

Institution: The University of Huddersfield
Unit of Assessment: 25 Education
Title of case study: Researching Young People on the Margins of Education and Training
<p>1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)</p> <p>The University of Huddersfield's School of Education and Professional Development has produced an extensive body of research addressing the experiences and needs of educationally marginalised young people. This work has developed understanding of the experiences of young people not in education, employment or training (NEET), learners in alternative education and those on low-level vocational programmes. Responding to stakeholder demands for a more nuanced insight into these problems and their possible solutions, research has been disseminated to practitioners, policymakers, voluntary organisations, local authorities and the wider public through conference presentations, keynote addresses and the media, benefiting user communities at local, regional and national levels.</p>
<p>2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)</p> <p>Common conceptions about NEET young people are dominated by negative stereotypes and assertions. Research carried out at the University of Huddersfield has played a key role in addressing these assumptions by uncovering the complex interplay of factors involved in young people's attempts to negotiate a route into adult life. This has revolved around analyses of the policy context and curriculum initiatives associated with young people at risk of long-term exclusion, including care leavers, teenage parents and young offenders.</p> <p>In 2008 Robin Simmons (Senior Lecturer 2004-10; Reader 2010-13; Professor 2013-present) examined the proposal to extend compulsory participation in education and training to the age of 18. Compared with previous attempts to do this, which took place in significantly different socio-economic contexts, the study argued that the needs of those most likely to be affected by the proposal - young people who are NEET — were in danger of being subordinated to the demands of an economy increasingly based on low-skill, low-pay work relations (Ref. 1).</p> <p>Examining training programmes which purport to enhance the “employability” of young people deemed not yet ready for employment, an apprenticeship or further education has been a significant feature of the research. Commencing in late 2008, research in this area led Simmons and other Education academics to engage with practitioners and policymakers who identified the need for more sustained research in this field, resulting in a number of studies.</p> <p>Simmons' (2) initial research into Entry to Employment (E2E) programmes warned that a focus on largely occupational socialisation and generic skills could promote an impoverished form of “employability” and reinforce class-based labour divisions. Subsequent research into E2E by Simmons, Dr Ron Thompson (Head of Division, 2005-present) and Dr Lisa Russell (Senior Research Fellow, 2008-present) showed how a marketised target-driven system and funding constraints can compromise practitioners' ability to best meet young people's needs (3). The team conducted a one-year ethnographic study of young people attending E2E programmes in two local authorities in the north of England, concluding that such schemes, although potentially helping to find work, were unlikely to offer participants a labour-market advantage in adverse economic conditions (4).</p> <p>The success of the E2E research helped secure funding from The Leverhulme Trust to carry out longitudinal research into the lived experience of NEET young people between 2010-2013. The Joseph Rowntree Foundation then awarded the same team a grant to examine the workplace experiences of young people who have previously been NEET, a project which ran from 2012-2013.</p> <p>In 2011 Thompson carried out research that related the NEET category to ideas of social exclusion. The study concluded that individualised approaches based on the personal and cultural</p>

Impact case study (REF3b)

characteristics of NEET young people are inadequate for understanding the category and as a basis for policymaking (5). This research underscored many of the key findings of the School of Education and Professional Development's research into the lives of marginalised young people, including that although many of those classified as NEET may lead chaotic lives, most have "mainstream" attitudes and aspirations and that being NEET is not rooted in cultures of dependency and "worklessness"(6).

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

1) Simmons, R (2008): Raising the Age of Compulsory Education: A NEET Solution?, *British Journal of Educational Studies*, 56(4), 420-439. Cited 6 times in Scopus. Viewed 407 times on Taylor & Francis Online.

<http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1111/j.1467-8527.2008.00417.x>

2) Simmons, R (2009): Entry to Employment: Discourses of Employability and Inclusion in Work-Based Learning for Young People, *Journal of Education and Work*, 22(2), 137-151. Cited 10 times in Scopus. Viewed 246 times on Taylor & Francis Online.

