



Co-funded by the  
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# Transitions Management Handbook

A Guide for Mentors and other key  
stakeholders working with NEET-  
Experienced Young People

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# Foreword

This handbook draws on research conducted as part of the Erasmus+ project, Improving Transitions, Enabling Results. It offers important insights into the challenges and opportunities facing NEET-experienced young people and will help learning mentors work constructively and creatively with young people on the margins of education and employment. The handbook provides a set of guidelines which will enable mentors to support young people to move into mainstream education and training – and remain there. It is an important resource which help young people fulfil their potential, not only as learners but ultimately as workers, consumers and citizens more broadly.

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# About the ITER project

NEET is a pan-European challenge – NEET is an acronym for Not in Education, Employment or Training and refers to a young person aged 16-24 (in the UK) who is unemployed, not in school or vocational training.

The objectives of ITER project are directly linked to EU Youth Strategy (2019 - 2027) core priorities to fight the social exclusion and poverty affecting large numbers of young people in Europe.

NEET young people across Europe are at serious risk of poverty and social exclusion; the ITER Project will contribute to opportunities and resources necessary for NEET young people to participate fully in economic, social and cultural life.

The ITER project has been designed to improve methods to engage NEET young people to identify their individual needs and barriers to mainstream vocational education and to empower them to co-design and implement their personal action plan to address their needs and barriers across 4 'Zones': Learning, Life, Leisure and work, building in the customised assistance needed to support their transition from NEET to mainstream vocational education and training and to support them and their receiving VET organisation/college with a transitions action plan which sets out their support needs and agreed plan that prepares them for transition, supports them during transition and offers support to their VET organisation/college.

The ITER project has developed a web-based platform and interface/dashboard using the DayPlot gamification methodology to design a young person friendly interactive platform which will encourage the engagement of NEET young people in the initial assessment, action planning and transitions readiness stages of their customised assistance and support their transitions to mainstream VET reducing dropout/withdrawal and increasing completion/qualifications rates for previously-NEET students/trainees

Further information on the ITER Project is available on the project website <https://www.iter-project.info/>

## The ITER Project Partnership



GEMS Northern Ireland Limited (Co-ordinator) UK



University of Huddersfield UK



Extern, Northern Ireland UK



Time Associates UK



Antares SRL Italy



Eulab Consulting Italy



Desincoop Portugal



University Politehnica of Bucharest Romania



Békés County Government Office Hungary

The ITER project partnership brings together organisations/institutions that have the shared commitment, knowledge, skills, experience and complimentary expertise that drives the project and ensures it delivers high quality results.

# Part one



# 1. Setting the context of being a NEET-experienced young person in Europe

NEET rates vary considerably across Europe, not only between different countries but also within any given nation. The makeup of the NEET population – in terms, for example, of age, gender, ‘race’ and ethnicity – can also differ significantly in different places. The reasons for this are complex and multi-causal, but there are a number of important points to grasp about the position of NEET-experienced people across Europe.

Not all NEET young people are low achievers but those from socially disadvantaged backgrounds and young people who have few or no qualifications are generally more likely to be NEET than their peers. Some NEET-experienced young people also face significant barriers to participation in terms, for example, of family circumstances; caring responsibilities; health and wellbeing; and social, emotional and behavioural difficulties. Those most vulnerable to spending extended periods of time being NEET frequently suffer from complex and multiple forms of disadvantage and have often had negative experiences of education and work, which can affect their confidence, motivation and commitment to education and work.

It is also important to recognise there are often considerable ‘scarring effects’ associated with being NEET. Young people who spend significant periods of time outside education and work are particularly vulnerable to long-term adult unemployment; they are more likely to be involved with the criminal justice system than their peers; to suffer from poor health; addiction; relationship breakdowns; and multiple forms of social exclusion. There are, moreover, broader social and economic consequences associated with NEET. On one hand, there are lost tax revenues associated with unemployment, but the long-term effects of NEET are also associated with additional public expenditure on health, social services, welfare benefits and other forms of support. NEET-experienced young people are also less likely to vote, to volunteer, or engage with civil society more broadly.

Policymakers and practitioners should therefore be concerned with the issue of NEET, especially in terms of providing better opportunities for the most excluded young people. Particular initiatives may work more or less well in different nations

but, for many NEET-experienced young people across Europe, making the transition into ‘mainstream’ vocational education and training is an important milestone – and the way they are supported in making this shift is vital to their success or failure. Mentors are central to this process, and they can, our research suggests, make a real difference to the lives of young people on the margins of education and work.

