

NORTHERN IRELAND ANTI POVERTY NETWORK 2010

Working for a Poverty Free Society

**THE RIGHTS AND ENTITLEMENTS OF
YOUNG PEOPLE AGED 16 TO 17 YEARS
ACROSS NORTHERN IRELAND
BY FRANCES DOWDS**



The Rights and Entitlements of Young People Aged 16 to 17 Years Across Northern Ireland

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Contents

	Page
Acknowledgements	4
Introduction	5
Methodology	5-6
United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child	6-7
Research – Statistical Context	7-8
Young People experiencing Poverty	8
Understanding Poverty	8-9
Young People in Families at Risk of Poverty	9-11
Young People Living Independently or in Supported Living	11-15
Young People Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET)	15-18
Impact of Social Disadvantage on Educational Attainment	18-20
Barriers to Education	20-21
The High Cost of Education	21-23
Housing	23-26
Earnings	26-29
Conclusions	29-31
Appendix 1: Economic Rights & Entitlements	32-40
Bibliography	41-42

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1. Introduction

The purpose of this study is to provide the Office of the Commissioner for Children and Young People (NICCY) with the beginnings of an evidence base regarding the rights and entitlements of young people aged 16 to 17 years across Northern Ireland with regard to specific services in the access and enjoyment of benefits, housing and the area of earnings.

NICCY commissioned this report in the form of a critical essay, as evidenced through a review of existing literature and the examination of relevant qualitative and quantitative research. The essay also examines current policy on rights and entitlements, and includes the views of key stakeholder young people. Education, training and employment are the key policy areas that determine the entitlements of 16-17 year olds to benefits, housing and earnings.

The paper makes reference to the above with reference to the rights contained in the UNCRC including the 2002 and 2008 Concluding Observations of the Committee on the Rights of the Child. It addresses the approximate demographics of young people aged 16 and 17 years in Northern Ireland, including an approximate breakdown of key groups of young people identified as being at greatest disadvantage in relation to such rights and entitlements.

With reference to the statutory assessment of poverty (relative income poverty line) fieldwork sessions were held with key groups identified at greatest risk of poverty in Belfast, Armagh and Derry/Londonderry:

- Young people in families at risk of poverty
- Young people living independently/in supported living
- Young people not in education, employment or training – within families or in supported living/independently living (including young mothers)

The paper examines their educational experiences, their needs, including access to and awareness of information on statutory entitlements and rights, and thresholds for access to benefits. To conclude the paper provides evidence-based recommendations on the need for further research/work in this area, and the particular issues needing addressed.

Due to the complex nature of rights and entitlements, particularly in relation to welfare, key facts and figures and entitlements have been presented throughout the sections of this essay for ease of access. This information is available at appendix i at the end of the document.

2. Methodology

Two fieldwork sessions were held with each of the three groups listed above. Participants were identified through the membership of the Northern Ireland Anti-Poverty Network: a Network with members drawn from the voluntary and community sectors, public and statutory bodies established to create a focus on poverty. Fieldwork sessions in Belfast, Derry/Londonderry and Armagh were held over a period of two months. Participants in the Belfast group were drawn from one inner city community background. The latter two fieldwork groups drew participants from different community backgrounds across Derry/Londonderry and from smaller rural villages and towns. Thirty-four participants were

asked a series of open questions which sought to identify the good things and the bad things in their lives with specific reference to rights and entitlements.

The use of open questions, allowed the young people themselves to take control of the agenda of the focus groups, and ensured that their agency was acknowledged and respected. Participants were also asked to identify recommendations that could make a difference to their lives. The second fieldwork session gave participants a 'right of reply,' an opportunity to verify findings generated within the first and also allowed for additional comment to be included.

There were 34 participants, 18 female, 16 male. Sixteen were aged sixteen, ten were seventeen, four were eighteen and four were aged between eighteen and twenty. The older participants were all either in supported housing or living independently. Nine participants were in care, three had recently left care and four were living in supported housing. Eighteen young people were either living at home, were living with extended family members or with foster families. Twenty-three young people were outside education, training or employment and fifteen were taking part in voluntary sector organised youth training schemes outside of traditional education. There were six young people within the Belfast focus group who were in education and/or training and this served to generate interesting comparative data with the young people not in education, employment or training (NEET). Eight of the young people had part-time jobs, seven of these within Belfast; by the end of the focus groups the number of jobs held had reduced to seven in total. Of the young participants six were registered unemployed, five had been so for more than one year. One of the 34 participants had a child. By the end of the focus groups two young women were pregnant.

3. UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)

The United Nation's Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) applies to all children and young people aged 17 and under. The Convention is separated into 54 'articles': most recognise the right of all children in relation to social, economic, cultural or civil and political issues; while others set out how governments must publicise or implement the Convention. Some groups of children and young people - for example those unable to live and develop within the family environment, and young people with a disability - have additional rights to make sure they are treated fairly and their needs are met. The UK ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) on 16 December 1991.

The key articles of relevance to this paper are:

Article 4 Implementation of Rights – the obligation on the State to ensure that the rights in the Convention are implemented.

Article 26 Social Security – the child's right to benefit from Social Security.

Article 27 Standard of Living – the right of every child to 'a standard of living adequate for the child's physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development'.

Article 32 Economic Exploitation – the right of the child to protection against harmful forms of work and against exploitation.

Commenting on the above articles the Committee on the Rights of the Child (2002, 2008) expressed serious concerns at the levels of poverty in Northern Ireland and the rest of the UK in both its 2002 and 2008 Concluding Observations on the State party's periodic reports. Although key responsibility for Article 27 falls primarily to the parents or guardians of a child, "the Convention also clearly places a responsibility on governments to both support parents in the fulfillment of this duty and to step in where parents are unable to adequately fulfill it." (NICCY (2008) CRR)

According to the NICCY submission (CRC, 2008) "Research evidence has consistently shown that children living in poverty are being denied access to a standard of living adequate for their physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development..." The report continued "They are also being denied their Article 6 right to survive and develop, to the maximum extent possible." Commenting in 2008, the Committee expressed concern that although child poverty had reduced somewhat since 2002 it remained "a very serious problem" across the UK and of "particular concern in Northern Ireland where over 20% of children reportedly live in persistent poverty" (CRC 2008: para 64).

The Committee then recommended that "the State party, in accordance with Article 4 of the Convention, allocate the maximum extent of available resources for the implementation of children's rights, with a special focus on eradicating poverty and reducing inequalities across all jurisdictions." (para 19).

The Concluding Observations of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child in relation to the allocation of resources noted "with appreciation the increase in expenditures on children in recent years. Nevertheless, the Committee is concerned that the increases are not sufficient to eradicate poverty and tackle inequalities and that the lack of consistent budgetary analysis and child rights impact assessment makes it difficult to identify how much expenditure is allocated to children across the State party and whether this serves to effectively implement policies and legislation affecting them." (para 18).

In 2002, the Committee on the Rights of the Child expressed concern that the National Minimum Wage (NMW) did not apply to under 18 year olds, noting that these young people were at risk of economic exploitation (article 32).

4. Research - Statistical Context

A detailed statistical picture of the experience of young people aged 16-17, particularly those not in education, employment or training is not readily available through government sources, which traditionally plot the academic and vocational achievements of young people in full time education or vocational training within broader and varying age bands. The life experiences of young people not in education, employment or training can be gleaned as a result of research omissions rather than inclusions. What data specific to 16-17 year olds is available has been presented throughout the essay. Some additional sources of information on the target groups have been collated from academic or specialist Non Government Organisation (NGO) studies. Further limited data has been secured as a result of government questions asked within the NI Assembly and as a result of specific queries on existing data sources from the NI Statistics and Research Agency (DSD & DE).

This work supports the observations made by NICCY on the lack of disaggregated data on 16-17 year olds across Northern Ireland. This omission has been highlighted and recommendations have been made within the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children

and Young Peoples’ submission to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, for government to make such data available (Concluding Observations of the Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2008). Without such data it is not possible for government to ascertain whether they are meeting their obligations to children and vulnerable young people as outlined under the UNCRC.

5. Young People experiencing Poverty

Fact	48% children experiencing poverty 21% in persistent poverty - (3 years or more) (Save the Children, 2007)
Entitlement	Educational Maintenance Allowance £10-30 p/w including grants of £1-200 for attendance and delivery on learning agreements (only if in education, or training and employment)
UNCRC	Article 27 (Standard of Living) of the UNCRC recognises the right of every child to ‘a standard of living adequate for the child’s physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development’ Article 26 Social Security – the child’s right to benefit from Social Security

6. Understanding Poverty

Poverty is a complex subject and can be defined in a number of ways. Children are considered to be living in severe poverty in Northern Ireland when they are poor on three measures, they are: child and adult deprivation (both doing without basic necessities) and low household income. Recent research by Save the Children has identified forty four thousand children living in severe poverty (A 2020 Vision, Ending Child Poverty in Northern Ireland, 2007). Children who were poor on one or two measures were considered to be experiencing child poverty but not experiencing severe poverty. One hundred and seventy thousand children are living with poverty under this definition (The Bottom Line, McLaughlin and Monteith, 2006). In 2007 one hundred and twenty four thousand children were identified as living with income poverty (Households Below Average Income (HBAI) Report 2005/6, Department for Social Development (DSD) 2007).

