

Leaving education early:

putting vocational education and training in centre stage



Introduction

This is one of the 15 country fiches that have been developed as background material to the Cedefop study:

Leaving education early: putting vocational education and training centre stage.

Volume I: investigating causes and extent

Volume II: evaluating policy impact

The publication was produced by Cedefop, Department for learning and employability, under the supervision of Antonio Ranieri.

Irene Psifidou, Cedefop expert, was responsible for the publication and research conducted under the 'Early leaving from education and training' project from October 2013 to July 2016.

Country fiches have been developed and drafted on the basis of desk research and interviews conducted between 2014-15 by ICF consulting services with national stakeholders, social partners, companies, VET providers and practitioners as well as learners who provided country-specific information. They have been validated by selected interviewees (1).

Country fiches are available for: Austria, Belgium-Fr, Germany, Denmark, Estonia, France, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal and United Kingdom.

Work was carried out under Cedefop's framework contract 2013-FWC25/AO/ECVL/IPS-ARANI/EarlyLeaving/OO5/1 3

Please note that this is an unedited version.

rena.psifidou@cedefop.europa.eu

⁽¹⁾ The detailed methodology as well as an anonymous list of all interviewees, including information on country, organisation and job position/role, is available on request. Please contact Cedefop expert in charge Irene Psifidou:

Table of contents

1.	Defin	iitions applying in national and regional context	3	
2.	Rates	s of early leaving from VET during last five years	4	
	2.1.	Northern Ireland	4	
	2.2.	Wales	5	
	2.3.	England	6	
3.	Natio	nal and regional strategy to tackle ELET	8	
4.	Rece	ent policy initiatives	12	
	4.1.	Northern Ireland	12	
	4.2.	England	13	
	4.3.	Wales	13	
5.	Stake	eholder cooperation	21	
6.	Monitoring systems2			
7.	Effec	t of the economic crisis	25	
8.		ors positively contributing to the effectiveness of VET in cing ELET	26	
9.	Factors constraining the effectiveness of VET to reduce ELET29			

1. Definitions applying in national and regional context

The compulsory participation age in education and training is 16 years in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, and has been raised to 17 years in England in 2013 and is to be raised to 18 from 2015.

Questions	Answers
What is the national definition(s) of early leavers from education and training? Who are classified as early leavers from education and training?	Early school leaving is not a term used in the UK. Instead, the UK uses the definition of young person 'not in employment, education or training' (NEETs). There are overlaps in many ways between 'NEETs' and 'early school leaving'. Early leavers from education and training in England, Wales and Northern Ireland are classified as NEET. A person is considered NEET if they are aged 16 to 24 and not in education, employment or training.
What is the national definition of early leaving from VET? (Does it include those in apprenticeships?)	There is no national definition of early leaving from VET. 'In England, there is no formal definition of VET and the term VET is applied to programmes as different as the highly selective, competitive and demanding apprenticeships offered by large engineering companies and the programmes which recruit highly disaffected young people with extremely low academic achievement (²)'. Instead, in the UK, the focus is on retention, achievement and success in further education, which includes apprenticeships.
What are the data used to inform this definition and who is responsible for it? (i.e. which data set(s) provide information that is used to compute ELET indicators and who sponsors the collection and collects these data).	The data collected systematically concerns the rates of completion, attainment and achievement of qualifications. Data on NEETs is collected by various organisations in the UK and statistics are mostly shown for England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland separately, due to the devolved responsibility for education and training. Since May 2013, the Office for National Statistics (ONS), also in charge of the LFS data collection, has published a bulletin on NEETs with comparable data for all of the UK based on the Eurostat LFS. The data are aggregated at top level and made available (3) annually. School leaver and participation rates in Northern Ireland are available from the Annual School Census and the Further Education Statistical Record (FESR) which is

⁽²⁾ Wolf report https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/18050 4/DFE-00031-2011.pdf [accessed 24.4.2017].

⁽³⁾ ONS bulletin. http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/lms/young-people-not-in-education-employment-or-training--neets-/may-2013/statistical-bulletin.html [accessed 24.4.2017].

extracted from the NI Colleges Information System (NICIS). Further data are found in the Department for Employment and Learning's Client Management System (CMS) and from the ONS.

In Wales destinations data is collected by Careers Wales. It provides a useful snapshot of pupil destinations which informs careers staff in their work with clients, parents, teachers and employers. This is shared with Local Authorities and education providers as well as the Welsh government.

Rates of early leaving from VET during last five years

According to the labour force survey there were 1 093 000 NEETs in the age group 16-24 in the UK in the first quarter of 2013. This corresponded to 12.4% of 16-24 year olds as average for the UK, which is above the Europe 2020 national target of 10% (⁴).

2.1. Northern Ireland

In Northern Ireland, there were 36 000 young people classified as NEETs in 2014, representing 17% of the 16-24 population (5). Other sources, such as the 2011 Census, mention 33 516 young people falling into the NEET category in 2011, which at that time represented 14.7% of the 16-24 population (6). Both data sources indicate that the ELET rate in Northern Ireland is above the UK average. Northern Ireland has not fixed any specific ELET target but set the objective that all aged 16-18 have access to training.

The following trends were observed over the last five years in FE colleges (7) in Northern Ireland (8):

⁽⁴⁾ European Commission; EACEA; Eurydice; Cedefop (2014). *Tackling early leaving from education and training in europe: strategies, policies and measures.* Eurydice and Cedefop Report. Luxembourg: Publications Office.

⁽⁵⁾ Labour force survey July to September 2014.

⁽⁶⁾ http://www.delni.gov.uk/neets-stakeholder-forum-briefing-paper-2014.pdf [accessed 24.4.2017].

⁽⁷⁾ Further education (FE) colleges offer VET programmes from age 16 to 19 years of age but also deliver general education courses around the school leaving examination GTSE, entrance examinations for the universities (A levels). These are the institutions that the early leavers would go back to in order to get help to return to school.

- (a) the number of enrolments at further education (FE) colleges (⁹) decreased by 9.4% from 199 577 in 2009/10 to 180 825 in 2013/14;
- (b) the retention rate in FE colleges increased from 87.7% to 89.1% while the achievement rate increased from 80.3% to 87.1% and success rate from 70.4 to 77.6%;
- (c) the majority of enrolments continue to be aged '19 and under', with a year-on-year increase from 50.5% in 2009/10 to 58.0% in 2013/14;
- (d) part-time provision continues to be preponderant: in 2009/10 full-time provision was 14.9% with 85.1% part-time; while in 2013/14 the split was 14.3% full-time and 85.7% part-time;
- (e) it is interesting to note that there is a fairly even gender split in part-time provision, while males (56.9%) are the majority in the full-time programmes in 2013/14;
- (f) of the 141 778 enrolments in 2013/14, the majority are at Level 2 programmes (lower secondary education) (¹⁰): those at 'Level 1 and below' accounted for 22.3% (31,597), 46.0 % (65,252) at 'Level 2', 23.0% (32,550) at 'Level 3' and 8.2% (11,576) were at 'Level 4 and above'.