## 1.1 A note on covid-19 and its impact on young people

The Covid-19 pandemic which spread across Europe and further afield in 2020 has had far-reaching implications for young people, especially the most disadvantaged. ‘Lockdown’ regulations have meant that many young people have been unable to access education, training, careers’ guidance, and other forms of support they so desperately need. Whilst online learning has mitigated this to some extent, the most marginalized often lack access to the technology necessary to engage with such provision, and many NEET-experienced young people do not have a secure, stable home environment conducive to online learning. It also needs to be recognised that many of the social aspects of learning and personalised forms of support that NEET-experienced young people need most can only be provided effectively through face-to-face provision.

It is also fair to say that young people have been disproportionately affected by rising unemployment caused by the pandemic. For many employers, the first response to adverse economic conditions is to stop recruiting new staff – a policy which most affects those leaving education and training, or otherwise seeking to enter or re-enter the labour market. But the industries in which young people are most likely to work – including retail, leisure, hospitality and catering – have also been among those most affected by the pandemic.

So, whilst Covid-19 has had far-reaching effects across Europe, young people – especially those who were already substantially disadvantaged – have, in many ways, borne the brunt.

## 1.2 Our research approach

There is now a significant body of literature on NEET. Local authorities, national and regional government collate statistics, provide intelligence, and fund interventions which aim to engage or re-engage NEET-experienced young people in education and work. EU bodies, such as Eurofound, have done much work on NEET, its characteristics, and the causes and effects of youth unemployment. Academic research has examined different aspects of the lives of NEET-experienced young people across Europe and elsewhere. Whilst this handbook is informed by such work, it is based primarily on research carried out in six nations - England, Hungary, Italy, Northern Ireland, Portugal and Romania - by partner organisations which took part in the ITER Project. The findings presented – and guidelines provided – draw on focus group interviews with three sets of participants:

- NEET-experienced young people
- Mentors whose work entails providing advice, guidance and other forms of support to NEET-experienced young people.
- Stakeholders responsible for formulating and implementing policy at the local and regional level.

Key findings from the research are presented in sections 1.3 – 1.5 of the Handbook.

# 1.3 Summary of key findings

## General context for NEET

There are some differences in the way that different European nations attempt to address youth unemployment. In some ways, this is understandable. NEET rates are substantially higher in Portugal and Romania, for instance, than the UK, and different countries have different arrangements in terms of the role of national and local government, and the ways in which education and training are funded, organised and delivered. The youth labour market also differs considerably from place to place, due, at least in part, to the history, culture and traditions which characterise different nations, and extant demand for different forms of labour. It is nevertheless fair to say that there are more similarities than differences in the NEET population across Europe, and the barriers facing them as they attempt to engage or re-engage in education and work.

## Details of the research

The overall aim of the research was to establish how best to support NEET-experienced young people moving into mainstream vocational education and training. It focused on four inter-related themes:

- Barriers faced by NEET-experienced young people trying to access vocational education and training.
- Practical strategies to support NEET-experienced young people into vocational education and training and help them remain in mainstream provision.
- The role of partnership working in helping NEET-experienced young people access vocational education and training.
- The role of information sharing in supporting transitions into mainstream provision.

## Summary of findings

There are some differences in the challenges and opportunities facing NEET-experienced young people in different parts of Europe, but our research suggests that there are many important similarities too. These include:

## Individual barriers to participation

### Young people's deficits in terms of:

- Qualifications; vocational skills and knowledge
- Motivation; commitment; flexibility; confidence, and 'soft skills',
- Mental health; social, emotional, and dispositional factors; and physical disabilities
- In some cases, unrealistic or unclear goals; short-termism; and reluctance to seek help were also seen as barriers to participation.

## Environmental barriers to participation

- Negative influence of family and peers on young people's attitudes, values and aspirations
- Accessibility and/or quality of advice and guidance
- Availability and accessibility of appropriate education, training and support services
- Negative previous experiences of education
- Travel, in terms of cost, logistics and/or cultural factors
- Financial problems can also be a problem in many instances. For example, the availability and accessibility of grants, travel, and training allowances

## Enabling successful transitions

- The mentor has a pivotal role in building positive relationships; offering personal and practical support; and acting as a 'bridge' into mainstream provision.
- It is important to try and 'match' provision to young people's abilities and interests in order to encourage them to access mainstream training programmes – and remain on them.

- Mentors should recognise young people’s strengths, as well as their deficits or shortcomings.
- Financial incentives can often encourage NEET-experienced young people to access and remain on training programmes (as is the case with many other young people and adults)
- In some contexts, diagnostic tools, IT packages and other methods can complement alongside face-to-face support.
- Voluntary work can sometimes help NEET-experienced young people build confidence and provide them with valuable experience of the world of work.