Poverty means families constantly struggling to afford basic things like proper food and heating, it also means doing without the sorts of things others take for granted like three hot meals a day or a new warm winter coat.

People falling below 60% of median income are said to be living on low incomes and at risk of poverty. The amount of money that this 60% income threshold represents varies according to the number of adults and children the household contains.

In 2006/07 the threshold was worth £138 per week for a single adult. This sum of money is measured after income tax, rates, and housing costs have been deducted. The sum of money left over is therefore what is available to pay for food, clothing, travel, heating, lighting and so on (DSD, Households Below Average Income 2006/07).

UK benefit levels however are set at a substantial level below this threshold: a single person under 25 years of age receives £50.95 p/w and a single person over 25 receives £64.30 p/w.

According to Horgan (2007) 'the impact on families, particularly those families already living below the poverty line, of having a 16 or 17 year old not in education, employment or training is immense. There is no state support provided for those 16 and 17 year old NEETs. So their families have to find money from their already meagre resources to feed, clothe and provide pocket money for such youngsters. Mothers from the most disadvantaged parts of Northern Ireland reported that the additional stress this placed on the household budgets caused tension in the family and "huge rows" with the young people'. (Horgan 2007, the Impact of Poverty On Young Children's Experience Of School: 15).

The tension and pressure this financial hardship causes was outlined by one of the young fieldwork group participants in this research:

'I'm always hungry. My parents are telling me I have to 'pay my way' for the food I eat, the only money I get is my expenses from Give and Take £7 per day and I'm only here 2 days a week.'

Another explained:

'It's a real struggle to survive when you're in a family where money's tight.'

According to Horgan (2007), the mothers she spoke to talked of the huge strain placed on the family budget by having to feed and support a hungry teenager for whom they did not receive any state benefits. All of the mothers who mentioned this issue raised it in relation to their sons:

'So this is the next thing now, my money stops for him because he just left school there in June. That will be two to feed with nothing coming in for them - and they can fairly eat!' (Horgan, 2007:12)

Another participant in this research explained how he had left school to work but couldn't get a job:

'I get my money from me ma, I don't go to school or do training, I've tried to get work but with no qualifications or experience I can't get anything, it's just not fair I'm trying to get work, I'd take anything, I think I should be able to get the bru, my ma says she gets nothing to keep me, I feel wick asking her for money all the time.'

7. Young People in Families at Risk of Poverty

The first longitudinal analysis of four years of Northern Ireland Household Panel Survey (NIHPS) figures found that 48% of children were living in poverty at some time over the four year period and 21% were in poverty for either three or four of the years. Northern Ireland has levels of persistent child poverty twice those of Britain. The fact that every other child in Northern Ireland can expect to experience poverty at some time in their lives is concerning. The high rate of persistent poverty is even more worrying since the effects of persistent poverty are so significant. (Monteith et al, 2008)

Research carried out by the National Centre for Social Research on behalf of the Department for Work and Pensions into the circumstances of persistently poor families with children found that "Persistently poor families were significantly more likely than temporarily poor

families to have difficulties saving regularly, paying household bills and making money last.” (NCSR, 2008: 2)

For children growing up in persistent poverty, the study found they were at risk of a range of poor outcomes including: going without regular physical exercise; being suspended or expelled from school; being in trouble with the police; living in bad housing; lacking a number of material deprivation items; and facing multiple (three or more) negative outcomes (28 per cent compared to 18 per cent for temporarily poor children).

Figures for the proportion of 16 and 17 year old children living in poverty, whether temporarily or persistently, are not available. The problem is that many of the figures relating to child poverty are concerned only with children under the age of 16 years. Indeed, Lifetime Opportunities, Government’s Anti-Poverty and Social Inclusion Strategy for Northern Ireland (2006) does not include young people aged 16-17 as children. The Strategy defines specific goals and targets for four key stages in life – Early Years (0-4), Children and Young People (5-16), Working Age Adults and Older Citizens. Because the Poverty and Social Exclusion in Northern Ireland Survey (PSENI) defined a child as an individual *under 16 years of age* i.e. 15 years and under, we do not have detailed information on how many 16 and 17 year olds live in poverty in Northern Ireland. It should also be noted that the analysis of severe child poverty in Northern Ireland, carried out by Monteith and McLaughlin for Save the Children (Severe Child Poverty in Northern Ireland: Key Research Findings 2004) used the findings of the PSENI survey, so in the figures we use in relation to severe child poverty, children aged 16 and 17 years are not included. However, more recent versions do include 16 and 17 year olds.

There was a detailed analysis of poverty among young adults aged 16-24 carried out using the results of the PSENI Survey. Scullion and Hillyard (2005) found that, while children aged 0-15 had the highest risk of living in poverty (38%), young adults aged 16-24 had the next highest risk of poverty (34%), as can be seen from Figure 1 below. About one third (32%) of the young adults in the PSENI Survey were aged 16-18 years.

Over a third (38%) of the young adults in the PSENI Survey were in full-time education, of these 57 per cent were still at school and 43 per cent in further or higher education. The average age young adults left school was 17 with the modal age – most reoccurring age – being 16 years.

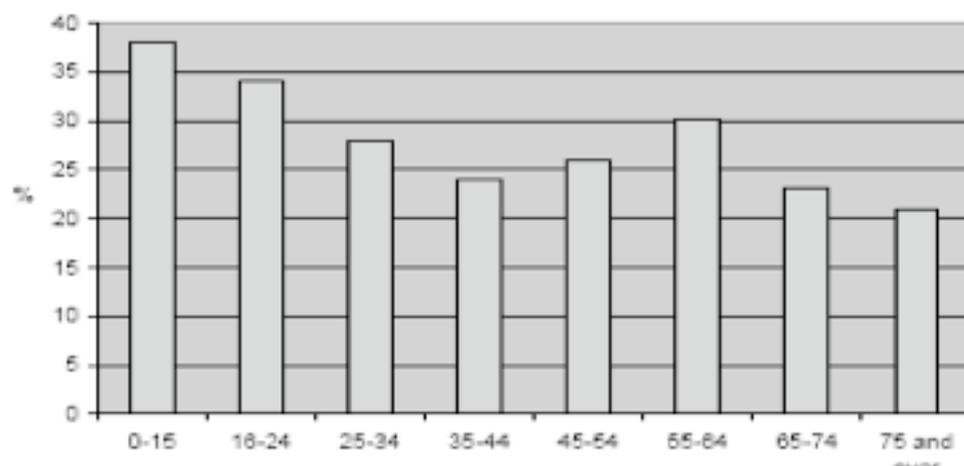


Figure 1: Risk of Poverty for Each Age Range

Source: Scullion and Hillyard (2005)

This study identified over half (51%) of the young adults had GCSE qualifications of A-G or equivalent, approximately a quarter (24%) were educated to A-level. Eleven per cent were qualified to degree level or higher and in higher education. The remaining 14 per cent had no qualifications. Two thirds (67%) of the young adults were economically active. Of these 87 per cent were in employment, (60 per cent full-time and 40 per cent part-time). The remaining 13 per cent were looking for work and were away from work in the week before the survey.

8. Young People Living Independently or in Supported Living

Fact	2,357 children in care 2007 No figures available for young people living independently or in supported living
Entitlement	Employment Support Allowance (JSA) £47.95 p/w OR Income Support (depends on personal circumstances) Housing Benefit (depends on property and average rent levels in area) Hardship Allowance (depends on personal circumstances) Educational Maintenance Allowance £10-30 p/w plus cash bonuses up to £500 over two years Any household benefits received will not be affected by EMA payments
UNCRC	Article 26 Social Security – The child's right to Social Security

In Northern Ireland at 31 March 2007 there were 2,356 children in the care system, known as looked after children. This equates to 54.5 per 10,000 population aged under 18; a similar rate to that of England (54.6) and notably lower than that of Scotland (131.0) or Wales (72.4). This figure also represents a 3.2% decrease in the number of children 'looked after' from the corresponding figure for 2006 (Mooney et al 2008 cited in NICCY 2008: 155).

Young people living in care are looked after by a Social Care Trust. Upon leaving care they can apply for benefits (ESA/JSA or Income Support and Housing Benefit and may apply for a

discretionary hardship payment) usually qualifying under 'exceptional circumstances', for example, if they are estranged from their family leading to severe hardship.

Young people living in supported accommodation are entitled to claim benefits as they qualify under 'exceptional circumstances' (ESA/JSA or Income Support and Housing Benefit; they may also apply for a discretionary hardship payment) and if in education, training or employment can also receive EMA.

Fieldwork participants who had experience of living in supported housing and living independently talked about the bad things in their lives in relation to their struggle to get to grips with a complex welfare and benefits system that the professionals in their lives were unable to understand:

'Having a social worker, they say they're there to help but they're useless, always canceling meetings and you can't get through to them and they don't know our rights and entitlements. They make decisions without involving us; LAC reviews don't listen to us.....I don't get the right support from social workers or the brew. These people don't have any answers to my questions, even the most basic questions; social workers have no experience helping you with benefits.'

