

Institution: University of Huddersfield		
Unit of Assessment: 23 Education		
Title of case study: Enabling Organisations and Practitioners to Challenge Stereotypes and Effectively Engage Young People on the Margins of Education, Employment and Training		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2008-2020		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s):	Role(s) (e.g. job title):	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:
1. Robin Simmons 2. Ron Thompson 3. Lisa Russell 4. John Smyth	1. Professor of Education 2. Principal Research Fellow 3. Reader 4. Visiting Professor	1. 2004-to date 2. 1987-July 2020 3. 2008-to date 4. 2015-2018
Period when the claimed impact occurred: August 2013 - December 2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? No		
<p>1. Summary of the impact</p> <p>The problem of young people not being in education, employment or training (NEET) has been a central issue in youth policy for UK governments since the 1990s. Young people who are socially, economically and educationally marginalised are often presented in official and popular discourse as lacking motivation and commitment to education and work. Yet, rather than having inherent negative dispositions to education and employment, research by Professor Simmons and colleagues found that marginalised young people are more likely to become demotivated by inappropriate training provision and repeated negative labour-market experiences. This research informed and supported third-sector organisations as well as practitioners to advocate for - and carry out work to - (re)engage marginalised young people in the UK and across Europe. The research provided an evidence-based narrative which reflects the lived experience of marginalised youth. This has contributed to national policy discussions of - and proposals for - NEET ('not in education, employment or training') strategies in the UK. The researchers have used the research to challenge stereotypical assumptions and offer an alternative narrative in regional and national media debates around young people on the margins of education, employment and training.</p>		
<p>2. Underpinning research</p> <p>Being NEET (not in education, employment or training) for extended periods can have significant negative consequences for young people, their families, for the economy and society more broadly. Young people who are NEET for a long time are more prone to social isolation, poor self-esteem, low confidence, and various limiting illnesses and conditions. They are also less likely to participate in the democratic process and often have lower levels of institutional trust relating, for example, to policing, health and social services. Coles and colleagues (2010) estimated the excess cost for each 16-18 year old, who spent substantial periods of time being NEET was, over the course of a lifetime, £56,000 in public finance costs and £104,000 in resource costs over and above those incurred by their contemporaries who have not been NEET. Public finance costs include welfare payments, lost tax revenue and the cost of excess demand for health and social services; resource costs include lost income for individuals and their families and losses to the economy due to lower earnings, productivity and consumption.</p> <p>Dominant discourses often depict NEET young people as lacking the necessary motivation and commitment to be successful in education and work. Since 2008, research by Simmons, Russell and Thompson of the <i>Huddersfield Centre for Research in Education and Society</i> (HudCRES) challenges these assertions and suggests that such dispositions usually arise from repeated negative labour-market experiences rather than being inherent individual, social or cultural deficits [3.1; 3.2]. It also finds that many NEET young people feel highly frustrated about their position and that most of them aspire to the traditional signifiers of 'mainstream' adulthood including a job, their own home and conventional family life - rather than being drawn from some incipient underclass [3.2; 3.3].</p> <p>Research on youth marginalisation has been a key feature of Huddersfield research for many years and, in this REF period, researchers have led major projects funded by <i>The Leverhulme Trust</i> (August 2010-June 2013) and <i>The Joseph Rowntree Foundation</i> (November 2012-March</p>		

2013). The *Leverhulme* project [£124,721; PI: Simmons] is particularly noteworthy as it is a rare example of a major programme of longitudinal ethnographic research on the lives of NEET young people; such research being resource intensive and especially challenging given the turbulent social and cultural milieu in which participants' lives were often located. The research involved sustained engagement with over fifty participants in settings including: training programmes; work placements; Careers Service and Job Centre interviews; in young people's homes and other social spaces.