2.2. Wales

According to the statistical first release at the end of 2013 there were 11 800 NEETs (10.5%) in Wales in comparison to 12 300 (10.8%) at the end of 2012 (¹¹). New data from the annual population survey suggests that at the end of 2014 there were 9.7%. Destinations data suggests that 3.7 % of year 11 leavers (whose average age is 16) were NEET compared with 4.2 % in 2012.

- (8) DEL (2015). Statistical Bulletin of Further Education Activity in Northern Ireland: 2009/10 to 2013/14.
- (9) Further education (FE) colleges are the main providers of further education and training in Northern Ireland. They play a central role in raising literacy and numeracy levels and in up-skilling and re-skilling the population through a broad range of courses leading to qualifications.
- (10) England, Wales and Northern Ireland use eight-level national qualifications framework (NQF) referenced to the EQF. For all types of programmes available to 16-19 year olds, certification is through qualifications from Level 1 to Level 5: while Level 1 programmes offer basic skills, Level 2 qualification is equivalent to the lower secondary-level exams (general certificate of secondary education GCSEs), Level 3 is an upper-secondary leaving qualification (A levels) and Levels 4 and 5 are for higher-level study (post-secondary level).
- (11) http://gov.wales/statistics-and-research/young-people-not-education-employment-training/?lang=en [accessed 24.4.2017].

Destinations of 16-year olds upon leaving from secondary schools in Wales (12)						
	Male	%	Female	%	Total	%
Continuing in full time education	15 584	84.2	15 455	88.7	31 039	86.4
Continuing in part time education (less than 16 hours a week)	94	0.5	62	0.4	156	0.4
Work-based training - Non-employed status	1 098	5.9	838	4.8	1 936	5.4
Work-based training - Employment status	287	1.6	104	0.6	391	1.1
Employed - other	357	1.9	161	0.9	518	1.4
Known not be in education, training or employment	772	4.2	562	3.2	1 334	3.7
No response to survey	157	0.8	118	0.7	275	0.8
Left the area	163	0.9	122	0.7	285	0.8
Total number in cohort	18 512	100.0	17 422	100.0	35 934	100.0

2.3. England

In England early leaving is monitored using the Labour force statistics which look at young people not in education, employment or training (NEET). The data below shows that overall NEET data fell across all summary age groups and was lowest on record in 2014 for young people between the ages of 16-18.

NEET rates for different age cohorts: England 2012-14 (%)

	April to June 2012 (%)	April to June 2013 (%)	April to June 2014 (%)	% point change from April to June 2013 to April to June 2014
Age 16	5.9	5	3.8	-1.3 ppts
Age 17	9.7	8	7.4	-0.7 ppts
Age 18	15.9	14.4	12.9	-1.5 ppts

⁽¹²⁾ http://destinations.careerswales.com/2013/year11.html [accessed 24.4.2017].

Age 16-18	10.5	9.1	8	-1.1 ppts
Age 19-24	18.8	18.3	16	-2.2 ppts
Age 16-24	16.3	15.5	13.6	-1.9 ppts

Source: Labour force survey, April to June.

Regional data is collected using the local authorities client caseload information system. This data suggests that there are significant regional differences between the North East, North West and Yorkshire and Humberside which have higher NEET rates. London, the East Midlands have the lowest NEET rates.

There is no aggregated data that looks specifically at early leaving from vocational education as a whole. However, the data below looks at success rates of government-funded apprenticeships according to their level. Apprenticeships combine practical training in a job with study and they take 1 to 4 years to complete depending on their level. An apprenticeship has an equivalent education level and can be:

- (a) intermediate equivalent to Level 2 (lower secondary education);
- (b) advanced equivalent to Level 3 (upper secondary education), and
- (c) higher from ILevel 4 and above (post-secondary levels). Young people who are 16 years of age or over and are not in full-time education can apply for an apprenticeship (¹³).

Apprenticeship success rates - all apprenticeships and government-funded apprenticeships (2012/13) – percentages

				2012/13
Level	Age	apprentic	full year (all eeships)	Full year (government-funded apprenticeships)
Intermediate level	Under 19		69.8%	69.7%
apprenticeship	19-24	71.6%		71.4%
	25+	73.8%		73.7%
	Total		72.0%	71.9%
	of which19+	72.9%		72.7%
Advanced level	Under 19		75.9%	75.9%
apprenticeship	19-24		74.1%	74.1%
	25+		71.1%	71.1%

⁽¹³⁾ https://www.gov.uk/apprenticeships-guide [accessed 24.4.2017].

	Total		73.0%		73.0%
	of which 19+	72.3%		72.3%	
Higher apprenticeship	Under 19		77.4%		77.4%
	19-24		75.0%		74.9%
	25+		62.4%		62.4%
	Total		70.2%		70.2%
	of which 19+	69.7%		69.7%	
All apprenticeships	Under 19		71.5%		71.5%
	19-24		72.6%		72.5%
	25+		72.7%		72.6%
	Total		72.3%		72.3%
	of which 19+	72.6%		72.5%	

Notes: This table shows apprenticeship success rates in 2012/13 for all apprentices and for just those apprenticeships with government funding. The success rates for all apprentices were published in the January 2014 statistical first release. The success rates for government-funded apprentices were only published in the national success rates tables.

This data shows an increase in completion rates since 2007/8 when 64% of apprentices and advanced apprentices completed. Evidence suggests that non-completion occurs as a result of:

- (a) leaving one employer to join another (either in the same occupation or a different one);
- (b) returning to school, college, or university (depending upon qualification level); or
- (c) dropping-out of the education and training system to enter unskilled work, unemployment, or inactivity (¹⁴).

3. National and regional strategy to tackle ELET

The UK does not have a single, comprehensive strategy to tackle early leaving, but has developed strategies and action plans to ensure that young people and adults have the opportunity to complete their education and gain the qualifications they need to succeed in the workplace: each of the four jurisdictions across the United Kingdom has its own strategy. In England,

⁽¹⁴⁾ http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/ier/publications/bulletins/ier96.pdf [accessed 24.4.2017].

'Building engagement, building futures' (2011) sets out the strategy to maximise the participation of 16-24 year olds in education, training and work. 'Pathways to Success: Preventing Exclusion and Promoting Participation' (2012) is the Northern Ireland strategy designed to address comprehensively the issue of young people who are not in education, employment or training (NEET). In Wales, the 'Youth engagement and progression framework' (2013) brings together critical elements of NEET reduction (for those aged 11 to 25 years) together in one place with a clear two-year timetable for implementation (15).