<http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/13639080902854060>

3) Russell, L, Simmons, R, and Thompson, R (2010): Playing the Numbers Game: Connexions Personal Advisers Working with Learners on Entry to Employment Programmes, *Journal of Vocational Education and Training*, 62(1), 1-12. Cited 6 times in Scopus. Viewed 104 times on Taylor & Francis online.

<http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/13636820903427561>

4) Russell, L, Simmons, R, and Thompson, R (2011a): Ordinary Lives: An Ethnographic Study of Young People Attending Entry to Employment Programmes, *Journal of Education and Work*, 24(5), 477-499. Cited 3 times in Scopus. Viewed 567 times on Taylor & Francis Online.

<http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/13639080.2011.573773>

5) Thompson, R (2011): Individualisation and Social Exclusion: The Case of Young People Not in Education, Employment or Training. *Oxford Review of Education*, 62(6), 785-802. Viewed 949 times on Taylor & Francis Online.

<http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/03054985.2011.636507>

5) Russell, L., Simmons, R. and Thompson, R. (2011b) Conceptualising the lives of NEET young people: structuration theory and 'disengagement' *Education, Knowledge and Economy*, 5 (3), 89-106. Viewed 616 times on Taylor & Francis online.

<http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/17496896.2012.662010>

Research grants:

A Longitudinal Study of the Experiences of NEET Young People, The Leverhulme Trust, August 2010 to June 2013 – £124,750 (PI: Simmons)

Young People's Experiences of Working in the Private Sector: A Case-Study Approach, Joseph Rowntree Foundation, November 2012 to March 2013 – £9,935 (PI: Russell)

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

Three related strands of impact come from the School of Education & Professional Development's research on young people on the margins of education and training: raising awareness of the complexity of the issues involved; informing policy debate; and directly benefiting young people participating in the research. A significant feature of ethnographic research with marginalised young people is that engaging in the research process can be a rewarding and supportive experience for participants, who often lead isolated and restricted lives.

One of the most significant findings to emerge from these studies is that much negative discourse about marginalised young people is based largely on over-simplistic, individualised assertions. Two research monographs, Russell's *Understanding Pupil Resistance: Integrating Gender, Ethnicity and Class* and Simmons and Thompson's *NEET Young People and Training for Work: Learning on the Margins*, both published in 2011, encourage practitioners, students, academics and policymakers to challenge these claims.

The research team recognise the importance of communicating their findings – and the need to challenge inaccurate stereotypes – to the general public. Simmons was interviewed on BBC Radio Leeds in response to national developments in NEET policy and changing patterns of unemployment in June 2010, July 2011 and March 2012. He was also interviewed about youth unemployment on BBC1's *Spotlight* news in July 2013. In July 2013, Simmons was interviewed on BBC1's *Breakfast News* and Radio 4's *Woman's Hour* on the implications for NEET young people of raising the participation age (Refs. 1 and 2).

The policy implications of the team's research are acknowledged at the local, national and international level. Simmons has presented findings at a number of high-profile events targeted at policymakers and practitioners working with NEET young people, including keynote addresses at the Westminster Education and Employment Forum in October 2011 (3); the National NEET Conference in Birmingham in February 2012 (4); and include the Youth Conference in Belfast in October 2012 (5). These events attracted policymakers from national and local government, representatives from voluntary organisations, and employers and employers' associations. Simmons has also been invited to give a keynote address at the European Youth Unemployment Conference, *NEET Ideas for the New ESF Programming Period 2014-2020* in Belfast in November 2013 (9). This conference will feature sessions run by government ministers from Germany, Greece, Spain, the Netherlands, and the UK, and focused on using the European Social Fund to tackle youth unemployment.