Overall, these two projects conclude that, in most cases, the causes of young people's marginalisation are located in a paucity of meaningful labour market opportunities more than any individual shortcomings or deficits. Key research findings include:

- NEET young people are often placed on inappropriate training provision (inappropriately low-level courses or in vocational areas outside their interests and ambitions). This can de-motivate and deter them from attempting to re-engage with future opportunities [3.1; 3.2; 3.3].
- Good-quality employment (reasonable pay and conditions, training and opportunities for progression) can have a positive effect on young people's orientations to employment [3.1; 3.2; 3.6].
- Practitioners who 'go the extra mile' can make a real difference, in terms of facilitating access to opportunities which marginalised youth may not otherwise feel able to access [3.2; 3.4; 3.5].
- Conversely, negative experiences of engaging with support services can have a highly-deleterious effect [3.2; 3.4; 3.5].

The success of these projects led to invitations to become involved in further funded research. Based on previous collaboration with *Include Youth*, a rights-based charity for young people in Northern Ireland, Simmons and Thompson were commissioned by *Business in the Community NI* and *Include Youth* to carry out research, drawing on Big Lottery funding. This research was published in 2016 as *100% Employment Opportunities for Northern Ireland Care Leavers* and highlighted the particular vulnerability of care leavers to becoming long-term NEET and the potential benefits of targeted interventions to provide care leavers with meaningful labour market opportunities – both for the individuals concerned and in terms of the significant long-term social and economic cost savings associated with such interventions [3.5].

Prof John Smyth, a world-leading researcher on marginalised youth, was appointed visiting professor at HudCRES (2015-18). He collaborated with Simmons on output 3.4 below, using data from research funded by the Leverhulme Trust and the ideas of Jurgen Habermas to challenge dominant discourses about NEET young people's lack of skills, knowledge, and other social and personal deficits.

3. References to the research

Evidence of the quality of the research: The papers below are published in high-quality peer-reviewed academic journals recognised as leaders in education studies, youth studies, and post-compulsory education and training. The research monograph is published by a recognised market leader in education studies.

3.1. Simmons, R., Russell, L. and Thompson, R. (2014) 'Young people and labour market marginality: findings from a longitudinal ethnographic study', *Journal of Youth Studies*, 17(5), 577-591. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13676261.2013.830706>

3.2 Simmons, R., Thompson, R. and Russell, L. (2014) *Education, Work and Social Change: young people and marginalisation in post-industrial Britain*, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan. <https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137335944> [book, can be supplied on request]

3.3. Russell, L. (2016) 'The realities of being young, unemployed and poor in post-industrial Britain', *Power and Education*, 8(2), 160-175. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1757743816651896>

3.4 Simmons, R. and Smyth, J. (2016) 'Crisis of youth or youth in crisis? Education, employment and legitimisation crisis', *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, 35(2), 136-152.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/02601370.2016.1164470>

3.5 Simmons, R., and Thompson, R. (2016). *100% Employment Opportunities for Northern Ireland Care Leavers*. Business in the Community NI, Belfast.

<http://includeyouth.org/mgmt/resources/100-opportunities-for-ni-care-leavers-full-report-4.pdf>

3.6 Thompson, R. (2017) 'Opportunity structures and educational marginality: the post-16 transitions of young people outside education and employment', *Oxford Review of Education*, 43(6), 749-766. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03054985.2017.1352502>

4. Details of the impact

The problem of young people not being in education, employment or training (NEET) has arguably been the most important single, youth policy problem for UK governments since the 1990s. It has significant costs for individuals and for economy and society, and tackling NEET, and finding ways to (re)engage young people, is of key importance

In order to do this, the research of Simmons and colleagues has focused on young people's lived experiences of being NEET and on evaluating the opportunities available to them. The research has delivered impact across three areas. The research findings have enabled third-sector organisations *Include Youth* and *GEMS NI* in Northern Ireland, UK social enterprise *Education4Democracy*, UK social justice organisation *Young Women's Trust* and the UK charity *Barnardo's* to effectively engage - and advocate for - marginalised young people. The research has also been informing the work of policymakers and challenging stereotypes about NEET young people via the media.

In addition, The University of Huddersfield has delivered training for youth and community workers for over twenty years, producing more than 600 graduates (around 150 in this REF period). This extensive body of NEET research is a key component of both undergraduate and postgraduate programmes.