Scope	Description			
Northern Ireland				
Strategy/action plan to reduce ELET in Northern Ireland	Pathways to success: preventing exclusion and promoting participation (¹⁶), 2012.			
	Brief description: this strategy aims to address comprehensively the issue of young people who are not in education, employment or training (NEET). It joins up actions being taken across the Northern Ireland's ministerial departments to prevent young people falling into the NEET category in the first place by addressing the barriers to learning as well as measures to re-engage those who have left school but are not in any other form of education, training or employment. The objective of the Strategy is that, by 2020, every young person will have an opportunity to access education, training or other preparation for employment and benefit from that opportunity.			
	This NEET strategy includes three main packages of measures:			
	 (a) preventive measures: ensuring young people can access opportunities for education and training, including apprenticeships; 			
	(b) compensatory measures to re-engage 16-18 year olds;			
	(c) compensatory measures to re-engaged 18-24 unemployed youth.			
	An evaluation of the strategy is underway.			
Elements of the strategy are	The strategy is translated in actions put in place by			

⁽¹⁵⁾ European Commission; EACEA; Eurydice; Cedefop (2014). Tackling early leaving from education and training in europe: strategies, policies and measures. Eurydice and Cedefop Report. Luxembourg: Publications Office.

⁽¹⁶⁾ Northern Ireland Executive (2012). Pathways to success – preventing exclusion and promoting participation of young people. http://www.delni.gov.uk/del-pathways-tosuccess-v6.pdf [accessed 24.4.2017].

explicitly linked to VET

further education (FE) colleges that give young people a second chance through vocational education, professional and technical training. FE colleges support young people to re-engage in education, employment or training, such as with: free transport to the college, free meals, meanstested financial support, mentoring, guidance support, etc. Colleges also work with a range of agencies to address issues such as drug and alcohol abuse, homelessness and mental health. The focus is on sorting out the barriers to learning first by improving young people's basic skills and raising their confidence, and then help them move into a vocational programme, training or apprenticeship. Specific funding is provided to the FE colleges for these 're-engaging programmes' in addition to their annual budget (both provided by the Department for Employment and Learning).

England

Strategy/action plan to reduce ELET in England

'Building engagement, building futures' (¹⁷) 2011 Building engagement, building futures' includes five priorities for action (¹⁸):

- (a) raising attainment in school and beyond to ensure that young people have the skills they need to compete in a global economy;
- (b) helping local partners to provide effective and coordinated services that support all young people, including the most vulnerable, putting us on track to achieve full participation for 16- to 17-year-olds by 2015;
- (c) encouraging and incentivising employers to inspire and recruit young people by offering more high quality apprenticeships and work experience places;
- (d) ensuring that work pays and giving young people the personalised support they need to find it, through universal credit, the work

⁽¹⁷⁾ Department for Education (2011). Building engagement, building futures: our strategy to maximise the participation of 16-24 year olds in education, training and work.

http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20130401151715/https://www.education.gov.uk/publications/standard/publicationDetail/Page1/HMG-00195-2012 [accessed 24.4.2017].

⁽¹⁸⁾ HM Government (2011). Building engagement, building futures: our strategy to maximise the participation of 16-24 year olds in education, training and work. p. 5.

programme and get Britain working measures (19);

(e) putting in place a new youth contract worth almost £1 billion over the next three years to help get young people learning or earning before long term damage is done.

Elements of the strategy are explicitly linked to VET

This strategy makes clear the commitment to improve vocational education following the Wolf review (²⁰). It looks specifically at apprenticeships reform, incentivising small businesses to take on young people and make it easier for employers to offer opportunities for apprentices. It also suggests a need for more coherent study between the ages of 16-19 with a specific focus on work experience.

It sets out intentions to ensure vocational qualifications offer high quality qualifications and make it easier for colleges to recruit directly from age 14.

It suggests that vocational education can yield considerable returns for young people and the economy.

Wales

Strategy/action plan to reduce ELET in Wales

Youth engagement and progression framework (YEPF)

The YEPF has six components, considered to be effective at increasing youth engagement and progression when implemented together as part of a strategy. These are: early identification; better brokerage and coordination of support; stronger tracking and transition of young people; ensuring provision meets the needs of young people; a focus on employability skills and opportunities for employment among young people; and greater accountability. Local authorities (LAs) have been charged with the role of leading the implementation of the Framework, working closely with Careers Wales, youth services, schools, providers of post-16

^{(&}lt;sup>19</sup>) These are governmental measures aimed at replacing means-tested welfare benefits. For example, the universal credit for 16-17 year olds aims to ensure that the most disadvantaged receive the additional support they need so as to reduce the financial, and some of the non-financial barriers, to work faced by disabled people. The purpose is to provide strong work incentives and to ensure that people are better off in work than on benefits.

http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20130401151715/https://www.education.gov.uk/publications/eOrderingDownload/HMG-00195-2012.pdf [accessed 24.4.2017].

⁽²⁰⁾ Wolf report (2011). Review of vocational education: the Wolf report. https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/18050 4/DFE-00031-2011.pdf [accessed 24.4.2017].

	education and training and other partners.
Elements of the strategy are explicitly linked to VET	The framework aims to support progression of NEETs into education and training and then employment for both vocational and academic pathways. However, there is not a specific focus on VET.

4. Recent policy initiatives

4.1. Northern Ireland

In Northern Ireland, the following policy initiatives have been undertaken in recent years by the Department for Employment and Learning to reduce ELET through VET:

- (a) the entitlement framework links up FE colleges with schools to provide vocational subjects/courses to learners from age 14 for ensuring their access to a broad and balanced curriculum;
- (b) additional support fund provides support to learners with specific educational needs being at greater risk of non-completion in FE college provision;
- (c) care to learn funding support available for single parents for covering the costs for childcare so as to allow them to engage in further education;
- (d) a new apprenticeship strategy (²¹) adopted in 2015 aims at raising the level of apprenticeships and increasing participation and retention in apprenticeships;
- (e) review of youth training (²²) targets young people above 16 years of age that finished compulsory education, but have not enrolled in any further education and are 'yet to be employed' (level 2 and below);
- (f) a new further education strategy is in development to shape future VET policy in Northern Ireland. The consultations with all relevant stakeholders are on-going. The aim is to better link FE colleges with the learners' needs and the employers' demands and set targets for using learner destinations and completion indicators;

(²¹) http://www.delni.gov.uk/securing-our-success-the-ni-strategy-on-apprenticeships.pdf [accessed 24.4.2017].

⁽²²⁾ http://www.delni.gov.uk/index/consultation-zone/ archived-consultations/archived-consultations-2014/review-of-youth-training.htm [accessed 24.4.2017].

(g) educational maintenance allowance provides financial incentive to encourage young people to continue in education and training.

4.2. England

In England the following policy initiatives have been developed to reduce ELET through VET:

- (a) traineeships which aim at giving young people the skills they need to progress into an apprenticeship, further education or employment;
- (b) raising of the participation age means that pupils who left year 11 in summer 2013 had to continue in education or training for at least a further year until June 2014. Pupils who left year 11 in summer 2014 or beyond need to continue until at least their 18th birthday;
- (c) vocational qualification reform- this is an on-going reform of the vocational qualification system as a whole;
- (d) apprenticeship funding reform- a funding arrangement was intended both to assist employers with the early costs of the Apprenticeship and to encourage retention;
- (e) youth contract a programme for 16- and 17-year-old NEETs to support them to re-engage into education, training or a job with training.

