5	10.3	9.4
Aug 2021	11.1	8.3	6.4
Aug 2022	9.0	5.9	4.6
Aug 2023	9.1	6.7	4.9

7.2 The number of young people claiming benefits had begun to decrease following the pandemic but has increased in recent months. There are high numbers of young people claiming benefits, with 2600 in August 2023 compared to 1930 before the pandemic. An increase has also been seen in the regional and national data.

The table below shows the comparison with the Black Country Boroughs

	Sandwell %	Dudley %	Walsall %	Wolverhampton %
Jan 2020 (pre pandemic)	7.3	6.9	7.6	8.7
Aug 2020	14.5	13.2	14.5	16.0
Aug 2021	11.1	9.9	11.6	12.9
Aug 2022	9.0	6.9	8.2	9.4
Aug 2023	9.1	7.5	9.2	10.5

7.3 When looking at Sandwell in relation to the other Black Country boroughs, the proportion of unemployed young people is comparable.



This indicates that the rise in youth unemployment is due to external factors but has had a greater effect on the Black Country area than other neighbouring authorities in the West Midlands and wider Great Britain.

7.4 It is possible to drill down to the Sandwell wards to see where the greatest levels of unemployment exist.

Sandwell Wards	Total Claimants 16+		Youth Claimants 18-24	
	number	% of population	number	RAG compared to Sandwell
<b>SANDWELL</b>	<b>13,495</b>	<b>6.4</b>	<b>2600</b>	
Abbey	435	5.1	65	
Blackheath	405	5.4	50	
Bristnall	410	5.4	55	
Charlemont and Grove Vale	410	5.5	80	
Cradley Heath and Old Hill	550	6.5	95	
Friar Park	495	6.4	105	
Great Barr and Yew Tree	360	4.5	100	
Great Bridge	540	6.1	110	
Greets Green and Lyng	695	8.1	125	
Hateley Heath	660	6.9	125	
Langley	540	6.1	100	
Newton	365	4.8	75	
Old Warley	370	4.9	80	
Oldbury	530	5.4	80	
Princes End	690	8.3	150	
Rowley	400	5.5	80	
Smethwick	725	7.7	125	
Soho and Victoria	1095	9.8	190	
St. Pauls	905	9.0	150	
Tipton Green	610	6.6	130	
Tividale	445	5.6	100	
Wednesbury North	540	6.6	115	
Wednesbury South	490	5.9	110	
West Bromwich Central	830	9.1	145	



The data provides an overview of the total number of claimants within each ward and the proportion of the ward population that this equates to. It also shows the number of claimants aged 18-24 although data does not exist to see what proportion of this age group is claiming benefits.

The wards have been RAG rated against the Sandwell data to show those wards where unemployment is higher than the authority's average.

## 7.5 **Causes of Youth Unemployment**

Youth unemployment has been a longstanding issue in the borough, which has been exacerbated by the pandemic. Current reasons include:

- Withdrawal of national programmes such as Kickstart, ESF, etc
- A lack of skills and experience for the vacancies that are available
- Low academic achievement specifically in topics such as Maths and English

It is likely that there are a number of other factors that contribute to this although it is difficult to evidence. These include

- Increased mental health and anxiety of young people following the pandemic
- A lack of work experience opportunities including those young people who did not complete work experience placements during the pandemic
- Reluctance to move away from the stability of benefits (covering income, housing, etc.)
- Reluctance to take up opportunities such as apprenticeships due to financial constraints
- Increase in caring responsibilities (siblings, parents, grandparents)
- Generational worklessness resulting in lower aspirations
- Lack of willingness to travel outside of the borough for opportunities

## 7.6 **Measures to reduce Youth Unemployment**

In order to address the issue and help to decrease the number of unemployed young people, a number of activities are taking place:

- Covid funding is being used to provide a range of activities to improve confidence and encourage engagement. The activities are being run from September 23 – March 24 in partnership with SRES and the Youth



Service and include canoeing, archery, orienteering, hill walking, music, magic, crafts, etc. Confidence-building is often an important precursor to engaging in skills-based training for some young people.