## Preventing dropout

- It is important to get young people on the right sort of provision in the first place – in other words, training which is at the right level which reflects their interests and ambitions.
- The mentor has a key role in preventing dropout – providing ‘a bridge’ between young people, training providers and, where appropriate, families and significant others. Continuing mentor support once a NEET-experienced young person is in mainstream provision can often prevent dropout; nurture and care are important, but practical support is too.

## Partnership working

- Can offer a range of potential advantages for NEET-experienced young people and those who work with them in terms, for example, of sharing expertise, resources and information
- Can help develop effective links between national and regional policy, and the local level
- Informal partnerships between practitioners operating locally can sometimes be as (or more) effective than official partnership arrangements in benefiting young people.
- Young people are generally positive about partnership working if it provides them with tangible benefits, such as better information, more resources or access to a broader range of opportunities.

## Partnership building

- Partnership forums need to put the welfare and needs of young people at the centre of their work.
- It can often be helpful to include business and other employers in partnership forums.
- It is important to ensure that the views and opinions of young people are represented in partnership forums.
- Building informal partnerships alongside formal arrangements can help move things forward ‘on the ground’.
- . There is a need to ensure that partnerships become self-sustaining in the long-term as specific funding is often timebound.

## Sharing information

- Young people are generally positive about information sharing if it benefits them – in terms, for example, of information about training, employment, or financial support. But some have reservations about the sharing of sensitive personal information.
- Mentors and stakeholders are also broadly positive about information sharing but stress the need to put the young person at the centre of the process.
- It can sometimes be useful to include schools and employers in the information sharing process, although this needs to be done in ways which advantage young people (or at least does not disadvantage them)
- Many young people find form filling and being repeatedly asked to provide personal information off-putting. Effective information sharing, including via digital portfolios, digital IDs, resource banks and other forms of new technology, can help reduce this burden.
- Young people, mentors and stakeholders need, however, to be aware of the constraints of GDPR when sharing personal information.

## Finally...

- NEET-experienced young people’s lives can be complicated so individual, environmental and other factors often interact in unexpected ways. This is where the skill, ability and commitment of the mentor can enable the young person to navigate a successful transition into mainstream provision.

- Financial matters are often significant for NEET-experienced young people – both in terms of motivation and the practicalities of sustaining day-to-day life.
- Trust and relationships are vitally important to the young person and should be at the centre of everything the mentor does.

Sections 1.3.1 to 1.3.6 summarise findings particular to each nation, in addition to those reported in the foregoing.

### 1.3.1 Northern Ireland

The role of the mentor is seen as key to young people’s progression – in terms, for example, of providing advice and guidance, pastoral, and practical support. Data also suggests that flexible training provision can be particularly beneficial for NEET-experienced young people. Many of the individual and environmental barriers found elsewhere are evident in Northern Ireland, although the influence of sectarianism can present an additional obstacle as certain young people may feel they are not able to travel to or through certain areas in order to access training programmes or support services.

### 1.3.2 England

Institutional competition and inflexible funding systems can, data suggests, sometimes inhibit partnership working. Here, mentors in particular talked about the positive potential of informal partnerships in helping NEET-experienced youth to access support services and opportunities for education and work. Financial matters were also highlighted as important – both in terms of motivating young people to participate and the costs associated with travelling to training courses or sustaining independent living.

### 1.3.3 Italy

Again, informal partnerships were identified as offering positive potential. The need to recognise young people’s talents and strengths as well as their weaknesses and deficits was also a strong theme arising from the data. Access to high quality information, advice and guidance was seen as a problem in some instances; the need for ongoing mentor support to help young people through key transition points – for example, when moving from one training provider to another – was another key finding from the research in Italy. The notion of the mentor providing a bridge into mainstream provision and into employment thereafter was a related theme.



### 1.3.4 Romania

The nature of the labour market was identified as a barrier to participation, especially in terms of the lack of employment outside agriculture. Ethnic stereotyping and prejudice was identified as a barrier for some young people, especially those from Romani backgrounds. Poor quality advice and guidance and the need for financial incentives to encourage participation were also highlighted, as was a lack of effective communication, interpersonal and basic skills among some young people.

### 1.3.5 Hungary

Many of the same individual and environmental barriers to participation identified elsewhere were also evident in Hungary. Mentors, however, stressed the need for flexible, tailored solutions and better financial incentives to encourage young people to participate in education and work. Again, the mentor is seen as central to improving the prospects of NEET-experienced young people, particularly in terms of helping their confidence and motivation but also in breaking down social and material barriers to participation. The quality of partnerships varies although can, at best, bring national and local priorities together.

### 1.3.6 Portugal

Relationships are, once again, seen as key to supporting NEET-experienced young people. In particular, ongoing support and contact from the mentor is regarded as vital in facilitating successful transitions. Family pressure to enter the labour market rather than pursue more long-term goals via training was mentioned by both the mentors and the young people who took part in the research. Flexibility of provision and financial incentives were also identified as important ways of helping young people move into mainstream education and training and remain on course.