4.3. Wales

In Wales there are also apprenticeship and traineeship programmes which form a key part of VET initiatives to reduce ELET. Other initiatives include:

- (a) pathways to apprenticeship this programme offers young people, aged between 16 and 24, the opportunity to develop employment related skills within a further education institution on a full-time intensive training programme, including a work placement element of between 5 and 12 weeks in length, following a framework set by relevant Sector Skills Councils. Regional NEET strategies- In Wales LA have responsibility for developing individual NEET strategies which vary across local authorities;
- (b) local ESF funded programmes for example pre-vent- a 14-19 scheme aims to tackle the underlying reasons why youngsters find it difficult to learn and are at risk of leaving school without qualifications or the skills to find a job;
- (c) apprenticeship matching scheme- a scheme run by Careers Wales which aims to match apprentices with employers.

There are also many initiatives and projects carried out by FE colleges and by voluntary and community organisations that proved successful at re-engaging NEETs and supporting students with learning difficulties (²³).

Northern Ireland

New policy initiatives being undertaken that include a role for VET to reduce ELET: reduce ELET (in general) through VET.

Entitlement framework (EF)

The EF (24) has come into force in 2013 to encourage collaboration between post-14 school provision and vocational FE college provision in view of improving the breadth, relevance and quality of students' experiences during compulsory education. From September 2013, the EF guaranteed in law that all learners in Northern Ireland have access to a broad and balanced curriculum with a minimum number of courses at lower and upper secondary level (18 and 21 respectively from September 2013, rising to 24 and 27 by September 2015), a third of which must be applied (vocational) and a third, general. Qualifications under the new EF will contain a range of courses that can be individually tailored to students' interests and future career plans and thus enhance their employment chances. Post-primary schools work together with further education colleges to plan and provide the full range of general and vocational / technical course choice for young people in each local area.

Is the role of VET in reducing ELET assuming greater or lesser importance? Why?

The role of VET in reducing ELET is of greater importance. The collaboration between schools and further education colleges in delivering the Entitlement Framework aims to ensure that every young person has the opportunity through the education and training system to achieve their potential. By spending at least half a day per week at a FE college on more applied courses in a curriculum balanced on general-vocational courses, learning becomes more motivating and attractive for young people and the vocational pathway becomes better known. When leaving compulsory school at 16, young people are then better equipped to decide to continue education, training or take up an apprenticeship or a first job.

New policy initiatives being undertaken that include a role for VET to reduce ELET: reduce ELET from VET.

Additional support fund (ASF)

The key objective of the ASF is to widen access and increase participation of students with learning difficulties and disabilities in FE college provision. ASF is targeted at all students, enrolled in FE colleges, who have declared a learning difficulty and/or disability. The Fund,

^{(&}lt;sup>23</sup>) http://www.delni.gov.uk/scoping-study-young-people-not-in-education_-employment-or-training-neet.pdf [accessed 24.4.2017].

^{(&}lt;sup>24</sup>) Cedefop (2013). Spotlight on VET: the United Kingdom.

	incorporated within the FE college funding provided by the Department for Employment and Learning, is intended to help colleges to meet the necessary additional costs of provision for these students, such as for providing for an assigned person for sign-language, support for those with mobility issues, etc. The fund has two streams (²⁵): (a) meeting the cost of technical and personal support in mainstream FE college programmes;
	(b) meeting the extra costs associated with offering specific courses for students with learning difficulties and disabilities, for whom mainstream provision is not suitable.
Is the role of VET in reducing ELET assuming greater or lesser importance? Why?	This initiative aims to reduce ELVET through building capacity of FE colleges to respond to the individual needs of learners with special learning difficulties and disabilities. It is believed that with this additional support, FE colleges can help these learners stay and progress in education and training.
New policy initiatives being undertaken that include a role for VET to reduce ELET: reduce ELET (in general) through VET.	New apprenticeship strategy A new apprenticeship strategy has just been adopted in 2015 and is now being implemented as pilot testing before being rolled out from September 2016 onwards. The aim is to establish apprenticeships as a system of employment and learning that is adaptive to the particular needs of employers across a wider range of sectors and at higher levels, from level 3 up to level 7-8 to correspond to equivalent levels of university education. Employers as well as FE colleges and higher education institutions are directly involved in developing the curricula frameworks for these new qualifications through apprenticeships. Sectoral groups have been established to involve relevant employers and other stakeholders to drive the development of a particular apprenticeship and thus make the system more proactive to the employers' needs for skills. Following the model of the skills barometer in the Netherlands, the strategy aims to link apprenticeship placements with employment vacancies.
Is the role of VET in reducing ELET assuming greater or lesser importance? Why?	The role of VET is much greater than before because it is expected that the new apprenticeship system will offer more and better opportunities for work-based placements for those 16-year olds finishing compulsory education and not going into university, but opt for practical training with employers in the form of apprenticeships.
New policy initiatives being undertaken that include a role for VET to reduce ELET:	Review of youth training Youth training has been providing vocational courses at Level 2 and below to 16-year olds who finished

^{(&}lt;sup>25</sup>) http://www.delni.gov.uk/del-pathways-to-success-v6.pdf [accessed 24.4.2017].

- (a) reduce ELET from VET;
- (b) reduce ELET (in general) through VET.

compulsory education and are 'yet to be employed' – similar to the youth guarantee model. The aim of the review is to better match the demand and supply and provide a seamless progression route for young people to a breadth of professional and technical occupations, in a similar fashion as the review of the apprenticeships scheme. While the general minimum requirement for any first job is Level 5 of the General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) the review aims to develop 'youth baccalaureate' to help learners achieve this minimum of Level 5 so as to get into employment. It also offers training in a workshop environment.

Is the role of VET in reducing ELET assuming greater or lesser importance? Why?

As for the apprenticeships, the role of VET in reducing ELET is of greater importance than before because the initiative aims to enhance the value and qualification from this youth training provision so that those young people targeted can indeed benefit from this pathway and get better prepared for employment, hence preventing to become NEETs.

New policy initiatives being undertaken that include a role for VET to reduce ELET: reduce ELET from VET.

Educational maintenance allowance (EMA)

The EMA was introduced jointly in September 2004 by the Department for Employment and Learning and the Department of Education in recognition of the importance of financial incentives in encouraging young people to continue in education. The main purpose of the scheme is to encourage young people from low income backgrounds to remain in post compulsory education. EMA was introduced for 16 year olds in 2004 and was extended to the entire 16 to 19 year old age group in the 2007/08 academic year. While EMA was abolished in England in 2010, it was evaluated as an effective measure in Northern Ireland and it was continued and strengthened since.

Is the role of VET in reducing ELET assuming greater or lesser importance? Why?

EMA is a very important financial incentive for 16-year olds and older to remain in education and training after finishing compulsory education, especially in vocational pathways (given the disadvantaged background of the target group, these young people cannot afford to go to university due to the high fees).

England

New policy initiatives being undertaken that include a role for VET to reduce ELET: reduce ELET (in general) through VET.

Raising the participation age (RPA)

The compulsory participation age in education and training has been raised to 17 years in England in 2013 and is to be raised to 18 from 2015. This policy initiative means that pupils who left year 11 in summer 2013 had to continue in education or training for at least a further year until June 2014. Pupils who left year 11 in summer 2014 or beyond need to continue until at least their 18th birthday.