Participants also said they felt stigmatised by others for being dependent on benefits:

'Being punished by other people's attitudes for being on benefits.....I've been told I live on benefits because of the taxes 'they' pay. They don't know it's a constant struggle to survive and it's hard to get out of it, I can't afford to go to tech as I don't have enough money, how to get there is the problem. There's not enough advice on what to do, or where to go, it's all too general. Even if you don't drink or smoke you don't have enough money to live on.'

Another participant added:

'I was told I was sponging off the government but they didn't know me or that I had Tourettes and how it affected me.'

The level of benefit support these young people were able to access was described as inadequate:

'Benefits don't take account of anything other than the basics. Don't take account of travel or household bills like rent, electric or prescriptions.... heating is a big expense.'

The young people who took part in this study were very uninformed about any aspect of their rights and entitlements, most did not know prescriptions were free to people or households dependent on benefits. The only participants who accessed economic supports were those still in education and were supported through school to access their Educational Maintenance Allowance (EMA) or those living in supported housing through their support workers to access Employment Support Allowance (ESA – previously Incapacity Benefit or Job Seekers Allowance JSA) or Income Support. Even the workers had to rely on specially trained benefits advisers to navigate what was seen as a complex and inaccessible welfare system.

The majority of young people did not know there were any circumstances under which they could access benefits until they turned 18. This best kept secret exacerbates the hardship and social exclusion young people leaving care who are also NEET experience.

'Sure you're not entitled to benefits until you're 18.'

Young people living independently shared a common experience of frustration and extreme stress associated with accessing benefits; one participant said they felt:

'Government had quotas to meet for example to get so many people off benefits....this affects you and you're not getting the help you need, not the whole truth about what you're entitled to.....Government are unreasonable, they're harsh and not helping.'

Unbiased advice was seen as important by those living independently:

'Most of the time you go to the brew for advice but its better going to Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) because they're independent and you get better advice and more information.'

The level of disillusionment among the participants was reflected mostly in the groups with larger numbers of young people in care, living independently or not in employment, education or training. Talking about welfare support:

'It seems you get more help if you're in trouble or pregnant, they should help more. It's the same thing all the time, I don't have much faith in aftercare, they've done nothing for me...they're full of s...t and they know nothing about you.'

Speaking about going to the brew one participant said:

'I used to be trustful but not anymore.'

Those young people in education who had applied for Educational Maintenance Allowance (EMA) found the process complicated and fraught with delays. It was described as both a bad and good thing in their lives. The good aspect was receiving it on top of benefits and or money earned from part time work, the bad was:

'The EMA rules and regulations – the application is too hard and it all takes too long.'

The level of payment was described as:

'Too low.'

Those participants who were taking part in training through schemes such as 'Give and Take' thought it was unfair that they couldn't access EMA payments:

'It's not fair we only get expenses when we're learning too.'

For many of the young people not in supported housing there was an overwhelming sense of 'not knowing' if they had any 'rights' to an income, to housing and where to go to get advice on their particular circumstances.

Recently released statistics on young people aged 16 and over leaving care in Northern Ireland paint a particularly telling picture of current and potential future, hardship. The clear lack of educational attainment alongside, for many, the lack of family and community support places these young people in a particularly vulnerable and marginalized position within our society.

- Over two fifths of the 245 young people who left care in 2007 had spent more than five years in care.
- Over half (53%) left care because they had reached the age of 18; 21% returned home and 8% moved into supported accommodation.
- Young care leavers (41%) were four times more likely to be unemployed or inactive than those of similar age in the population. (NI Care Leavers 2007-08)
- Care leavers were 18 times more likely than school leavers to leave school with no qualifications. (DHSS & PS, 2007-08)

The link between low income and negative educational experiences, poor educational attainment and disadvantage in later life has been examined and defined by a wealth of researchers (Experiences of Poverty and Educational Disadvantage, Donald Hirsch, 2007, JRF). Significant numbers of young people in care experience disruption in their education and these young people are more likely to experience suspension and expulsion and poorer educational attainment in comparison to the general school population.

- In 2007-08 16% of care leavers achieved between 1-4 GCSE's at A*-C compared to 18% in 2005-06
- In 2007-08 12% of care leavers achieved five GCSE's compared to 65% of all NI school leavers
- Nine percent of looked after children of school age were suspended from school in 2002/003, compared with 1.7% of the total school population in Northern Ireland.
- Care leavers were 18 times more likely than school leavers to leave school with no qualifications. (DHSS & PS, 2007-08).

There are many reasons why these young people underachieve; a key element is young people in care being moved frequently interrupts their educational experience. Research has shown how stressed young people feel during school moves, when they have to adapt to a new set of friends and a new teaching staff (McAuley and Bunting, 2006).

Research studies have shown that young people in care struggle with enormous issues about their early life and relationships with their birth families, yet their emotional and mental well-being has often not received adequate attention. There continues to be a lack of information on the mental health disorders in the general child and adolescent population as well as in relation to looked after children. The incidence of mental health problems is disproportionately high amongst vulnerable groups, including children leaving care and children in conflict with the law. These young people continue to experience difficulty in accessing specialist support services (RMHLDNI, 2006). The Bamford Review which included a review of Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) described the situation as "wholly inadequate.... characterised by overwhelming need and chronic underinvestment."

What is of particular concern is the lack of training for staff within schools in order to be able to identify mental health difficulties and refer young people to appropriate services.

Disadvantaged young people face particular challenges to their health. Some of the inequalities in physical health within Northern Ireland are particularly prevalent among disadvantaged groups such as young people in or leaving care, young people not in education, employment or training and young people in receipt of no form of income from employment or benefits.

NICCY’s 2008 Review of Children’s Rights in Northern Ireland highlights that there are a number of ways in which poverty can negatively impact on young people’s rights regarding health and wellbeing (NICCY 2008). NICCY points to a range of statistics *“comparing the experiences of those living in deprived communities”* (NICCY 2008:241). These include:

- *“higher prevalence of mental health problems”* (Muldoon et al 2005 cited in NICCY 2008:241)
- *“higher rates of suicide – the rate for deprived areas in 2005/06 was 16.8 per 100,000 population compared to a NI average of 11.4”*
- *“higher rates of self harm – standardised admission rates to hospitals in deprived areas were almost double the NI average in 2005/06”*
- *“higher rates of teenage pregnancy – 28.9 births per 1,000 females in deprived areas in 2005/06 compared to 12.4 in non deprived areas”* (DHSSPS 2007 cited in NICCY 2008:241)

Education can be a turning point for these most vulnerable young people, an area where real and positive change can occur. It has the potential to retain normality and stability for children. ‘In many ways, their educational pathway has served as a protective factor even in the absence of a close family or substitute family experience.’ (McAuley, 2005:9)

9. Young People Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET)

Fact	45,000 Young People NEET 16-24 No figures available on 16-17 year olds
Entitlement	No entitlement to state benefit support
UNCRC	Article 26 Social Security – the child’s right to Social Security Article 27 (Standard of Living) of the UNCRC recognises the right of every child to ‘a standard of living adequate for the child’s physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development’.

Under current welfare legislation (Employment Support Allowance, Job Seekers Allowance, Income Support and New Deal) young people under the age of 18 not in employment, education or training (NEET) lose all entitlements to benefits from child benefit to tax credits and Educational Maintenance Allowance. If they are living at home they will be totally dependent on their family for financial support.

In the July – September quarter of 2008, forty five thousand young people – almost one in five of those aged 16-24 were not in employment, education or training in Northern Ireland. In 2008, there were 53,458 young people aged 16-17, in Northern Ireland, constituting 3.17% of the 1.7 million people in the region.

(NISRA, 2007: <http://www.ninis.nisra.gov.uk/mapxtreme/terms.asp> - dataset population).

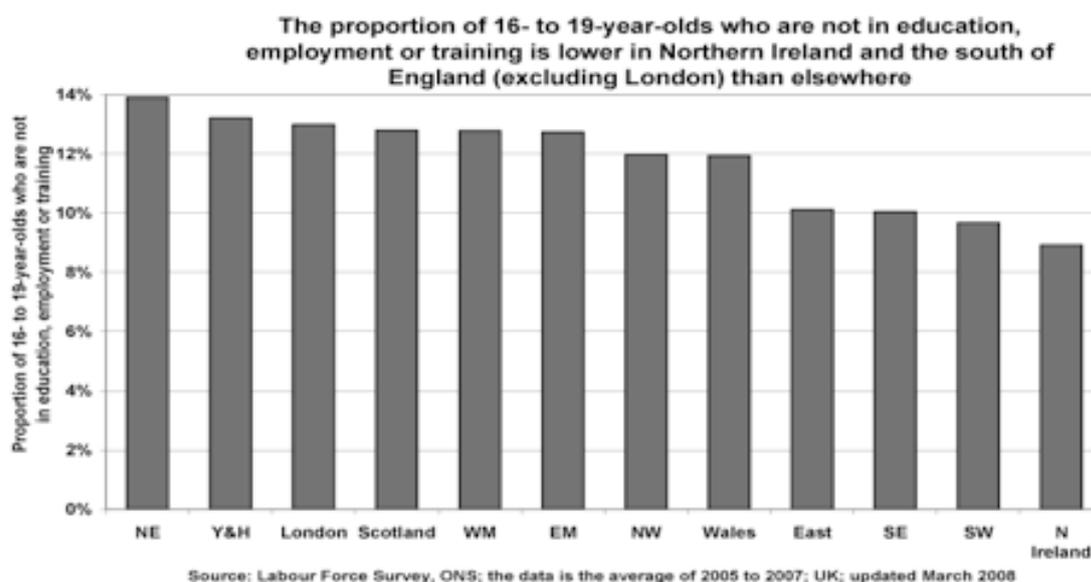
There is no disaggregated data available on the numbers of 16-17 year olds not in education, employment or training in Northern Ireland. To gain an insight to this group we must consider them as part of a larger age set.