## 1.4 key takeaways from our research

NEET-experienced young people often exhibit a range of negative attitudes, values and opinions, and some may appear to lack motivation, commitment or the enthusiasm to succeed. It is important, however, to recognise that these characteristics often derive, at least in part, from repeated negative experiences of education, work and other aspects of social life – and are therefore not necessarily intrinsic personality characteristics. Conversely, good experiences and effective personal support can make a real difference. It is also necessary to recognise that many NEET-experienced young people have a range of positive characteristics, abilities and interests, which can be a valuable resource going forward.

Positive relationships are vital. The role of the mentor in providing advice and guidance, and different forms of personal and practical support is often key to the progress of NEET-experienced young people. Our research suggests that practitioners who ‘go the extra mile’ can make a significant difference – especially in helping a young person remain in mainstream education and training once they have made their initial transition. This might include providing ongoing social and emotional support; liaising with family or significant others; working with a training provider to make tutors aware of a young person’s learning needs; or supporting a young person in dealing with social services, health, housing and other agencies.

Practical and material factors can present substantial barriers to participation – in terms, for example, of travel logistics; finances, including the availability and level of grants, bursaries and training allowances; the quality of information, advice and guidance they can access; and the availability of training programmes which match young people’s interests and abilities.

Partnership working is important – both in terms of mentors working in partnership with young people and other practitioners, and support services; and in terms of organisations working together to share information and resources in order to best support NEET-experienced young people.

### 1.4.1 closing comments

Helping NEET-experienced young people make successful transitions into mainstream education and training is a complex and demanding task. But, whilst there is no ‘silver bullet’ that will guarantee success, the role of the learning mentor

is perhaps the single most important factor in producing positive outcomes for marginalized youth. Practitioners need to be aware of their vital role in providing a 'bridge' for NEET-experienced young people, which will enable them move into mainstream provision, and stay there. The guidelines provided in this handbook will assist greatly, but mentors will also be aware that the way they interact and communicate with young people can have a significant impact. In other words, the small things matter too, and building and maintaining positive relations with young people is key.

# Part two

## **2.1 the importance of partnership working when supporting a NEET-experienced young person to progress to mainstream VET/College**

The need for existing partnerships to function more effectively and to put the young person at the centre of partnerships is significant for mentors. Mentors often create informal partnerships with training providers, employers and support services, either alongside or outside formal partnership arrangements. This is necessary to provide support to young people at a local level.

These partnerships are crucial, therefore, in supporting young people to progress to mainstream VET. As young people are usually less well-informed about how to facilitate these types of partnerships, the role of the mentor and the relevant stakeholders is crucial.

## 2.2 preparing a NEET-experienced young person for their move to VET/College

The analogy of the mentor as a bridge to success is a useful one. Care and trust are important factors or traits that young people need to recognise in an effective mentor.

Continued emotional and practical support from the mentor is perceived as particularly valuable for many young people, even after they have entered mainstream provision.

Getting young people into the right provision, matching their individual skills, ambitions and abilities is seen as an important factor, whilst the role of the mentor in providing nurture, care and various forms of practical support is seen as key.

Ongoing mentoring support, once a young person has entered mainstream provision, is equally as important.

Effective links and networks with employers and training providers is also significant. For some stakeholders, early work experience or voluntary work offers the potential to introduce or acclimatise young people to the labour market whilst another factor is the ability to match provision to the young person's interests and abilities.

Finally, the use of diagnostic tools and information technology can also play a key role in helping young people make successful transitions into mainstream provision, mainly as an adjunct to face-to-face support, whilst it is also recognised by some mentors and stakeholders that there is a need for flexible provision and for NEET-experienced young people to be able to develop soft skills and life skills alongside vocational learning.

## 2.2.1 why partnership working is important

Any truly effective partnership is based on trust. This is essential, especially when working with young people. The young person must fully trust their mentor and the relationship should demonstrate a strong sense of balance. This 'equal' partnership will help to build trust and open up effective communication. And, as we all know, communication is a vital component of all good relationships.

## 2.2.2 assessing a young person's readiness to move on

Effective planning for young people relies on accurate assessment of needs, setting realistic outcomes for those needs and then formulating the work required to achieve those specified outcomes.

Every young person is unique, and the plan should be based on the assessment of their specific needs - the key issues in the young person's life and the most pressing needs these issues give rise to. This should be your starting point.