This could be through:

(a) full-time study in a school, college or with a training

	provider;		
	(b) full-time work or volunteering (20 hours or more) combined with part-time education or training; or		
	(c) an apprenticeship or traineeship		
	The Department for Education considers that participating in education or training for longer means young people are more likely to attain higher levels of qualifications and have increased earnings over their lifetime, better health and improved social skills. This in turn contributes to a more highly skilled, productive, and internationally competitive workforce (²⁶).		
Is the role of VET in reducing ELET assuming greater or lesser importance? Why?	VET is an absolutely vital part of meeting the requirements of the increased participation age. Students who might have become NEET or entered the workplace will need to continue in education and VET provision fills this gap.		
	Interviewees noted that raising the participation age has had an impact on co-ordination with the FE sector. Local Authorities have responsibility for implementing RPA and in some cases this has led to better co-ordination with vocational education providers.		
New policy initiatives being	Traineeships		
undertaken that include a role for VET to reduce ELET: reduce ELET (in general) through VET.	The traineeship programme was developed 'to help young people who are focused on getting an apprenticeship or sustainable job but who do not yet have the skills or experience to compete successfully for vacancies. There are three main components of traineeships, acknowledging that barriers to finding paid work (including apprenticeships) are often multi-faceted:		
	 (a) high quality work experience placement: developing workplace skills; 		
	(b) a focused period of work preparation training: Including CV writing, job search skills and interview preparation to help young people with the practicalities of finding and securing work;		
	(c) English and maths training: to ensure trainees have, or are working towards, the levels of literacy and numeracy required in the workplace.		
Is the role of VET in reducing ELET assuming greater or lesser importance? Why?	Traineeships aim to provide young people with higher level vocational education facilitating access to apprenticeships. Interventions that allow progression and are accessible to those not ready to undertake an apprenticeship, play an important role in VET's ability to reduce ELET. It provides an important pathway for school		

^{(&}lt;sup>26</sup>) https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/349300/Participation_of_Young_People_Statutory_Guidance.pdf [accessed 24.4.2017].

	leavers into VET.
New policy initiatives being	Apprenticeship funding reform
undertaken that include a role for VET to reduce ELET:	In this new approach, the government will:
reduce ELET from VET	 (a) support apprenticeships for young people aged 16 and 17 by contributing to the additional development costs employers may incur immediately after recruiting them, regardless of the size of their employer;
	 (b) provide additional support to smaller businesses taking on apprentices that are working towards the new standards;
	(c) co-invest with employers in the external training and assessment required to meet- and be assessed against-the Apprenticeship standard, where it is provided by an approved provider, up to the maximum government contribution for the standard; or
	 (d) contribute towards the costs of training and assessment required to meet-
	 (e) and be assessed against- the apprenticeship standard, where it is provided by an employer meeting the same requirements as an external training provider;
	 (f) support apprentices of any age to achieve English and maths up to and including the minimum of Level 2 or higher if required by the standard, by meeting the full costs;
	 (g) incentivise employers to ensure their apprentices complete their training and achieve the relevant standard by incorporating a payment by results (PBR) element into the funding model; and
	(h) support people with learning difficulties or disabilities to undertake Apprenticeships by meeting the full costs of reasonable adjustments and support, to enable them to compete on a par with other apprentices (²⁷).
Is the role of VET in reducing ELET assuming greater or lesser importance? Why?	Apprenticeships are playing a key role in raising the profile of vocational education across the board. An interviewee suggested that making apprenticeships increasingly responsive to employer needs is essential. Some interviews suggested that high level apprenticeships have meant VET's profile has increased considerably and this has had a filter down effect on other vocational studies. However, others suggested that

^{(&}lt;sup>27</sup>) https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/302235/bis-14-597-future-of-apprenticeships-in-england-funding-reform-technical-consultatation.pdf [accessed 24.4.2017].

although the profile of apprenticeships has risen, high level apprenticeships are increasingly seen as the gold standard, meaning that the profiles of other VET courses have not risen.

New policy initiatives being undertaken that include a role for VET to reduce ELET:

- (a) reduce ELET from VET;
- (b) reduce ELET (in general) through VET.

Vocational qualification reform

This policy aimed to respond to the Wolf report which suggested that many vocational qualifications had low labour market value and employer recognition.

Previously, vocational qualifications were not reported in 14-16 age cohorts' performance tables and were not used to measure school and college standards. Higher level vocational qualifications were first reported in performance tables in 2015.

The Skills Funding Agency has been streamlining public funding for qualifications with low demand. It is also implementing a set of business rules for approval of qualifications funding which focus on size, purpose and employer recognition of qualifications.

Existing Apprenticeship frameworks are being replaced by new employer-designed Apprenticeship standards there will be higher expectations for English and Maths within Apprenticeships, a 12 month minimum duration regardless of age or prior experience, more assessment at the end, and the introduction of grading. Eight Trailblazers have been formed already, through which leading employers are coming together to design the first new Apprenticeship standards for their sectors. Further phases of Trailblazers will develop standards over the next few years, and by 2017/18 all new Apprenticeship starts will be working towards standards, rather than frameworks' (²⁸).

The UKCES are working on defining new, higher-level occupational standards. The apprenticeship standards will feed into this into this creating a more integrated system.

Plans continue to change vocational funding mechanisms with a specific focus on looking at different models of payment by results. This aims at incentivising positive outcomes of vocational training. There is also an increased focus on online only funding systems.

Ofqual and the Skills Funding Agency are also working to make more open and accessible information available on the vocational qualifications available.

Is the role of VET in reducing ELET assuming greater or lesser importance? Why?

There was a view amongst interviewees that streamlining VET qualifications will have a positive effect on VET and its ability to meet the needs of employers. This direction of travel is seen as both beneficial to those undertaking

⁽²⁸⁾ https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/286749/bis-14-577-vocational-qualification-reform-plan.pdf [accessed 24.4.2017].

	VET education but also for the economy in general. Some interviewees raised concern however that communication between employers and policy makers could be improved.
Wales	
New policy initiatives being undertaken that include a role for VET to reduce ELET: reduce ELET (in general) through VET	Traineeships Traineeships aim to give young people the skills they need to progress into an apprenticeship, further education or employment. The concept of traineeships focuses on tailoring support to meet the specific needs of individual trainees, enabling them to progress into higher levels of learning or into employment. Delivery of traineeships should combine a work placement, community project or voluntary work with centre -based learning opportunities.
Is the role of VET in reducing ELET assuming greater or lesser importance? Why?	Interviewees suggested that traineeships have gained popularity and status off the back of the success of apprenticeships. Traineeships play an extremely important role in terms of reducing ELET because they directly target the most at risk individuals. In this sense it could be argued that traineeships are vital to VET as a tool to reduce ELET.
New policy initiatives being undertaken that include a role for VET to reduce ELET: reduce ELET (in general) through VET	Local Authority NEET strategies Local authority NEET strategies vary greatly across Wales and this means that partnership and funding arrangements also vary. The introduction of the Youth Engagement and Progression Framework aimed to co- ordinate these strategies on a national level. Local Authorities often apply for European Social Fund for localised programmes to tackle NEETs. Examples of regional NEET strategies can be found in the strategy published by the Blaenau Gwent Children and Young People's Partnership (²⁹).
Is the role of VET in reducing ELET assuming greater or lesser importance? Why?	The focus on VET varies across local authorities. Overall VET is increasingly prominent tool used to reduce NEETs; however, there is variation across LA in terms of their promotion of VET. Interviewees suggest that LA policy has mainly focused on reducing NEET in younger age groups. An area for future co-ordination is focusing more on those up to the age of 24. It is likely that this will increase the focus on VET further.
New policy initiatives being undertaken that include a role for VET to reduce ELET:	Apprenticeship matching service This is a free on-line service provided by Careers Wales which aims to help employers find suitable apprentices and aspiring apprentices to find opportunities in a