The UK Poverty website www.poverty.org.uk, supported by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation to keep indicators of poverty, including child poverty, up-to-date, follows the rate of young people not in education, employment or training with an age range of 16-19. They chose this indicator because many school leavers who are not in education or training are no longer developing their skills and thus are more likely to suffer from low pay at work both now and in the future. Further the proportion of young people not in education, employment or training increases, year on year, from 16 to 17 year olds and 18 year olds. (Source: www.poverty.org.uk/i32/index.shtml - Labour Force Survey 2007)

The indicators on the poverty website reveal that the lower a young adult's qualifications, the more likely they are to be lacking but wanting paid work. The evidence suggests that all levels of qualifications appear to make a noticeable difference, particularly A-levels or their equivalent – compared to just good GCSEs. It also concludes that the overwhelming majority of young adults with no qualifications are low paid, unemployed or economically inactive. Despite the higher risks of lacking work associated with lower qualifications, it remains the case that the great majority will be in work in their late 20s, even for those with no qualifications. (Source: www.poverty.org.uk/i31/index.shtml)

On the basis of the figures on the Poverty.org website, we had considered that the rates of young people not in education, employment or training are lower for Northern Ireland than any other part of the UK/GB, see the graphs below.

Figure 2 – Young People NEET at UK Level



(New Policy Institute - www.poverty.org.uk/i32/index.shtml)

This conclusion is supported by data on the participation rate of 16-19 year olds in full time education and vocational training in 2007/08 (92.3% -89.0% for males and 95.8% for females). According to Department for Employment and Learning figures, participation rates in Northern Ireland are higher than in England and Scotland, for both males and females. See Table A which includes vocational training provided outside the School and FE sector.

Table A Participation in Full-Time Education and Training
(16 and 17 year olds 2007-2008, including non-FE vocational courses)

	Male	Female	Total	%	
Schools	11,465	15,565	27,030	56.5	
FE (Mainstream courses)	4,554	5,969	10,523	22.0	
FE Job skills/Training for Success	4,317	440	4,757	10.0	
Job skills/Training for Success – Non FE	3,231	2,259	5,490	11.5	
Total	23,567	24,233	47,800		
Population	26,493	25,306	51,799		
Participation Rate	89.0%	95.8%	92.3%		

We might think we could infer from Table A that the non-participation rates would be in the area of 7.7%. However, figures published in the Northern Ireland Assembly suggest that the above picture is incomplete and that the proportion of 16-19 year olds not in education, employment or training in Northern Ireland is among the worst in the UK. In February 2009, the Minister for Employment and Learning provided the information in Table B to the Assembly.

Table B: Labour Force Survey estimates of 16-24 year olds in Northern Ireland, who are not in employment, full-time education, or Government-supported training schemes¹, 2006 – 2008

Period	Number	% of all aged 16-24
July-Sept 2006	40,000	17%
July-September 2007	38,000	16%
July-September 2008	45,000	19%

¹ Figures exclude those in part-time education or training.

This study has also been unable to identify the numbers of young mothers who are NEET or who are leaving care, living independently or are *members of low income families*. However, we would expect that the majority of such young people would be found in the most disadvantaged areas of the region. This expectation is bolstered by analysis carried out in Scotland of the proportions of young people not in education, employment or training in the top 15% most deprived areas of the region in comparison with the proportion in the rest of Scotland. As can be seen from Table C, the contrast is stark. A similar analysis is needed in Northern Ireland and would be expected to produce similar results.

Table C – NEET 16-19 Year Olds Scotland

Geography residence base	2006	2007	
		%	Number
Scotland	12.4%	12.2%	32,000
15% most deprived	29.7%	24.5%	11,000
Rest of Scotland	8.6%	9.7%	21,000

(Annual Population Survey, Scotland 2007)

10. Impact of Social Disadvantage on Educational Attainment

Young people end up not in education, training or employment largely because they are failed by the education system. 'Research has shown that someone who has grown up in poverty is disadvantaged well into adulthood....the relationship between poverty and low educational achievement at school is part of a wider cycle in which family disadvantage is passed on from one generation to the next. (Hirsch, 2008: 3)

There is now overwhelming evidence that children growing up in poverty are more likely to be educationally disadvantaged than are other young people. For example, the Equality Commission for NI, in their response to DE's Literacy and Numeracy Strategy in November 2008, reports that:

- 'in 2005/06, only 26% of students who were entitled to free school meals (FSM) gained 5 or more GCSEs A*-C including English and Mathematics by the time they left school, compared with 51% of those who were not entitled to FSM,
- in 2005/06, only 22% of students who were entitled to FSM achieved 2 or more A levels (or equivalent), compared with 49.9% of those who were not entitled to FSM.

(ECNI,2008: Web:
www.equalityni.org/archive/pdf/CommissionresponseDELiteracyNumeracyStrategyNov08.pdf)

It is possible to speculate that almost all of the young people leaving school without a basic qualification in table D below will have grown up in poverty.

Table D

HSSB Area	Total number school leavers	Min 5 GCSE's Grade A*-C	Percentage achieved Min 5 GCSE's A*-C	Achieved no GCSE's	Destination Unknown
EHSSB	8797	5586	63.5	344	671
NWHHS	6059	4002	66.1	227	371
SHSSB	5047	3363	66.6	154	217
WHSSB	4468	2858	64.0	196	215
Missing/Invalid postcode	432	240	55.6	52	40
NORTHERN IRELAND	24803	16049	64.7	973 (4.8%)	1514

(NIRSA School Leavers Survey 2007)

Such high levels of poor educational attainment by so many of our young people – 8,681 in the 2007 cohort alone – is very worrying and should receive more urgent attention from all those concerned with children's rights and with the elimination of child poverty.

It has long been recognised that social disadvantage impacts on a child's educational attainment (DE, 2001; Horgan, 2007) and that family income has an impact on a child's ability to learn or even acquire the language required to learn. Children who have a long lasting experience of poverty have slower cognitive and social development and poorer physical and mental health than those who live in poverty for a short time (Horgan, 2007). Horgan goes on to say that the pressures of dealing with the issues that come with working in a disadvantaged school, such as behavioural problems, hungry children, angry parents, welfare problems, clearly showed in the teachers behaviour and actions.

'The combination of the legacy of the conflict and behavioural problems associated with poor language development and poor nutrition meant that teaching staff in some of the most disadvantaged schools spent much of their time fire fighting rather than concentrating on lessons.' (Horgan, 2007:52)

The 2006 Northern Ireland Audit Office report, Improving Literacy and Numeracy in Schools, concluded that "there has been only limited improvement among lower performing pupils in both primary and post-primary sectors" (NI Audit Office, 2006:1). The 2005 Literacy results for Key Stage 3 suggested that 6000 14 year-olds in Northern Ireland were at risk of leaving school unable to read at the expected standard (Level 5).

Children from socially disadvantaged backgrounds, as indicated by Free School Meal (FSM) entitlement, are less likely to have positive educational outcomes. In 2007/08 18.1% of primary school children in Northern Ireland were entitled to free school meals as were 25.1% of pupils in secondary schools and 5.9% of pupils in grammar schools. The

qualifications of school leavers as shown in Table E below indicates that pupils entitled to FSMs are only half as likely to have at least 5+ GCSEs (A*-C) and are four times more likely to have no qualifications.

Table E - Qualifications of School Leavers by FSM Entitlement

Attainment	% entitled to Free School Meals	% not entitled to Free School Meals
5 A*-C GCSEs or higher (including A levels)	35.6	70.3
No formal Qualifications	8.4	2.1

Source: NIO (2006)

Inequality in educational outcomes for those children living in poverty, defined as being entitled to free school meals, has grown rather than decreased between 2002/03 and 2006/07.

NIAPN would argue that at least twice the number of children are likely to be living in poverty than the number eligible for FSM since eligibility for FSM is now confined to those children whose parents are claiming Income Support or Job Seekers' Allowance and therefore not in employment. Household Below Average Income figures (2005-2006) show that half of all children living in income poverty are in families where at least one adult is in employment – and the child would not be entitled to FSM. However, FSM entitlement is currently the best available proxy for poverty.