- A Youth Hub is currently being developed in partnership with DWP and the YMCA to provide a 'one stop shop' for young people needing support to progress
- UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) funding for April 2024 – March 2025 will be commissioned to specifically target young people who are claiming benefits and support progression into education or employment
- Mapping of provision for specialist groups including Care Leavers, SEND and Youth Justice has taken place to identify the gaps. Targeted commissioning for these groups will also take place via UKSPF
- The Employment and Skills Partnership held a workshop on youth employment to identify barriers, gaps in provision and potential solutions to feed into UKSPF commissioning and key priorities for the Skills and Employment Strategy in development. As a result, a series of areas were identified for further exploration including mental health and resilience, gaps in youth justice provision and piloting models currently used for Children in Care/Care Leavers for SEND and Youth Justice. This work will be fed into the action plan for the Skills and Employment Strategy.
- The Anchor Network has an employment group who are working on a series of projects to make vacancies more accessible and inclusive including the 'I can project' with the NHS
- The Council has a supported employment service who are supporting young people with an EHCP to access supported internship programmes with local employers.
- Commonwealth Games legacy funding is being used to target youth unemployment, including NEET prevention activities in schools, targeted jobs and skills support and paid work placements for disadvantaged groups.
- A Children in Care/Care Leavers NEET strategy action plan has been put in place to progress actions targeted at reducing NEETs.
- Outreach of Employment and Skills staff across a range of voluntary sector organisations, libraries and Jobcentres to engage residents needing support



## 7.7 **SEND Employment Activity**

- 7.8 A range of interventions are available to reduce unemployment amongst young people with SEND.
- 7.9 Supported internships are widely available in Sandwell, with a variety of employers, and whilst these are leading to paid employment for some interns, the quality of the programmes is inconsistent and more needs to be done to both increase the number of young people with an EHCP accessing supported internships and the number of supported interns securing paid employment when the programme ends. These issues are being addressed by the Internships Work project being funded in the region by Department for Education.
- 7.10 Sandwell Council is not currently offering a Supported Internship programme as an employer but there are discussions taking place regarding the implementation of a scheme for academic year 2025.
- 7.11 In addition to supported internships, Sandwell Council has a Specialist Employment Team, which is a pan-disability, all-age supported employment service. Young people who are NEET with SEND are referred to the team through different routes as a pathway into employment.
- 7.12 Until March 2025, the team has funding from the Department for Work and Pensions for a Local Supported Employment Initiative (LSEI), to support up to 60 people with a learning disability and/or autism into employment. Referrals into this provision have been steady and have resulted in employment outcomes.



## 8.0 Apprenticeships

- 8.1 There were 2070 apprenticeship starts in Sandwell in 2021/22, a 46.6% reduction since 2016/17. Nationally the figure declined by 28.1%. Of those starts, 650 were aged 19-24, 990 25 plus and 430 under the age of 19, with 54% being female.
- 8.2 The majority of apprenticeships started were at an advanced level, with 910 starts (44%) which is equivalent to Level 3. Higher apprenticeships represented 29% of all starts with 27% starting Intermediate apprenticeships equivalent to Level 2.
- 8.3 The most popular sectors to complete an apprenticeship in were Business, Administration and Law (630 starts) and Health, Public Services and Care (660 starts).
- 8.4 Sandwell Council Apprenticeship Programme
- 8.5 Since the start of the Apprenticeship Levy in 2017 there have been 954 **apprenticeship** starts across the Council and schools.
- 8.6 The current age range of apprentices is from 16 to 62 years, including existing staff. Of the 954 starts, 355 are substantive staff and 599 new apprenticeship posts, including progressions of L2 to L7 apprenticeships.
- 8.7 The range of apprenticeships delivered across L2-L7 qualifications, across many sectors of customer service, business administration, marketing, ICT, Leadership, early years, teaching assistants and teachers, horticulture, agriculture, farming, surveying and town planning, electrical, gas, carpentry, painting and decorating, plastering, libraries, and motor vehicle.



## 5 Implications

<b>Resources:</b>	The services involved in delivering these services include Connexions and Employment and Skills, using a mixture of target budget and external funding.
<b>Legal and Governance:</b>	There are statutory duties to deliver Careers Advice and education for post 16 young people.
<b>Risk:</b>	Risk assessments are completed for all project provision delivered within post 16.
<b>Equality:</b>	There are no adverse impacts to protected characteristics from the delivery of post 16 pathways
<b>Health and Wellbeing:</b>	Health and wellbeing has been linked with employment outcomes with positive impacts found on health and wellbeing.
<b>Social Value:</b>	Social value opportunities are maximised for Sandwell young people with Regeneration developments and the Regeneration pipeline in the borough.
<b>Climate Change:</b>	Green skills are a key emerging area for the FE sector and growing demand for employers.
<b>Corporate Parenting:</b>	This work supports our corporate parenting priorities including ring fenced apprenticeships and supporting Children in Care and Care Leavers to achieve their aspirations.

## 6 Appendices

N/A

## 7. Background Papers

N/A