^{(&}lt;sup>29</sup>) Blaenau Gwent Children; Young People's Partnership (2011). *Blaenau Gwent NEET reduction strategy 2011-14*.

reduce ELET (in general) through VET	business that is right for them. This service allows employers to view all applicants, carryout shortlisting and organise pre-interview tests/checks, send invitations for interview and accept and reject applicants.
Is the role of VET in reducing ELET assuming greater or lesser importance? Why?	In the current economic climate this service provides an important platform for matching learners and employers. As such it is contributing the success of VET as a tool in reducing ELET.

5. Stakeholder cooperation

In the United Kingdom, partnership practice is well established, i.e. teams work together in a structured and institutionalised way.

Questions	Answers
What are and have been the main influences of stakeholders in the development and implementation of VET related policies specifically to reduce ELET: (a) employers; (b) trade unions social partners; (c) VET institutions; (d) other learning providers.	In Northern Ireland, cooperation mechanisms are being developed. Sector cooperation is mentioned in the strategy 'Pathways to success: preventing exclusion and promoting participation of Young People', which proposes arrangements to ensure that there is effective collaboration between all areas involved to ensure a successful NEET strategy. Multi-agency partnerships at local/institutional level are well established and involve professionals such as school heads, teachers, guidance specialists, psychologists, social workers, youth workers, as well as speech and language specialists (30). The Department for Employment and Learning mentioned that the networks of special educational needs, FE colleges and employers are all involved in the development of further education policies. There is a close relationship between the Department, FE colleges and employers in the delivery of the further education programmes. Wales The introduction of the youth engagement and progression framework (31) in Wales focuses on increased co-operation between national, regional and local stakeholders so reduce NEET. In wales local authorities are responsible for the coordination of regional strategies and the co-ordination of school, colleges,

⁽³⁰⁾ European Commission; EACEA; Eurydice; Cedefop (2014). *Tackling early leaving from education and training in Europe: strategies, policies and measures.* Eurydice and Cedefop Report. Luxembourg: Publications Office.

^{(&}lt;sup>31</sup>) http://gov.wales/docs/dcells/publications/131007-ye-framework-implementation-planen.pdf [accessed 24.4.2017].

training providers, Careers Wales, Job Centre Plus and third sector agencies. There are also four larger regional authorities groups which aim to co-ordinate the work of local authorities. This is a significant development and increased collaboration between local authorities is expected to have an impact on NEETs.

England

In England coordination between VET stakeholders is more centralised than in Wales. The Department for Education as well as the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills collaborate with VET stakeholders in the development of national policy and VET reform measures. Local authorities monitor NEET statistics but have little influence or funding available to have a significant impact. As a result many NEET interventions are co-ordinated at a more centralised level.

6. Monitoring systems

Northern Ireland	
Question	Answers
What specific early leavers monitoring systems exist?	Name/descriptor: 'Further education activity' in Northern Ireland (32).
	Aims: data collection management system shared by the six FE colleges and the Department for Employment and Learning in Northern Ireland.
	Year introduced/planned: 2009/10
	Coverage:
	(a) all programmes delivered by FE colleges, including school-based VET and apprenticeships;
	(b) all six FE colleges in the Northern Ireland.
What information is monitored/collected?	Data collected: enrolment numbers and rates by programme, age groups, gender, deprivation area, qualification levels as well as completion, retention, achievement, attainment levels and success rates in the programmes and per FE college.
What are the data used for? How it is used by VET institutions/providers?	Data is reported monthly by FE colleges to the Department and the results are published in Statistical Bulletins released several times per year.

⁽³²⁾ Data system: http://www.delni.gov.uk/further-education-stats [accessed 24.4.2017].

How is the monitoring system linked with offering support measures? (i.e. is it being used to contact those who have dropped out to provide support to find employment, education or further training?)	The Department sets at the beginning of each year enrolment, achievement and success targets for FE colleges, which are directly linked to funding of the FE college provision.
What role is/ has the monitoring system played in the design, development or implementation of the policies, strategies and initiatives?	Data is reported monthly by FE colleges to the Department and the results are published in Statistical Bulletins released several times per year and used in the policy development and review by the Department. Statistical Bulletins also look at trends over the 5-year period since the data collection system has been introduced.
Wales	
What specific early leavers monitoring systems exist?	Name/descriptor: destinations data Aims: to track the destinations of year 11, 12 and 13 students Year introduced/planned: 2003- current Coverage: pupils who have reached statutory leaving age. Pupils from special schools are included in the survey; those attending FE colleges and independent schools are not included (33).
What information is monitored/collected?	The 2014 survey reports the destinations of 63 516 pupils from secondary schools across Wales. It includes pupils who have reached statutory leaving age, Year 11, and pupils leaving school in Years 12 and 13. Males account for 49.5% of the total cohort (31 462) and Females 50.5% (32 054) (34).
What are the data used for? How it is used by VET institutions/providers?	'The annual survey of school leavers undertaken by Careers Wales on behalf of the Welsh Government, provides a useful snapshot of pupil destinations which informs careers staff in their work with clients, parents, teachers and employers. The data collected also proves an invaluable aid to partners and colleagues involved in planning learning, training and employment opportunities (35).

⁽³³⁾ http://destinations.careerswales.com/index.html [accessed 24.4.2017].

⁽³⁴⁾ http://destinations.careerswales.com/index.html [accessed 24.4.2017].

⁽³⁵⁾ http://destinations.careerswales.com/2013/index.html [accessed 24.4.2017].

How is the monitoring system linked with offering support measures? (i.e. is it being used to contact those who have dropped out to provide support to find employment, education or further training?) Destinations data is collected by Careers Wales who are an organisation funded by the Welsh Government to provide careers advice. They act as impartial careers service and have responsibility for coordinating local stakeholder to re-engage young people. They also play a role in updating monitoring information and acting as the first point of contact for young people.

What role is/ has the monitoring system played in the design, development or implementation of the policies, strategies and initiatives?

This data has very clearly influenced policy. Local authorities use this data as part of their internal planning systems which are increasingly based on more robust use of monitoring data as a result of the youth engagement and progression framework. Although arrangement varies across local authorities it is best practice that this information is shared with school and colleges who can use it to influence their internal policies.

England

What specific early leavers monitoring systems exist?