Enabling third-sector organisations to improve labour-market opportunities for marginalised young people and to advocate for positive change

Working with third-sector organisations provides an important way of influencing practice and thinking about marginalised young people. Collaboration with *Include Youth* has seen the research used by them to support their successful funding bids, which have enabled them to deliver services to marginalised young people. In 2018, *Include Youth* supported around 850 young people (age 14-24) in Northern Ireland and Donegal (Eire), to help them with their personal development and to improve their employability. These are young people in or leaving care, from disadvantaged communities or whose rights are not being met.

The Director of *Include Youth* comments on how they used the research in two successful bids for multi-million-pound funding: '*The research... played a pivotal role in our application to Esmée Fairbairn to fund our Transitional Support programme and our application to the European Social Fund (ESF) for the Give and Take scheme which is our flagship service in terms of supporting care-experienced young people into employment, education and training*' [5.1]. The ESF funding is for four years from 2018 to 2022 with a contribution of £2,663,070. In addition, the *Esmée Fairbairn* contribution was £200,000 for a three-year project running from 2019 to 2022. The Director highlights the positive impact on employment opportunities, particularly how it has benefited care-experienced young people: '*The research has provided Include Youth and Northern Ireland as a region with solutions*', that '*Southern and Western Health and Social Care Trust has begun ring fencing employment opportunities for care-experienced young people*' as a result of the research, and that '*Include Youth have...worked with individual employers around taking positive action measures to support care-experienced young people gain employment*' [5.1].

In 2019, Simmons was invited by *GEMS NI*, a leading voluntary-sector organisation based in Belfast, to participate in a €388,000 Erasmus+ funded project focusing on improving youth transitions through vocational education. *GEMS NI* works with 600+ NEET young people aged 16-24 a year. The collaboration with *GEMS NI*, which aims to support unemployed youth into high-quality, sustainable employment, involves research being carried out in partnership with private, public and voluntary-sector agencies in Hungary, Italy, Portugal, Romania and the UK. The Erasmus+ research is ongoing at the REF census date. *GEMS NI*'s CEO comments on how the research has supported more effective ways of working with young people: '*Professor Simmons has worked with my organisation and others in the NI NEET Strategy Forum...the benefit of his research has been palpable in inspiring us and others to work more effectively with young people whose lives are being blighted by economic inactivity and worklessness – helping us to break the cycle that often follows a young person into adulthood.*' [5.2]

The research impact goes beyond Northern Ireland into Europe because the approach *GEMS NI* developed – which drew heavily on the Huddersfield research – is now being transferred as a model for working with young people via this European project:

'GEMS NI has also utilised Professor Simmons research in our work to transfer...our Collaborative Mentoring model to other European Countries...the impact of his research on the project was demonstrated through the outcomes for partner organisations in Ireland, Italy, Austria and UK...the model is now embedded into the Upper-Austria labour-market offer and is also being used as a basis for working with young people on remand to support them to stay out of trouble and prevent recall to custody.' [5.2]

The Director of *Education4Democracy*, a UK social enterprise which aims to increase democratic participation among marginalised young people, stated: *Professor Simmons' work has proved invaluable to our organisation in providing a detailed examination of the socio-economic circumstances of NEET in the North of England and marginalised youth* [5.3]. In an article in *FE News* in June 2019, the Director goes on to say that the research '*on NEETS in the North of England has helped to inform and shape our organisation's strategy and development plan for engaging various marginalised groups. It has also assisted us as educational practitioners to challenge widely held popular stereotypes. Simmons detailed published social research demolished the myth that the young jobless are idle or feckless.*' [5.4]

In 2015, Simmons was invited to contribute to the *Young Women's Trust* Inquiry 'Scarred for Life? Creating a Future for Young Women'. *Young Women's Trust*, a leading voluntary organisation working to achieve economic justice for young women, supports and represents women aged 16-30 in England and Wales on low incomes. Simmons and Thompson's research (on the origins of NEET as a policy discourse; on NEET young people's experiences of education and work; and employers' preferences for certain forms of qualifications [3.1; 3.2]) is quoted extensively in the literature review produced to support the organisation's advocacy for investment in skills [5.5].

The commissioned research on improving employment opportunities for care leavers [3.5] is also referenced in the 2017 *Barnardo's* report 'Access All Areas NI: Supporting corporate parents to improve young people's journey from care to adulthood'. In the report *Barnardo's* used the research to highlight how care leavers are typically more exposed to greater adversity compared to the general population, including being at greater risk of being NEET. The research supports *Barnardo's* work to make recommendations to aid care leavers' journeys to successful independence [5.6].