11. Barriers to Education

Many of the young people who participated in this study had generally negative attitudes toward formal education, yet some did express an interest in attending local colleges of further education. Their geographic location, accessing information on courses, finding information on relevant financial supports; all of these served to act as barriers to those young people who did wish to access training.

Two key barriers were getting the right information and the cost of travel. One young participant speaking about a college in a nearby town said:

***'I wanted to go to college but I needed to talk to someone about what course I wanted to do, I didn't know who to contact and I didn't have the money to go making phone calls chasing someone. What really put me off though was the cost of the bus every day, I'm living on benefits and I'm skint all the time. Benefit levels are just far too low.....it's hard being stuck in a rut, no money, no job, no qualifications, it's a vicious circle. There's not enough advice on what to do or where to go, it's all too general.'* (YPLI-NEET)**

The chances of a young person of 16 or 17 who has left school without a qualification (NEET) getting a job are poor; they are unlikely to be accepted back by the school they attended nor are they likely to be able to access any employment-related training in an FE college. In effect, the only training available to them will be with New Deal or similar government schemes, which have generally had poor outcomes in relation to young people who have been failed by the education system. (Beale et al, 2008)

According to one young NEET participant:

'Not having any qualifications or training means I can't get a job. Because I can't get a job I can't get any experience. It's a vicious circle cos I can't get a job in the first place.'

The level of disengagement and the strong feeling of social exclusion from the education system among the young care leavers who contributed to this study are of great concern. This was demonstrated by the comments of one young man who was recently in care and was in the process of being supported to live independently when he said:

'They don't want us in education, cos I have a criminal record I couldn't get into any colleges so why bother even trying?'

This opinion was echoed by the majority of young NEET people and those living in supported housing. Negative experiences of education, of some teachers in particular, had closed an essential doorway that could help them avoid poverty and social exclusion in later life.

There were however generally positive comments made about alternative education schemes, which operate on the basis of a youth work approach. These programmes however have limited places and can only offer support to young people for up to a year. They enable participants to make friends and to learn to deal with authority provided by the workers in a context that provides boundaries but also treats them with respect. As one young person said speaking about the good things in her life:

'Give and Take cos getting training, it gives you hands on experience.....Getting help to work toward a job gives you a reason to get out of bed.'

Taking part in Give and Take:

'It's all learning and it helps you feel better about yourself.'

'Give and Take is good cos if we didn't come here my ma would keep getting fined cos I'm not in school.'

12. The High Cost of Education

There has been an increased understanding in recent times of the real cost of education – that it is not completely free and that the costs are relatively greater for those families living on the lowest incomes. This has been recognised by the Department of Education in NI which recently announced a new grant for primary school uniforms for children whose families are living on low incomes. Source: www.nidirect.gov.uk/index/newsroom/news-june-2009-uniform-grant.htm

While the real costs of education are high for all those living in poverty, the young people we spoke to for this research revealed that it is too expensive for those young people who are 'trying to survive' while living independently. The young people said that the additional costs of school for them are prohibitive. The cost of travelling to school was particularly mentioned as a difficulty for young people placed in supported living accommodation which was not within walking distance of their school.

'There's too much cost just travelling to school and the teachers' attitudes don't help, having to buy all your own school equipment costs an awful lot. I have to pay for my own books in school and I have to pay to get to and from school. Even though I'm living in supported housing I don't get a bus pass.'

Another young person said:

'I enjoyed school but when I went to school it cost a fiver a day for two buses there and back every day.'

Another young person presently living in supported accommodation and currently completing A levels at school spoke about student loans as a bar to even thinking about third level education:

'It's hard enough to get by now and I'm living in supported housing. Student loans, they cause massive debts; that really puts me off even thinking about going any further. Nothing to live on over holiday periods, cos you can't sign on, it's impossible, I live on my own. I don't have a family that can support me so going to uni, it's really not an option, I just couldn't make ends meet.'

However, the main reason that the young people we spoke to for this research gave for not engaging more with school was how they were treated at school. In particular, they complained about the attitudes of the teachers, how they are spoken to by teachers and, generally, the lack of respect the teachers showed them. These complaints echo what other research has found (Horgan, 2006; Horgan, 2007; Sutton et al, 2007).

While some young people within the focus groups did talk about particular teachers they liked, the majority had had very negative experiences:

'Teachers don't treat pupils maturely in sixth form, even in cases when pupils are 18+.....Teachers don't respect you especially when they don't like you... Some teachers and authority figures have really bad attitudes to young people and they pick on some pupils.'

Horgan (2007) found that boys as young as nine and ten had started to disengage from primary school. Her research suggests that it is the interaction of poverty, long, often boring, school days and disrespect shown them by teachers that cause these younger children to disengage. This view seems to be reinforced by the young people who participated in this research. One participant said:

'The teachers didn't like our class, cos everyone loves messing. They didn't like my family, they went there before me, the teachers at my secondary school didn't like them and my family didn't like them either.'

Another explained she had been expelled at 14:

'I was off school for one full year, I didn't like the teachers and they didn't like me...The welfare didn't bother with me and school after 14....I applied to go to Education Other Than At School (EOTAS) but they had no spaces.'

In contrast to the young woman who complained that the Education Welfare Officer did not bother with her, this young person explained she thought their school had an Education

Welfare Officer who **'was always at me,'** because they were constantly in contact about her non-attendance.

A common complaint from fieldwork participants was that teachers **'have negative attitudes to young people and pick on some pupils.'** As a result of this and other financial issues, **'school leads to a lot of stress'** for some. This can make learning harder, if not impossible. The young people felt that teachers should recognise that young people mature and should be treated differently as they get older. Instead, they said **'teachers don't treat pupils the way they would like us to treat them, with respect.'** When young people were asked what were the main 'bad things' in their lives, for those that were in education, the answer too often was **'teachers.'**

Another participant speaking about living in supported housing, going to school and having to cover the costs of buying his books, paying for his travel and lunches and the process of applying for an EMA said:

'The stress of all these things adding up is awful.'

For those taking part in education, **'getting qualifications'** was seen as a good thing in their lives. For others **'training gives you a chance to get hands on experience.'** School was also described as **'boring'** with a focus on young people either **'passing or failing'**.

We know from cohort¹ studies that young people coming towards the end of Key Stage 3 are highly critical of how 'boring' and 'irrelevant' the curriculum is to them (Harland et al, 2002). The young people in this research confirmed this view and were also highly critical of teaching methods used. There was a widespread view that teachers needed to make learning more fun and the 'boring' teaching methods at school were contrasted unfavourably with the youth work methods of the informal education that many of them enjoyed.

The response of NEET participants to being asked 'what's bad' in their lives reflected common difficulties around having no income. As one young man said;
'The 'BRU' it's not fair we can't get it until we're 18....Being skint all the time, every day.'

13. Housing

Many of the young participants also identified difficulties accessing housing. For the few who had moved from care toward independent living there was a gap in knowledge of what rent they would be paying, what benefits they would receive and what bills they would be responsible for.

One participant explained he was happy to have been given the chance to pick the flat he was moving into but stated:

'A social worker sorted out my flat, I've just moved in and I have to pay the electric, I get £15 a week, I don't know how much the flat costs or if there are other bills I have to pay.'

Another young person in care stated:

'If you have a care order the social workers pay for your rent until you're 18.'

¹ A group of young people born in the same year or period is referred to as a 'cohort'.

According to the Housing Rights Service (HRS) 'one in sixty young people in Northern Ireland presented as homeless in 2006-07. One in five of the 21,013 households who presented as homeless in 2006-07 were aged between 16 and 25 years old'.

www.housingadviceni.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=81&Itemid=621

This figure contrasts sharply with the pitifully small numbers of 16-17 year olds detailed in Tables F and G below as being currently in receipt of housing benefit.

Table F: Housing Benefit Claimants Aged 16 - 17 Years Old by Parliamentary Constituency: February 2009

Parliamentary Constituency	Number of claimants
BELFAST EAST	5
BELFAST NORTH	11
BELFAST SOUTH	7
BELFAST WEST	8
EAST ANTRIM	9
EAST LONDONDERRY	11
FERMANAGH AND SOUTH TYRONE	7
FOYLE	26
LAGAN VALLEY	-
MID ULSTER	-
NEWRY AND ARMAGH	9
NORTH ANTRIM	6
NORTH DOWN	-
SOUTH ANTRIM	-
SOUTH DOWN	8
STRANGFORD	-
UPPER BANN	15
WEST TYRONE	7
Unknown	-
Total	141

(NI Housing Executive & Land & Property Services, scan, February 2009 - Figures less than 5 (represented by a '-' are not disclosed due to DSD customer confidentiality policy)

Table G: Housing Benefit Claimants Aged 16-17 Years Old by Health Board

Health Board	Number of claimants
EASTERN	38
NORTHERN	27
SOUTHERN	34
WESTERN	40
Unknown	-
Total	141

Source: Scan, February 2009

The Northern Ireland Housing Executive and Land & Property Services

In common with findings from this research Housing Rights Service (HRS) state that ‘young people are often unaware of the housing issues they may face and don’t know that they have rights that are protected by law. They are often part of the ‘hidden’ homeless population who move around, staying with friends and do not think that help is available. They are also less likely than other groups to get advice on how to resolve their housing problem, for a variety of reasons including lack of awareness of their rights, or where to go to get help, and psychological barriers such as mistrust of statutory services.’ Source: www.housingadviceni.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=89&Itemid=109

In the context of young people moving from supported housing toward independent living a greater degree of information and support was available from staff. This approach was more supportive and respectful of the growing independence of young adults. Reassurance was provided that help and support would be on hand if needed and contact would be maintained once the young adult moved premises. Some young people moving from supported to independent living and identified as needing extra support would also have additional contact provided to help them adapt to living alone.