Name/descriptor: national client Caseload Information System (NCCIS)

Aims: NCCIS is the database that local authorities use to record the activity of young people aged 16-19 resident in their area.

Year introduced/planned: -information not available. Coverage: all throughout England.

What information is monitored/collected?

The information includes information on young person's current education or training provider, intended destination, cohort status, ethnicity and other aspects.

What are the data used for? How it is used by VET institutions/providers?

The NEET data collected by local authorities is often communicated to VET institutions and providers. It provides a monitoring system which tracks learners and identifies those at risk. The extent to which information is communicated and shared with VET institutions varies across LAs. In situations where arrangements are advanced, data is shared with a variety of relevant stakeholders and used as a centralised tool to enable NEET interventions. It was noted by interviewees that Raising Participation Age had had an impact in the LAs' role as a broker between FE providers and employers. The increased responsibility for LAs has meant that in some cases they are focusing on disseminating data and acting as a broker in FE. However, this is not the case in some LAs as there is no statutory obligation to use the NCCIS data as a flexible tool.

How is the monitoring system linked with offering support measures? (i.e. is it being used to contact those who have dropped out to provide support to find employment, education or further training?) See above.

Although data is being used by stakeholders in some cases to inform intervention, it is generally used to monitor NEET numbers rather than track individual learners and provide support that leads to intervention.

What role is/ has the monitoring system played in the design, development or implementation of the policies, strategies and initiatives?

This data is shared with the Department for Education and it also feeds into overall NEET statistics which are used in policy making. This information is used to monitor the success of the Youth Guarantee and directly feeds back into policy design, development and implementation.

7. Effect of the economic crisis

Question

In what ways has the role of VET in reducing ELET been influenced by the economic crisis:

Supply of VET places Demand for VET places Qualifications of VET students (increasing decreasing)

Popularity and perception of VET

Increase/decrease in public resources for VET Access to 'second chance' VET opportunities

Answers

A study by the work foundation shows that a much higher proportion of 16-18 year olds are in full time education compared to 18-24 year olds and that since the onset of the economic recession there has been an increase in the proportion of 16-24 year olds deciding to remain in full-time education to avoid unemployment. '42% of 16-24 year olds are now in full-time education in the UK'. In general, males are slightly more likely to continue in work-based training and become NEET, whilst females were more likely to continue into further education.

In England, the education maintenance allowance (³⁶) had quite a significant effect on retention levels, on staying in education, in some areas it raised levels by 10%. In 2010, this scheme was abolished due to austerity measures, considered to be too expensive for the state (600 million pounds), at the same time that university fees were raised up to three times. State benefits if a young person is unemployed were also reduced drastically.

Interviewees emphasised that the economic crisis had decreased the public resources for FE colleges, subsequently to the 'second chance' VET opportunities, as well as brought cuts for some VET measures. The Department for Employment and Learning in Northern Ireland stated that for the first time ever, FE colleges would not be able to offer as many places as demanded, hence they would face the situation of rejecting young people from their provision. Also due to the budget cuts, the number of full-time programmes has been reduced and thus part-time

⁽³⁶⁾ Sources: interviewees.

provision has become preponderant.

In England austerity measures have particularly effected the role of LAs and their ability to reduce NEET numbers. There is a lack of capacity and funding available for them to be able to act as a broker between local FE providers, employers and learners. Some interviewees suggested that the recession played a significant role in the push from Government to make education more receptive to employer demand and therefore those of the economy more generally.

In Wales it was noted by interviewees that the recession had had a significant negative effect on the subsidisation of part time learning which could have an impact on the skills that individuals are bringing to the classroom environment. Part time students are able to work alongside study but this is not encouraged by funding mechanisms which instead are heavily focused on apprenticeships and traineeships.

8. Factors positively contributing to the effectiveness of VET in reducing ELET

Across England, Wales and Northern Ireland there has been an increased focus on Vocational Education as a tool to reduce NEETs.

The following factors have been identified through interviews with policy-makers and practitioners as positively contributing to the effectiveness of VET measures to reduce early leaving and increase retention and completion rates:

- (a) linking funding to targets for completion and achievement: In Northern Ireland, the Assembly sets annual targets for the number of qualifications, enrolment figures, completion rates and achievement targets. The completion and success rates of a FE college impacts on the level of funding it receives. FE college provider funding is thus directly linked to the retention of students in further education and training. This funding formula urges FE providers to be efficient and effective in their provision;
- (b) financial incentives to learners: The majority of providers responding to a survey 'thought that the education maintenance allowance (³⁷) was having a positive impact on young people's participation (58%) and engagement in learning (54%). Similarly, two-thirds (68%) thought it was effective in targeting young people facing the greatest barriers to participation';

⁽³⁷⁾ Replaced with bursary fund in England: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/19999 6/DFE-RR265.pdf [accessed 24.4.2017].

- (c) engaging providers in policy dialogue: engaging FE colleges, employers and learners was reported to be helpful in shaping useful and effective programmes. For example, in the Northern Ireland Training for Success, FE college providers exchange with the project management team regularly and such opportunities are much appreciated on both sides;
- (d) in England this can be seen in the recent consultation of apprenticeship funding mechanisms where hundreds of stakeholders gave their views on potential changes to the apprenticeship funding system;
- (e) good employment prospects: the introduction of tuition fees for higher education studies has made apprenticeships an increasingly attractive alternative as they are considered to lead to good job opportunities and would not result in incurring a student debt. There are apprenticeship matching services where young people can search for vacancies online in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Whilst more employers have also started taking on apprentices, there are campaigns to encourage even more employers to offer apprenticeship places to cope with demand. Apprenticeship completion rates have been rising in recent years, to over 70% across the UK countries (³⁸);
- (f) quality of the teachers has been repeatedly reported as an important factor. A likely factor of the outcome of completing the vocational course is: raising the value and attractiveness of the teacher in engaging the learners as well as making sure that teachers are kept up to date with technology and the requirements from employers in the given sectors. However, it was also reported by interviewees that this was an area for improvement as some teachers may not have adequate knowledge of the vocational options available to young people;
- (g) inclusiveness of providers: FE colleges are known to be committed to inclusiveness of their learners through the courses and programmes offered so that 'every young person can get a chance at further education and training'. They are also inspected for quality assurance and one of the criteria is to support and include all learners, including those with disabilities, special educational needs, etc.;
- (h) provision of basic levels of literacy and numeracy in addition to vocational courses: As requirements for basic levels of English and maths (GTSE Level 5) are common among employers, such 'essential skills' courses have been introduced as a requirement for FE college provision and linked to their

^{(&}lt;sup>38</sup>) Cedefop ReferNET (2014). *Early leaving from vocational education and training in the United Kingdom.*

funding. Being able to go back to basic levels of literacy and numeracy in FE colleges was assessed as positive by the interviewees, but on the other hand, they highlighted that the benchmark for GCSE makes it still an academic qualification which are not attractive for young people who already failed them while in school;