Informing the work of policymakers

In December 2013, Simmons acted as an expert witness to the House of Lords EU sub-committee on youth unemployment [5.7] and provided evidence about the variable quality of apprenticeships and other training provided to young people in the UK; this was a key theme deriving from the Leverhulme-funded research [3.1; 3.3; 3.4 and 3.6].

In 2014, Simmons was invited guest speaker at the Universities and Colleges Union's (UCU) 'Big Idea' Conference in Westminster, which focused on strategies to engage or re-engage NEET

young people. Thereafter, Simmons and Thompson were commissioned by UCU to co-write the research report *Engaging Young People Not in Education, Employment or Training: The Case for a Youth Resolution*, in collaboration with UCU policy advisors [5.8].

In 2018, Russell and Thompson began work with *Wavehill Social and Economic Research*, a leading independent research organisation that provides research, evaluation and monitoring services to public, private and voluntary sector organisations across the UK. The 2018 work was commissioned by Blaenau Gwent Council, Wales to evaluate ESF-funded approaches to improving youth employment and attainment. This involved *HudCRES* researchers providing an extensive literature review on factors associated with becoming NEET and predictive tools designed to inform NEET interventions. Russell and Thompson were approached due to their reputation as leading researchers in the field of marginalised youth. Russell was also commissioned to provide *Wavehill Social and Economic Research* with ongoing advice and guidance until the conclusion of the project in 2021.

Challenging stereotypes about NEET young people via the media

Huddersfield research findings have been used to challenge stereotypes about NEET young people in the media, presenting an alternative narrative based on their lived experience (*FE News* 5 December 2017; *Northern Echo* 24 July 2018). In 2014 and 2015, Simmons was invited to speak to various news outlets about research on the quality of education and training programmes that are aimed at increasing the employability of NEET young people, including: *BBC Radio Berkshire* (30 July 2015) (approximately 159,000 listeners); *BBC Radio Ulster* (7 May 2014 and 3 December 2015) (approximately 536,000 listeners); and *BBC TV Northern Ireland Newsline* (3 December 2015) (approximately 400,000 viewers). In July 2015, Simmons was invited to write a newspaper article for the *Yorkshire Post* which had a focus on how the research findings challenge many popular stereotypes about the NEET population. The article emphasised that focusing only on skills and training is not enough, and that demand for labour must also be managed (circulation 22,000) [5.9].

Simmons was also invited to speak about research findings at the National Union of Teachers (NUT) 2015 annual education conference. He was then invited by the editor of the NUT journal, *The Teacher*, to write *Looking for a NEET solution: the elephant in the room* about strategies to engage or re-engage marginalised youth in education and work (*The Teacher* is the widest-circulating publication for teachers in the UK) [5.10].

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

- 5.1 Testimonial from Director *Include Youth*, Northern Ireland.
- 5.2 Testimonial from Chief Executive, *GEMS Northern Ireland Limited*.
- 5.3 Testimonial from Director, *Education4Democracy*.
- 5.4 What can educational practitioners learn from academic social research? *FE News* 14 June 2019.
- 5.5 *Young Women's Trust*. NEETs and Gender: Preliminary study for 'Scarred for Life?' an inquiry led by *Young Women's Trust* (1 September 2014). Pages 9-10, 18, 20, 22 and 32.
- 5.6 *Barnardo's* (2017) *Access All Areas (NI)* Supporting corporate parents to improve young people's journey from care to adulthood. Belfast, *Barnardo's NI* Page 15, 28 and 45.
- 5.7 House of Lords EU Committee (2014) *Youth Unemployment in the European Union: a scarred generation* (London, House of Lords). See para 118.
- 5.8 *Engaging young people not in education, employment or training - The case for a Youth Resolution*. 2014. Universities and Colleges Union.
- 5.9 "Quality matters for youth opportunities", *Yorkshire Post* (13 July 2015).
- 5.10 *Looking for a NEET solution: the elephant in the room*. *The Teacher* November 2015. Page 50.