The quality of the plan will, to a large extent, depend on the quality of the information gathered and this, in turn, will depend on the strength of the relationship established with the young person. The plan should set out how identified needs will be addressed over time so that the young person can make the best possible transition to the next stage of their journey. Once these needs have been clearly identified, the mentor and the young person can decide together which needs to address first, agree on the outcomes that need to be achieved for those needs, as well as a realistic timescale for achieving each outcome. Some obvious outcomes in this transition for any young person would be:

- Having a home.
- Achieving full potential in education.
- Career success.
- Being healthy.
- Having positive relationships.
- Involvement in meaningful, enjoyable activities

## 2.2.3 the Transitions Readiness Assessment

A key step in determining a young person's readiness to make the move from 'customised assistance' to mainstream VET/College is the completion of the Transitions Readiness Assessment Questionnaire. This is a self-analysis questionnaire when provides both the young person and their mentor with an opportunity to assess the young person's current readiness to move forward, e.g. next steps 'handover' to a VET Centre or College.

Both the young person and their mentor work through each question – ideally together – discussing the importance of each competency and how well they believe that the young person is demonstrating that competency, scoring each question from 1 through to 5. If it is not possible for the young person and their mentor to work together, then they can work through the questionnaire independently of each other but must then compare scores together at a later date. They must then arrive at a score for each question that each, following discussion, agrees with.

Finally, it is the mentor's responsibility to score the questionnaire in terms of red, amber, green for each question, providing a number of priority areas for development for the mentee moving forward as well as highlighting the areas where the mentee no longer requires support.

## 2.2.4 supporting a young person to choose their next move

The strongest message from young people making the transition to the next stage of their journey is about the importance of having a reliable adult in their life who they trust and who they feel cares about them. The availability of such a person is a crucial factor to help young people make the smoothest possible transition. Such trusted adults provide three main types of support: emotional support; practical advice; and handholding. The role of the mentor in supporting the young person in making their next move is crucial.

Developing a positive sense of self is a key developmental task. If the task is achieved, young people's chances of developing positive self-esteem will be greatly increased. Healthy self-esteem makes it much more likely that young people will see themselves as worthy of being loved and so be more able to love others; be more able to look after themselves physically and emotionally; persist in overcoming difficulties; be more likely to disentangle themselves from abusive relationships and situations, and generally live happier and more fulfilling lives.



Whilst personal history will be a major influence on the young person's formulation of their sense of self, other factors will have an impact too. For example, gender, ethnic origin, class background, sexuality and religion. The choices young people make about their dress, leisure pursuits, interests, likes and dislikes will also shape the way they see themselves and affect the way others see them. These decisions and choices can also be discussed and made in partnership with an effective mentor. Ultimately, it is the young person who makes the choice or final decision, but the mentor can play a crucial support in making sure that the 'right' choice or decision is made.

## 2.3 The Transitions ‘Planning Partnership’ – young person, their mentor and the receiving VET Centre/College

The relationship between the young person and the mentor is fundamentally key - the mentor builds a relationship, supporting the young person to identify their barriers and assist them when they are ready to do so, moving forward and take more control of their employability/educational futures.

By understanding the young person’s interests and ambitions the mentor can help them realise potential opportunities on their career journey. This continued support helps the young person understand that they are not on their own through this transition and that they do have support available to them, so giving them the confidence and motivation to help move forward in their lives.

This results in the development of a clear, personalised action plan that is reviewed with the young person on a regular basis. The action plan will address the young person’s needs and barriers across all the 4 zones. This plan is agreed by all and is a record of the tailored key milestones to be completed, these will support the young person throughout their transition period. This plan will also be seen as an added support to the VET organisation.

At the beginning of the young person’s readiness for transition, it is useful for the mentor to create a partnership with the VET provider, to build and retain a relationship that will help maintain the young person’s motivation especially in the early stages and to avoid unnecessary dropouts. Implementing a transition plan at this stage will establish a triage between the young person, mentor and VET organisation, allowing a smoother path into the chosen destination. Support of providers needs to be tailored to the individual - one size does not fit all.

### **For the young person it offers:**

- A good knowledge of the process
- What pre-entry training is needed?
- Transparency
- Good advice & guidance
- Continuity of support

### **For the Mentor it offers:**

- Better links to VET centres/colleges
- Knowledge of the process
- A key role to removing barriers.
- Sourcing funding if necessary
- Good knowledge to what is available for all young people.

### **For the VET Centre/College it offers**

- Good retention
- Knowledge of the young person's learning style.
- Availability of outreach in local communities
- Help to remove barriers.

## **2.3.1 sharing information – what to share and how to share it, the importance of consent**

The General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR) and the Data Protection Act 2018 must be adhered to.

It is important to inform the young person from the outset about what will happen to information about them:

- Who will be told what?
- Who will they then tell?
- Why people are being told the information?