- (i) collaboration between FE colleges and employers as well as with schools and universities: the most effective further education and training programmes / qualifications are designed collaboratively by FE colleges with employers as well as with universities to ensure portability. Increasing engagement from universities was reported by one interviewee as an important factor in increasing the profile of VET. These Maths and English requirements may water down the attractiveness of VET for some learners;
- (j) incentives to employers to engage in apprenticeships: interviewees pointed out that micro and small employers are not very likely to engage in the design and implementation of apprenticeships due to the administrative burden involved. Provision of administrative support (advertising, recruiting, training of apprentices) is often an effective way to ensure buy-in from employers;
- (k) career advice and guidance at key transition points: careers advisers operate throughout the UK from job centres, jobs and benefits offices and stand-alone careers offices. Advisers also work with careers teachers in schools and further education colleges to provide impartial advice and guidance to pupils from 14 to 19. In Northern Ireland, careers education is a statutory area of learning in the common curriculum for all grant-aided post-primary schools. In addition, FE colleges are required to offer careers guidance to their students. In Wales there is an independent careers service called Careers Wales which is seen as provider of impartial advice. There was a view amongst interviewees that co-ordination between Careers Wales and other services had improved but that there was still work to be done in this area;
- (I) investment in apprenticeships: the resurgence in apprenticeships has had an important impact on promoting vocational education as a whole. There has been a push from the government to promote high level and prestigious apprenticeships. Indeed, some are now seen to be as competitive as getting into Oxbridge. This focus on apprenticeships aims to provide greater options for young people. It was noted by interviewees that this investment in apprenticeships was impacting on other areas of vocational education such as traineeships, raising awareness and making young people aware of the vocational options available to them;

(m) increased awareness of skills shortages- A good example of this increased awareness is the recent changes to FE maths and English provision. There was a need identified by employers that some young people were lacking suitable literacy and numeracy skills needed in the work place. In response to this extra provision is no required for those not meeting the minimum GCSE standards pre-16. This means that all vocational courses must offer English and Maths provision with the aim of raising standards in both these areas.

Factors constraining the effectiveness of VET to reduce ELET

The following factors have been identified as constraining the effectiveness of VET measures to reduce early leaving and decrease retention and completion rates:

- (a) vocational pathway is not highly valued: the academic pathway is very highly valued in the UK at the expense of the vocational route. This is an attitude that is changing however, there is much to be done in terms of continuing an attitudinal shift. The challenge is the low value and status of further education and training, often seen as second chance by parents, peers, employers, etc. Employers still value much more academic learning outcomes than the vocational outcomes. Some policy initiatives (such as the new Apprenticeship Strategy in NI) aim at raising the prestige of the vocational route and making it more attractive;
- (b) a too high number of qualifications leads to confusion: a very high number of vocational qualifications are on offer in the UK, and with frequent introductions of new courses and changes to existing courses it can be confusing for young people and their parents to choose the most suitable course; on the other hand, the academic route is straight-forwarded and options are better focused. Research has found evidence that frequent changes to vocational qualifications can lead to confusion regarding their value and relevance (³⁹);
- (c) reluctance of employers to take on young apprentices: while buy-in from employers is key for apprenticeships for the outcomes of VET-measures, some employers are reluctant to take on apprentices due to fears about the economic situation, despite the availability of government funding;

^{(39) 2011} Wolf report. Review of vocational education.

employers pay apprentices' salary, but there is government funding for 16-24 year old apprentices' training in England. While the number of apprentices in the UK has risen sharply in recent years, a large proportion of the vacancies have been filled by adult learners above 25 years of age. Adult apprentices are often viewed by employers as more capable workers who already possess both technical and soft skills and therefore require less training than young people (⁴⁰);

- (d) budget cuts impact on inclusiveness of measures: Funding for VET measures is a big challenge in NI at present time, public funding being reduced for FE colleges at the beginning of 2015. The kind of provision to support the most challenged youth groups in further education and training is difficult to keep in the context in which there is a heavy focus on outcomes. Making the case for continuing investment in targeted VET measures is challenging in this context;
- (e) uncertainty of future funding for VET measures: All VET-related strategies and policies in NI have only a one-year budget due to the elections of next year, when the budgets would need to be approved following an extensive review. In Wales Interviewees noted that uncertainty in budgets has meant that employing high quality full time vocational teachers has been challenging for some colleges;
- (f) outdated qualifications for careers advisors: the Northern Ireland Schools and Colleges Careers Association has presented evidence (41) that careers advice is offered in schools and colleges, often in dedicated rooms, but that service is of variable standard due to a lack of or old qualifications and lack of staff dedicated specifically to careers advice;
- (g) in England and Wales interviewees both noted that there were improvements to be made in terms of careers advice. This was both the advice given in school by teachers which was often seen to be outdated but also in advice given by careers services. There was a view that further investment in educating careers advisors about the vocational options available. In England many colleges and schools use private companies to

⁽⁴⁰⁾ Interviews and Cedefop ReferNET (2014). VET in Europe – Country report: the United Kingdom.

⁽⁴¹⁾ Report 2013. http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/assembly-business/official-report/committee-minutes-of-evidence/session-2012-2013/april-2013/inquiry-into-careers-education-information-advice-and-guidance-in-northern-ireland-ni-schools-and-colleges-careers-association-briefing/ [accessed 24.4.2017].

- give careers advice and there was a view that this does not ensure quality provision;
- (h) redundant vocational qualifications at low levels: the Wolf review identified that too many vocational qualifications at lower secondary level in England (but also valid for the rest of the UK) were considered equivalent to GCSE subjects and that some of these vocational equivalent qualifications were easier to complete and obtain good grades in. Consequently, the report describes a situation in which students may be guided into completing qualifications that are less well regarded in the labour market to gain good grades, which in turn reflects well on the school's performance in the published school league tables. The Wolf Review recommended that only good quality vocational qualifications were to be considered equivalent to GCSE subjects in terms of the school league tables (42). As a result of this report, vocational qualifications at Level 1 and 2 are not being funded anymore.
- (i) lack of awareness of the vocational pathway: reports show that many pupils don't receive sufficient information about further vocational study opportunities. A survey by Edge of A level (EQF level 4) students revealed that they felt teaching staff lacked awareness of vocational courses. A third of young learners polled (32%) state VQs (vocational qualifications) and vocational opportunities have never been presented to them as an option, while 77% were even discouraged from pursuing a vocational path (43). Secondary schools moreover lack incentives to advise students to embark on a post-16 vocational study route, as the current school league table ranking takes retention, GCSE results and progression to academic higher education into consideration, but ignores VET. In spite of recent campaigns promoting VQs and apprenticeships, VET is still not considered as prestigious as general academic qualifications amongst most young people and parents in the UK;
- (j) the recession: there was a view amongst interviewees that although the financial crisis was easing it was to some extent constraining the VETs ability to reduce ELET. This was principally hindering smaller employers to engage in work placements and some schemes such as pathways to apprenticeship have found that employer engagement proved difficult.

⁽⁴²⁾ Cedefop ReferNET (2014). VET in Europe – country report: the United Kingdom.

⁽⁴³⁾ http://www.vqday.org.uk/press-releases/2012/vocational-stigma-starts-in-school [accessed 24.4.2017].