The range of issues faced by young people taking on their first home were very much the same:

‘Most of the young people leaving here (supported housing) go private, you need a deposit so you get a loan off the brew, you go to the social fund, but then that puts you into debt. You need help with getting stuff for a place once you manage to get one... in my place I need more help.’

All young people living at home identified financial barriers to leaving home, others had thought about it but:

‘It just isn’t possible to get a deposit of £2-300 together never mind pay weekly rent of about £85 a week.’

In the focus group where most still lived with their families, only a few participants had thought about leaving home to live independently, one person looked into sharing with his sister but it didn’t happen; the barriers identified again were the costs of rent and the need for a deposit. For the majority of this group independent housing was not an issue as they saw themselves as too young to leave home, one young man joked;

'I'm never leaving home, why would I, sure me ma looks after me, she'd only miss me if I moved out.'

One young person however had been:

'Waiting years for a house, I'm living at home with my child but there's no room for me and there's no local housing, the closest thing is miles away and it's a hostel.'

Others spoke about being:

'..judged when you're renting property, before they know who you are because of your age. When I was signing my tenancy I was treated differently because I was young. I've been living on my own for the past two years and I don't party and wreck, it's hard to get by but I like my own freedom and space.'

The Housing Executive points system used to allocate housing provision across Northern Ireland was discussed by some participants and described as needing changed. Most of those living independently had some understanding of it but the majority of research participants did not.

One young person who had been assessed said:

'You need 360 points to get somewhere with the Housing Executive: when you're trying to get a home when you are leaving care or supported housing, the points system is unfair. I've been waiting two years and there's still no sign of anything for me. I have about 120 points but it's not enough to get somewhere.'

Other young people in the same circumstances had different points allocated to them; some felt it was unfair that young mothers got additional points when the fathers did not.

The basic point across all groups of young people was the lack of provision particularly of affordable social housing and the need for grants rather than loans to pay a deposit and to get a home established:

'There's not enough provision for young people to move on from supported housing, and the points system really needs to be looked at so that it works better for us.'

14. Earnings

All of the young people spoke of the difficulty of living on little or no income. The importance of being able to find and keep any type of employment was a common concern. Most of the participants did not know what their NMW entitlements were or that they were increased each October:

'I'm not sure if I get paid the NMW.'

One of the main fieldwork recommendations identified by the young people was that the national minimum wage should be the same for all ages:

'The minimum wage should be paid at the same rate for every age.'

'If we're doing the same job it's just not fair, we should be paid the same money.'

UK National Minimum Wage (NMW) rates for employees over the age of 18 were introduced on 1st April 1999. However, young people under 19 years of age who are on training schemes or in apprenticeships were not given the protection of the NMW. Even in 2009, a 16-17 year old receiving the NMW will receive less than £150 for working a 40 hour week.

In 2002, the Committee on the Rights of the Child expressed concern that the National Minimum Wage (NMW) did not apply to under 18 year olds, noting that these young people were at risk of economic exploitation (Concluding Observations of the Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2002). In response to the Committee's recommendation that the state reconsider its policies regarding the NMW, the Government announced in March 2003 that 16 and 17 year olds would be paid a minimum wage, albeit one which was only 60% of the adult NMW.

Table H: National Minimum Wage Hourly Rates, 1999 to 2009

United Kingdom			
	16 & 17 year olds	18 – 21 year olds	Adult Rate
April 1999	-	3.00	3.60
October 2000	-	3.20	3.70
October 2001	-	3.50	4.10
October 2002	-	3.60	4.20
October 2003	-	3.80	4.50
October 2004	3.00	4.10	4.85
October 2005	3.00	4.25	5.05
October 2006	3.30	4.45	5.35
October 2007	3.40	4.60	5.52
October 2008	3.53	4.77	5.73
October 2009	3.57	4.83	5.80

Note: Introduced in October 2004

Source: Low Pay Commission

The published figures in Table I below do not allow the identification of the numbers of people such as those on apprenticeships and undergoing training, who are exempt from the National Minimum Wage rate or are entitled to lower rates. If employees receive free accommodation, employers are entitled to offset hourly rates. However, young people have told researchers (Horgan, 2006) that they are often told they are 'trainees' when they are doing the same work as someone older who is receiving the NMW.

Table I: Number and Proportion of UK Jobs Paid Below the NMW: by Age Group, 2008

	16 and 17 (Thousand) (%)		18 to 21 (Thousands) (%)		22 + (Thousands) (%)		All 16 and over (Thousands) (%)	
Estimates from the LFS								
2005	6	1.1	50	2.8	192	0.8	248	1.0
2006	6	1.2	48	2.7	279	1.2	333	1.3
2007	9	1.9	19	1.1	346	1.5	373	1.5
2008	11	2.3	29	1.6	405	1.7	445	1.7
Estimates from ASHE								
2005	20	4.0	55	3.0	233	1.0	308	1.2
2006	14	3.8	44	2.3	238	1.0	296	1.2
2007	16	4.0	49	2.6	231	1.0	296	1.1
2008	17	3.9	47	2.6	224	0.9	288	1.1

Source: April to June 2005 to 2008 Labour Force Survey and April 2005 to 2008 Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings

Another clear message coming from the young people NIAPN spoke to in the course of this work was that benefit and wage levels do not provide them with an adequate income to allow them to live with dignity and to participate in society in the way other young people can. The young people who lived independently spoke about ***'struggling to survive alone'***; some said that sometimes ***'it gets so bad there's not enough money to buy food'***; and one young person said ***'it's not about budgeting it's about not having enough money to budget.'***

Figures from the Labour Force Survey and the Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings (ASHE) suggest that the proportion of jobs paid below the NMW is small – between 2 and 4% of all jobs, see Table I. It is, of course, illegal to pay below the NMW except to a trainee. As might be expected, young people are considerably more likely to be paid below the NMW than those over 21 years, but the highest estimates for the proportion of such young people is 3.9% of 16 and 17 year olds and 2.6% of 18-21 year olds.

Table J: Characteristics of Employees in UK Jobs Paid Below the NMW, 2008

Qualifications	Below NMW		Total Jobs (Thousands)	% Jobs Paid Below	
	(Thousands)	(%)		(Thousands)	(%)
NVQ level 4 and above	55	12	8,933	34	0.6
NVQ level 3	46	10	4,359	17	1.1
Trade apprenticeships	9	2	1,036	4	0.9
NVQ level 2	90	20	4,160	16	2.2
Below NVQ level 2	88	20	3,561	14	2.5
Other qualifications	54	12	2,023	8	2.7
No qualifications	103	23	2,043	8	5.0

Source: Labour Force Survey April to June 2008

The relationship between low pay and low educational attainment is demonstrated in the Labour Force Survey table above (April-June 2008). Three quarters of all jobs paid below the NMW were filled with employees with low levels of qualifications – level 2 NVQ or below.

Unless proactive policies and interventions are identified and translated into practical and resourced actions and interventions there will be no change to the cycle of poverty and deprivation many of Northern Ireland’s most disadvantaged communities have experienced for generations. A number of recommendations follow based on the findings of this work and the opinion of the young people who participated.

15. Conclusions

In their Concluding Observations on the UK’s compliance with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, the UN Committee highlighted continued concern over government’s failure to ensure that all children reach their full potential (CRC 2008). They drew particular attention to those children from low income families who are over represented in the numbers of children failing school. It was recommended that the government: *“Invest considerable additional resources in order to ensure the right of all children to a truly inclusive education which ensures the full enjoyment to children from all disadvantaged, marginalised and school-distant groups.”* (para 67; p16) This study endorses that position. It is clear that the needs of the most vulnerable young people are not being met in the current education system.

There is a need to develop specific inclusion policies and interventions that focus on supporting young people from Not in Employment, Education or Training to Employment Education or Training, possibly learning from similar initiatives in Scotland such as Beattie Inclusiveness Project (Scottish Executive Social Research, 2005). This research provided an

overview of the difficulties facing the NEET group. It contributed to a greater understanding of their needs and of the policy effectiveness in addressing the risks and barriers faced by young people in the NEET group and its sub-groups.

In order to be able to monitor progress and to provide informed comment, statistics about child poverty in Northern Ireland need to be re-analysed and disaggregated to include 16 and 17 year olds. This data should be available at local area level and allow for analysis on the basis of gender, lone parent status, disability and ethnicity.