Ask for the young person's permission unless it is unsafe or inappropriate to do so. If the young person is under 18 years old, seek permission from their parent/legal guardian. Do not delay disclosing information to obtain consent if that might put children or young people at risk of significant harm.

It is important to get the consent of the young person as it -

- Is a process that sets the scene for the mentoring relationship.
- It promotes shared decision-making in the relationship.
- It allows the young person to have a say in their own pathway and action plan.
- It minimises the risk of the exploitation of, and harm to, the client through this information sharing and collaborative decision-making process.

Robust systems need to be put in place with the focus on the young person. Only information that is relevant to the purpose of the programme should be shared with those who require it. This allows others in the partnership to do their job effectively and offer the right support.

Make sure all information is adequate for its purpose. The quality of information is important to make sure that the recipients can understand. Information should be accurate and up to date and differentiate between opinion and fact. Explanation should be given if the shared information is historic.

Information should be shared on a regular and timely interval so as to maximise the opportunities to offer support and operational requirements.

Mentors/VET organisations should also ensure that sufficient information is shared, so partners can make decisions on the most appropriate pathway for the young person.

Mentors should follow their organisation's policy for the sharing of information and for handling personal information. When passing on information, this should be carried out in the most secure way possible.

All information should be recorded, whether the information is shared or not and stored in the most appropriate place, in line with your organisation file storage and retention policy. The retainment of information should not be kept longer than required. Some funders, however, do require differing lengths of retention periods.

## 2.4 Introducing the young person to their VET Centre/College

Ideally, the mentor will have an established relationship with the mentee and will have already worked with them on identifying, agreeing and matching their individual skills, ambitions, abilities and “best match” these to an appropriate VET Centre/College.

Once the young person has identified, applied to and been accepted on their chosen VET Centre/College, it is at this stage of transition that the importance of informal and formal partnerships established by the mentor will bring tangible benefits to the young person. In terms of ensuring a successful transition into their chosen VET Centre/College, once again the analogy of the mentor as a bridge to success is a useful one.

It is important that young people feel prepared prior to their initial introduction to their VET Centre/College and that this first meeting is a positive experience.

The mentor can assist the young people in preparation for this initial meeting both in practical terms and in care and trust are important factors or traits that young people need to recognise in the makeup of an effective mentor.

On that basis, continued emotional and practical support from the mentor is particularly valuable for many young people, even after they have entered mainstream provision.

### 2.4.1 introduction to the induction process

The three key elements of the mentoring model play an important part of the initial introduction of young people to their VET Centre/College.

#### **emotional support**

The mentor prepares the young person for their introduction by providing emotional support, nurture and care. This can involve talking through the young person’s fears and anxieties about starting in a new learning environment; helping them to put in place coping mechanisms; and agreeing who they can turn to for support once they have commenced their course.

It is important at this stage to continue to nurture the young person in terms of their self-worth and self-esteem. The mentor will remind the young person of the progress

they have made to date, referring to their transition plan and how the mentor and mentee have previously agreed, as part of a collaborative process, that they are ready and prepared.

## practical advice

It is important that young people who are going for an initial introduction to their chosen VET Centre/College do so feeling informed and prepared. The mentor has a key role in facilitating this by liaising with the receiving VET Centre/College to establish baseline information such as:

- Who will be at the introductory session?
- How long will it last for?
- Is there anything the young person is required to bring with them? For example - identification documents, bank details, qualification certificates, etc
- Is there a dress code?
- What will be discussed during the introductory session?

By liaising with the receiving VET Centre/College, the mentor can ensure the young person is clear on what will be expected of them and can help them gather the practical documentation they will need as part of their transition plan.

It is good practice for this preparation period to be a two-way process. Once again, this is where the young person can gain tangible benefits from the partnership developed by the mentor. In cases where young people have faced complex barriers to progression, such as multiple adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), some mentoring organisations will gain consent from the young person to share this information with the appropriate person in the receiving VET Centre/College prior to the young person attending the introductory session. This will normally involve the mentor arranging to have a professional discussion with the adult who will be the main point of contact with the young person in the receiving VET Centre/College. This may be the department head or can be a member of the VET Centre/College Pastoral Care Team.

During the discussion, the mentor can share the nature of the ACEs and how these have affected the young person, their development and progression. During this session, the mentor can also share information such as what puts the young person at ease, what may trigger the young person and what works well in terms of self-regulation and de-escalation. Organisations such as Extern NI highly recommend the use of professional discussions for NEET young people who have experienced ACEs as this means the young person does not have to “retell” their story or “re-live” their

trauma. The receiving VET Centre/College can inform staff about potential triggers and proven coping techniques.