In October 2011 Russell, Simmons and Thompson presented an overview of their research at a NEET Breakfast Summit, which brought together practitioners and local authority policymakers from across Kirklees. Russell and Thompson attend the Kirklees NEET Strategy Group and in 2012 and 2013 presented research findings as part of the local authority's planning process. This included giving advice on identifying "at risk" young people, the likely implications of replacing Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA) with more targeted bursaries, and the causes of labour market "churning" between various sites of education, employment and non-participation. Russell (6) also presented research findings at the New Local Government Network Seminar in Manchester in July 2012. Simmons is a member of the Kirklees RPA Strategy Group and presented findings to members in July 2013. These activities influence policy decisions at a local level and feed into frontline practice with marginalised young people, particularly in relation to advice and guidance.

In May and November 2011, Thompson presented papers on NEET policy and work-based training for young people at meetings of the Consortium for Post-Compulsory Education and Training, events which attracted teacher educators from more than 20 further education colleges across the north of England. In 2012, Simmons (7) presented research findings at two public lectures in Oldham and Barnsley attended by local authority representatives, students, teachers, youth workers, careers advisers and others working with NEET young people. In 2013, Simmons was invited to become policy advisor for Learning First, a voluntary organisation providing education and advocacy services for marginalised learners. He was also invited to write the foreword for a Universities and Colleges Union (10) research report on NEET young people, published as part of its Knowledge Economy project, and to present research findings to the UCU's Education Committee in October 2013.

In 2013, Simmons and Thompson edited "Reclaiming the Disengaged: Critical Perspectives on Young People Not in Education, Employment or Training", a Special Issue of the journal *Research*

in Post-Compulsory Education. This publication engages with key international debates on marginalised young people and features papers by leading researchers from England, Scotland, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa and Eastern Europe. In June 2013, Simmons organised the international symposium, *Reclaiming the Disengaged* which was attended by 30 delegates including representatives from the prison service, local authorities and the police service and featured seminars by Profs Deuchar (West of Scotland), Neves (Porto) and Simmons (Huddersfield).

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

- 1) BBC Radio – Simmons interviewed on BBC Radio Leeds in June 2010, July 2011 and March 2012 on national developments in NEET policy. Simmons interviewed on BBC Radio 4, Woman's Hour, 25 July 2013 <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p01d8mdl>
- 2) BBC TV – Simmons interviewed on BBC1 Breakfast News (July 17, 2013) and BBC1 Spotlight (July 24, 2013) on the raising of the participation age and its implications for NEET young people.
- 3) Simmons, R. (2011) Keynote Address: Re-engaging young people Not in Employment, Education or Training, *Westminster Education Forum and Westminster Employment Forum*, Westminster, 20 October.
<http://www.westminsterforumprojects.co.uk/forums/event.php?eid=286>
- 4) Simmons, R. (2012a) Keynote Address: 'The lived experience of NEET young people: Findings from an ethnographic study in the North of England', *Sixth National NEET Conference*, Birmingham, 7 February.
<http://www.hud.ac.uk/news/allstories/endtheseneetstereotypes.php>
- 5) Simmons, R. (2012b) Keynote Address: Researching the lives of NEET young people – implications for policy and practice, *Include Youth Annual Conference*, Belfast, 25 October (View, *Independent Voice for the Community and Voluntary Sectors*, Issue 9, 2012, p. 25). Evidence statement provided (contact 1).
- 6) Russell, L. (2012) Anticipating the risks of the next generation, *New Local Government Network Seminar*, Piccadilly Place, Manchester, 26 July
- 7) Simmons, R. (2012c) Lost generation? Conceptualising young people not in education, employment or training (NEET), Public lecture, University Campus Oldham, 14 March and University Campus Barnsley, 5 April
<http://www.hud.ac.uk/news/diamondjubilee/all60eventsbymonth/>
- 8) Simmons invited to become Policy Advisor at Learning First, May 2013. Evidence statement provided (contact 2)
- 9) Simmons, R. (2013) Keynote Address: The Youth Resolution, *European Youth Unemployment Conference: NEET ideas for the new ESF Programming Period 2014-2020*, Belfast, 21 November.
- 10) UCU (2013) *NEETs Survey*, London, UCU, Foreword by Simmons, R.
<http://www.knowledgeeconomy.org.uk/the-research/neets-july-2013/>