Further research needs to be undertaken to ascertain the impact of care on a young person's life and the relationship between the care experience, poverty and social exclusion.

Research also needs to be carried out on the impact on a family of having a young person who is not in education, employment or training and for whom the family receives no financial support.

The EMA policy was generally viewed as a positive support as it was paid on top of other income or benefits received. Payment of this allowance and its grant awards should also be paid to young people participating in Education Other Than At School (EOTAS) programmes who currently only receive daily expenses.

The young people who participated in this study were all enthusiastic about Education Other Than At School (EOTAS) programmes. Clearly, more such programmes should be provided, particularly in the most disadvantaged parts of the region. All young people who participated in EOTAS programmes and took part in this research made reference to some positive learning experiences through informal learning with youth projects. This was in stark contrast to their experiences of formal education.

Accessible information on benefits and entitlements must be made readily available to young people so that they are able to access those supports that do exist.

All teachers, but particularly those working with the most disadvantaged students, need to be trained in more interactive group work methods to engage disillusioned young people.

All the costs of education need to be met by the Department of Education. No young person, but especially those leaving care or those living in low income households, should have to pay the costs of travel to school/college, books etc. Young people living in areas at a distance from their local learning environment should be supported to attend through the provision of bus travel passes.

As a means of reducing some of the economic burden further education places on low income working households Free School Meals should be provided to low income households in receipt of Tax Credits.

The Assembly and Executive need to take on and include young people aged 16-17 in *some* parts of their policies in relation to child poverty and to children generally. They must urgently develop a policy similar to Youth Matters in England and include young people in the Children's Strategy and in Lifetime Opportunities.

The UK Government should reform the National Minimum Wage to ensure all workers regardless of age receive the same rate of pay.

Urgent legislative action is needed to ensure that all 16-17 year olds not in education, training or employment are entitled to claim welfare and housing benefits at the same rates for those over 25.

Additional financial help is needed for young people leaving care. By definition, these young people cannot rely on their birth families for the additional support that most young people take for granted. The State has been their substitute parent and should act as such.

Urgent legislative action is also needed to ensure that all 16 – 21 year olds leaving care are automatically afforded priority need status when presenting as homeless.

Greater investment is needed in appropriate accommodation options across Northern Ireland for children leaving care and young vulnerable people, so they are able to access suitable accommodation in their broad geographical area of choice.

There was a huge information deficit among the young people who participated in the study, particularly those leaving care, about what was involved in setting up a home. There is a clear need for more community based and specialist youth support projects to address the gaps in knowledge. Such initiatives are also essentially needed to provide respect based initiatives that help build the self esteem and self confidence of these vulnerable young people so that they can make informed choices that will help them build toward a better future.

Appendix 1

Economic Rights and Entitlements For 16-17 Year Olds

Income

National Minimum Wage

The UK National Minimum Wage (NMW) rates for employees over the age of 18 were introduced on 1st April 1999. There are three levels of minimum wage, and the rates from 1 October 2008 are:

- £5.73 per hour for workers aged 22 years and older
- A development rate of £4.77 per hour for workers aged 18-21 inclusive
- £3.53 per hour for all workers under the age of 18, who are no longer of compulsory school age (after the last Friday of June of the school year in which their 16th birthday occurs)

Apprentices

- Since 1 October 2006 apprentices under age 19 do not qualify for the national minimum wage
- Apprentices over age 19 and in the first 12 months of their apprenticeship do not qualify for the national minimum wage.

Accommodation offset

The daily rate of accommodation provided by an employer/trainer is offset at £4.46 (£31.22 per week) for each day that accommodation is provided.

What you can do if an employer is not paying the minimum wage?

What to do if an employer is not paying minimum wage rates:

- You can call the CAB help line at **0845 6500 207** if you want to make a complaint about an employer who you suspect is not paying the minimum wage. This is a premium rate phone line so calls will cost more, if you can ring through remember to ask the adviser to call you back. If you have access to the web you can always make contact through the website @:
www.nmwadvice.co.uk

Benefits for Young People

Young people aged 16 or over may be able to claim certain benefits or tax credits if:

1. they are sick / disabled (including if they are pregnant and incapable of work due to the pregnancy);

2. they are a carer / have childcare responsibilities (including lone parents, and for carers the person being cared for has been awarded the appropriate rates of AA / DLA);
3. they are a pupil / student or on a training course (in fulltime, non-advanced education or approved training: and are disabled or are looking after a child or are living away from parents due to estrangement, or are living away from parents because they are unable to provide support);
4. they work less than 16 hours each week (any partner must work less than 24 hours each week);
5. they are considered eligible as 'urgent cases payments' (for example people who have been granted refugee status);

Income Support (IS) and Who isn't eligible?

If you work on average more than 16 hours a week, or have a partner or civil partner who works on average 24 hours a week or more you can't usually claim Income Support.

Income Support is paid at the following weekly rates

<i>Age of claimant</i>	<i>£p/w</i>
Under 25	£50.95
25 and over	£64.30
Lone parent (under 18)	£50.95
Lone parent (18 or over)	£64.30
Couple (both under 18)	£50.95
Couple (both under 18, certain cases)	£76.90
Couple (one under 18, one 18 – 24)	£50.95
Couple (one under 18, one 25 or over)	£64.30
Couple (one under 18, certain cases)	£100.95
Couple (both 18 or over)	£100.95

Job Seekers Allowance (JSA)

Jobseeker's Allowance is a benefit open to most people over the age of 18 who are unemployed but looking for work. People can also be eligible if they have a job where they work less than 16 hours every week. If a young person is 16 or 17, they will only be able to claim JSA in exceptional circumstances, for example, estrangement from their family leading to severe hardship. See below for a full discussion of those exceptional circumstances

Income based JSA is paid at the following weekly rates

<i>Age of claimant</i>	<i>£p/w</i>
Under 25	£50.95
25 and over	£64.30

Lone parent (under 18)	£50.95
Lone parent (18 or over)	£64.30
Couple (both under 18)	£50.95
Couple (both under 18, certain cases)	£76.90
Couple (one under 18, one 18 – 24)	£50.95
Couple (one under 18, one 25 or over)	£64.30
Couple (one under 18, certain cases)	£100.95
Couple (both 18 or over)	£100.95

Contribution based JSA is paid at the following weekly rates

<i>Age of claimant</i>	<i>£p/w</i>
Under 25	£50.95
25 and over	£64.30

There is no minimum age for entitlement to contribution-based JSA but in practice, because you only qualify if you have paid or been credited with enough national insurance (NI) contributions in the two tax years before the benefit year in which you claim, young people are unlikely to qualify before the age of 18. If a 16-17 year old does not qualify for JSA they may qualify for Income Support. Even if a young person cannot claim JSA or IS they may qualify for Housing Benefit (see below).

JSA Labour Market Requirements

In general 16/17 year olds are subject to the same labour market conditions as people aged 18 and over although there is an emphasis on training for young people. Therefore:

- They are required to actively seek both work *and* training;
- They are expected to take more than one step during a week (usually at least one to find work and one to find training) unless taking one step is all that is reasonable for them to do;
- The normal list of activities that count as ‘taking a step’ include applying for jobs in writing, personally or by phone, seeking information from advertisements, advertisers, agencies or employers, registering with an agency or appointing someone else to help you find work, preparing a cv, asking a previous employer for a reference etc. For young people, the activities of seeking training and full-time education also count. In some cases young people can study or take part in training courses while on JSA so long as they satisfy the rules outlined below.

16-17 year olds are treated as available for work one week from the date of discharge from detention in prison, a remand centre or a youth custody institution.

Qualifying for JSA

The limited circumstances in which young people can qualify for Job Seekers Allowance aged 16-17 are:

- *Contribution-based JSA* - see above;
- *Income-based JSA* -No one else is claiming Income Support or income based JSA for them as part of a family;
- Young people can also qualify for Income-based JSA during the child benefit 'extension period' a period of 20 weeks after leaving school or college if:
 - They are under 18 and do not qualify for Contribution-based JSA,
 - They are not formally looked after by a Trust, having been in care after a 14th birthday for a period of at least 13 weeks *or*
 - They fit into certain groups of people who can claim Income Support (see above. It is usually better to claim IS to avoid the requirement to be available for and actively seeking work and the consequent risk of benefit sanctions).
- If they are a Care Leaver aged 16-17 a young person can only claim Income Support or JSA while they are in relevant education (12 hours or more a week) *if*:
 - They are a lone parent and treated as responsible for a child; or
 - They are entitled to the disability or severe disability premium.
- For 16-17 year olds to qualify for benefits they must satisfy special rules. To qualify for Income Support while in relevant education a young person must be:
 - An orphan and have no one acting as a parent, (they may be in prison, chronically sick or mentally or physically disabled or substantially and permanently disabled) or
 - Have left local authority care and of necessity have to live away from parents and any person acting in their place, or
 - Be estranged from them
 - Be in physical or moral danger or
 - Have a serious risk to their physical or mental health.