## Hand holding

As mentioned previously in this section, the strongest message from young people making the transition to mainstream VET is about the importance of having a reliable adult in their life who they trust and who, they feel cares about them. This is crucial if young people are to make the smoothest possible transition to their VET Centre/College.

## Agreeing the young person's Transitions Management Plan

Prior to agreeing the young person's transitions management plan, the young person and the mentor will have built up a sense of trust, honesty and mutual respect based on their interactions and experiences of being in a collaborative partnership. They will have usually been engaged in this process for a period of approximately 6-9 months prior to agreeing a transitions plan and will have developed an 'equal' partnership based on trust and open communication.

During this time, the mentor and young person will have completed and reviewed an assessment of needs in the four key "zones" of their lives - Learning, Leisure, Work and Life. The young person and mentor will have set realistic outcomes for these needs and formulated the work required to achieve specified outcomes and address identified needs. This process will have led to the young person and mentor agreeing that they are ready to make the transition to a VET Centre/College.

The transitions plan will reflect previous assessed needs and build on prior successful outcomes whilst being flexible in addressing any new identified needs or barriers as the Transition progresses.

Every young person is unique, and the plan will be based on the assessment of their specific needs - the key issues in the young person's life and the most pressing needs these issues give rise to.

Parts 1 & 2 of the transitions plan will contain the practical details and information relating to the young person, the referring organisation (mentor), the receiving organisation (VET Centre/College and the course chosen).

Part 3 of the transition plan is aligned to the final assessment and transitions questionnaire outcomes with a particular focus on addressing concerns/worries about transitioning to vocational education/training.

Each zone begins by identifying the strengths of the young person and the transferable skills they have developed, whilst also acknowledging areas for development where young people may still require support.



# Summary

Strengths	Areas for development

## Resources available to me

Assistance type	Eligibility (to qualify)	Who to contact/how to apply

Once again, the informal and formal partnerships developed by the mentor will provide the young person with tangible benefits such as improved access to high-quality information, advice and guidance and may include areas such as mental health, budget management, addiction, housing, and access to other support services.

In the next section of the transitions plan the young person will set small and achievable goals that they want to achieve over the duration of their vocational education or training course.

## My plan

Short term goals	Steps required	Progress

At the end of each zone, the young person and mentor will agree where they are in readiness for each step. This should support the young person to make choices and decide the next steps required to progress. The less the young person feels ready, the more resources should be identified to assist the young person on their journey.

Readiness Scale Needs work 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Prepared

Part 4 of the transitions plan formalises the agreement between the referring organisation, the receiving organisation and the young person setting dates, venues and timelines whilst also agreeing arrangements should additional needs or issues emerge.

Whilst most of the completion of the transitions plan can be co-designed by the young person and their mentor, it is important that once the professional discussion and initial introduction has occurred with the receiving VET Centre/College and the key contact has been identified, they become part of a tripartite process in agreeing and completing the transitions plan going forward.

## 2.4.2 Setting out the key steps and support available

The role of the mentor is key to facilitating successful transitions into mainstream education and training. Prior to commencing with their chosen VET Centre/College, the young person will have completed a comprehensive transitions plan.

In completing the transitions plan the young person will have assessed their readiness to progress in each of the 4 Zones of Learning, Leisure, Life, and Work. As part of this process the young person will have identified what resources are available to them, how to access these resources and who to contact. This is another area where the formal and informal partnerships established by the mentor will have tangible benefits for the young person. It is important that time is taken to ensure the young person has a name and a contact number for each resource identified and it would be best practice for the mentor to facilitate face to face introductory meetings with each resource person as part of the initial induction process so that the young person knows where to physically go and who to approach for assistance.

The transition plan is a tripartite contract between the mentor, the young person and the identified key contact in the receiving VET Centre/College. This key contact will be the primary support for the young person in following the key steps agreed in the “My Plan” in each of the 4 Zones of Learning, Leisure, Life and Work.

## 2.4.3 What to do if problems arise

Many of the young people who are transitioning in to a VET Centre/College will have experienced multiple and complex ACEs and some will have common and often overlapping issues present in their lives such as – poverty, legacy of disadvantage and under investment; legacy of conflict; pressures on the family; being a young carer; marginalization; 'exclusion' from mainstream school/youth provision; mental ill-

health within families; social, emotional and/or behavioural difficulties; SEN non/misdiagnosis; disability; learning difficulties; bullying; self-harm; suicide; issues of identity (inc. sexual orientation); substance abuse including parental substance abuse; domestic violence; parental abuse/neglect; lack of self-esteem/self-worth; lack of confidence; lack of social/life/coping/emotional resilience or depression.

In recent years there has been an increasing acknowledgement of how Adverse Childhood Experiences affect individuals in later life. This is known as trauma-informed practice. Trauma-informed practice recognises the prevalence of trauma and its impact on the emotional, psychological, and social wellbeing of people.