Sanctions for 16-17 year olds

Young people of this age can be sanctioned in the same way as claimants aged 18 and over if they are receiving Contribution –based JSA or Income-based JSA including under the severe hardship rules *and*

- Have left a job voluntarily without 'just cause' or
- Have lost a job because of misconduct

Sanctions can range from reductions in payments of 40% from 1 to 26 weeks depending on the circumstances. A young person has the right to challenge a sanction and the sanction period to a tribunal.

Severe Hardship Payments

Most people cannot qualify for hardship payments until they are over 18. If a 16-17 year old has been sanctioned, in many situations a claim for hardship does not need to be made because these young people will continue to get income-based JSA but at a reduced rate. If a young person does not qualify for income-based JSA under any of the rules for 16-17 year olds above or for Income Support, they can still be paid income-based JSA on a discretionary basis, if they would otherwise experience

severe hardship; commonly referred to as 'Severe Hardship Payments (SHP).' Hardship Payments cannot be awarded until a person has made and signed a hardship statement, normally recorded at interview.

If it is decided that they are in severe hardship, or will experience severe hardship, a 'severe hardship direction' is issued. A young person must have one to get severe hardship payments. SHP is a payment of Job Seekers Allowance, so receipt of this means a claimant is also entitled to other benefits. If a young person is refused they have a right of appeal, this takes time and a request for a review may be quicker. The factors taken into account for this ruling are:

- Financial circumstances including home, capital and outgoings;
- Whether the person they live with is on a means tested benefit;
- Whether they are homeless or at risk of homelessness if severe hardship payments are not paid, whether they have any health problems, are pregnant or vulnerable and at risk for any reason and whether they have access to food and accommodation.

These payments usually last eight weeks but the period of payment can be longer or shorter. When it ends, an application can be made to have it renewed. If the SHP is revoked a young person can no longer get these payments. This usually happens if circumstances change, information was omitted when the award was initially made, or there was a failure to follow up on an opportunity of training without good cause being demonstrated. An appeal can be made if an award is revoked.

However there are some differences for this age group. To qualify to claim for JSA including severe hardship payments, they must register for both work and training with the Careers Service and they will provide a referral form to be taken to Jobcentre Plus office where interviews are carried out. If a young person is claiming severe hardship payments, they must inform Careers Service and Job Centre staff at their appointments.

Full-time Students

Educational Maintenance Allowance

Young people aged 16-18 who are in full-time further education courses at school or college, or courses that lead to an apprenticeship could receive up to £30 a week to help with books, travel and equipment. The Educational Maintenance Allowance also pays cash bonuses up to £500 over 2 years. Any household benefits received will not be affected by EMA payments. Annual household income must be under £30,810 for young people to qualify for receipt of EMA. Rates paid are £30, £20 or £10 per week. Young people must have a bank or building society account, and complete an application form with parents or carers and be enrolled on a further education course or programme. Young parents under 20 in learning can also get help with their childcare costs. EMA is not affected by young people's part-time earnings. Households can be eligible for EMA and remain entitled to other benefits such as Child Tax Credit and Child Benefit.

Most full-time students cannot claim IS or JSA for the duration of their course, including vacations. Some exceptions apply. These include:
lone-parents, including a lone foster parent of a child under 16;
disabled students who qualify for the disability premium or severe disability premium;
deaf students who qualify for a disabled students allowance.

If a young person is a student and has a partner who is not a fulltime student and is not in employment, s/he might be able to claim IS or JSA on their behalf.

Early school leavers

If a young person leaves school before the legal minimum school leaving date, they are treated as having stayed on until that date and therefore may continue to be eligible for the EMA and their parents may continue to claim Child Benefit and Child Tax Credits for them. In exceptional cases, they may be entitled to JSA if they satisfy the qualifying conditions outlined above.

Young people leaving/in care/sheltered accommodation

A young person aged 16 or 17 can get IS, income based JSA or HB if they were looked after by a Health and Social Care Trust subject to a care or supervision order, or were provided with accommodation for at least 13 weeks;

The same applies if a young person aged 16 or 17 was in hospital or detained in a remand centre or a young offenders or similar institution when they became 16 and immediately before, were looked after by a local authority for at least 13 weeks since their 14th birthday.

The 13 weeks do not have to be continuous but there are exceptions to the rules.

- Lone parents
- Foster parents
- People capable of work or appealing against an incapacity for work decision
- Disabled workers
- Disabled or deaf students
- Blind people
- Young people in 'relevant education' who are lone parents or who qualify for disability premium or severe disability premium.

Incapacity Benefit -Incapable of work

Most young people will not qualify for Incapacity Benefit on the basis of their NI contribution record but they may still qualify if they become incapable of work in youth. There are a number of qualifying factors required and expert guidance would be required from a benefits advice agency to access this financial support.

Housing Benefit

If a young person is over 16 and is a tenant in rented accommodation such as a Housing Executive property or privately rented property or if s/he rents a room in a shared house, they may be entitled to Housing Benefit for help with the costs of the rent and rates. Claims for this benefit are made to the Northern Ireland Housing Executive. A 16-17 who has been looked after by an H&SC Trust cannot usually claim HB, instead the H&SC Trust should provide support and accommodation.

If a young person is in 'residential accommodation' for short term respite care or away from home for fear of violence they can normally get HB for between 13 and 52 weeks; after that entitlement can be reconsidered.

Local Housing Allowance

The amount of the Local Housing Allowance (LHA) that is paid by the HE depends on the area a young person lives in, the category of the dwelling and the local housing allowance that is set for each category. The local housing allowance for one-bedroom shared accommodation (Category A) is paid if;

- The claimant is single (a young individual), under 25, living alone or
- A couple with no dependents

The local housing allowance for a one-bedroom self contained accommodation (Category B) is instead paid if;

- The person qualifies for a severe disability premium as part of his/her applicable amount or
- Is under the age of 22 and was in care of, or under the supervision of, a H&SC Trust under specific legal provisions after turning 16 or
- was provided with accommodation by the H&SC Trust under s20 of the Children (NI) Order 1995.

Discretionary Housing Payment

If extra financial assistance is needed to meet housing costs it may be possible to claim discretionary housing payments to top up housing benefit from the NI Housing Executive. The Housing Executive has discretion on whether to pay, what amount to pay and over what period to pay. A claim for discretionary Housing Payments is separate from a claim for HB and young people should ask the Housing Executive how to make a claim. If successful, payment is usually made weekly. Grounds must be provided to support the claim and it is possible to request a claim be back dated. It is necessary to demonstrate the need for this financial assistance on top of a young persons housing benefit.

Other Benefits

- Young people are entitled to free prescriptions up to the age of 16 (19 if in full time education);
- to free dental treatment up to the age of 18;
- to free sight tests and help with glasses or contact lenses up to the age of 16 (19 if in full time education).

Carers Allowance

Anyone who is providing 35 hours a week care for someone receiving the high/middle care rate of Disability Living Allowance or any rate of Attendance Allowance can claim carers allowance (CA), once aged 16 or over. While claiming CA, the carer is credited with Class 1 national insurance contributions, which means it is possible to qualify for contribution-based benefits after a period of time – usually two years.

Carers Allowance Claimant Rates

Claimant	£53.10
Adult dependent	£31.70

Child Benefit

Child benefit is paid in addition to other benefits and is paid to people who are responsible for a child. The rates are:

Eldest or only child	£20.00
Additional children - per child	£13.20

Child Tax Credits

A person must be over 16 to claim Child Tax Credit (CTC) and be responsible for one or more children who resides with them. The amount of CTC received is made up of a combination of 'elements', how much income the parent or carer has and the income threshold that applies to them. If a young person is in receipt of Income Support or Income-based JSA they act as an automatic passport to maximum CTC.

Child Tax Credit Rates

	£ Per day	£ Per year
Family element (Basic)	£1.50	£545
Family element (Baby)	£1.50	£545
Child element	£6.13	£2,235
Disability Element	£7.32	£2,670
Severe Disability Element	£2.95	£1,075

Working Tax Credits

Working Tax Credit is for people who are employed or self-employed (either on their own or in a partnership) who:

- usually work 16 hours or more a week;
- are paid for that work;
- expect to work for at least 4 weeks

and who are

- aged 16 or over and responsible for at least one child, or
- aged 16 or over and disabled, or
- aged 25 or over and usually work at least 30 hours a week

As part of Working Tax Credit young people may qualify for help towards the costs of childcare. If you receive the childcare element of Working Tax Credit, this will always be paid direct to the person who is mainly responsible for caring for the child or children, alongside payments of Child Tax Credit. The amount of tax credits received will depend on annual income.

Working Tax Credit Rates

	£ Per day	£ Per year
Basic element	£5.18	£1,890
Couple element	£5.10	£1,860
Lone parent element	£5.10	£1,860
30-hour element	£2.13	£ 775
Disability element	£6.94	£2,530
Severe disability element	£2.95	£1,075
50 plus element	(16 – 29 hours) £3.57	£1,300
	(30 hours or more) £5.31	£1,935
Childcare element	80% of eligible childcare costs up to a weekly maximum of:	
	one child	£175
	two or more children	£300

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