In simple terms, if young people have experienced a range of ACEs, this will have an adverse impact on their confidence, self-esteem, coping mechanisms and how they deal with problems or barriers they face in life. A key role of the mentor is to ensure that the young person transitioning into their chosen VET Centre/College knows who to go to and how to ask for help if a problem arises. Similarly, it is important that, as part of the handover and transitions plan, the sending organisation provides the receiving organisation with a clear background on the young person including triggers and proven coping strategies.

Previous experience of some mentoring organisations in Northern Ireland has identified that providing regular “Support Clinics” in the receiving VET Centre/College helps in identifying problems or issues at an early stage, allowing the sending mentoring organisation to intervene and liaise with the receiving organisation and the young people to put in place additional support mechanisms. For example, Extern’s ‘Moving Forward Moving On’ project has support clinics across approximately 16 VET Centres where one mentor will hold an open drop-in session for two hours a week initially, gradually reducing to fortnightly, then monthly. This provides young people with a reassurance that they can go there and talk through any issues and ask for help as problems arise.

The regular tripartite review meetings outlined in Part 4 of the transitions plan which can continue for up to 26 weeks post transition are a critical part of the process which allows for the young person to address issues as they emerge and put in place an agreed action plan to overcome emerging problems as they arise.

## Preparation for start: practical arrangements and personal support

Young people who have previously engaged in mentoring services recognise the importance of having a trusted mentor alongside them during the initial introduction meeting. In practical terms, such as getting them there and to the right place on time and prepared, but also in terms of reassurance and confidence.

The three key aspects of transitional mentoring support are as follows:

### Emotional support

- Building up relationships
- Trusting and respecting young people
- Being listened to without judgement

### Informed advice and guidance

- Advice not only in relation to education, training and employment
- Advice on housing, counselling, drugs etc. And other support services
- Advice and guidance on which services young people should go to, who best to talk to, and what to say.

### Hand holding

- Young people who are vulnerable and/or lack the confidence to avail of different services.
- Mentors will go with them to access adult services, as well as helping them fill in relevant forms.
- Call young people before and after appointments to check progress before planning next steps together.

There are many practical things the mentor and the young person can do together in preparation for starting at their chosen VET Centre/College. This includes helping the young person setting up a bank account so they will be able to receive payment once they start. Mentors may need to help the young person obtain their National Insurance Number (UK), maybe a copy of their birth certificate for identification purposes in order to open a bank account, make an appointment with the bank and bring the young person there with the correct identification and documents. Another example would be bringing the young person on the public transport route that will get them to their VET Centre/College, showing them where to purchase a ticket, and

how to use it. In some cases, the young person will need specialised equipment before starting their chosen course, this could be work boots and protective clothing, tools or books. The mentor can help the young person access assistance for these and purchase these with them before starting their course.

In completing the transitions plan the mentor and young person can talk through any worries or concerns they have and agree how to cope with these in the “My Plan” section. The “Resources available to me” section identifies what help and resources are available to the young person, how they can access these and who to go for help if problems arise.

It is important that prior to commencing their chosen VET Centre/College that the mentor ensures that the young person is clear of what is expected of them in terms of timekeeping, how to report absences, etc. As mentioned in previous sections, it is also important that the mentor accompanies the young person on their first visit to their chosen VET Centre/College to meet the key contact and agree and sign their transitions plan so that all parties are clear on the expectations and responsibilities of all involved.

## Checking in: Reviewing progress

A comprehensive and detailed transition plan is an important tool which will assist the young person as they begin at their chosen VET Centre/College. Once NEET young people embark on this journey, one of the greatest challenges is to ensure that they sustain their place and complete their chosen course successfully. Key to this process is the tripartite review of progress meetings. These meetings provide a safe place for the young person to discuss any worries, issues or problems and agree arrangements where additional issues do emerge.

If the sending organisation can facilitate the “support clinics” mentioned previously in this section, this provides another “safety net” for the young person to check in with their mentor and ask for help or support as required. In addition, mentors may agree to “check in” regularly with the key contact of the receiving organisation, especially in the initial transitioning stage particularly if the young person has multiple and complex Adverse Childhood Experiences.

## 2.5 Mentor withdrawal

Prior to agreeing the young person’s transitions management plan, the young person and the mentor will have built up a sense of trust, honesty and mutual respect based on experiences of being in a collaborative mentoring partnership.

The young person will have usually been engaged in this process for a period of approximately 6-9 months, sometimes longer, with the mentor being a reliable adult in their life who they trust and who they feel cares about them. Given this, mentor withdrawal can be a significant event in the life of the young person, even more so in the case of NEET young people who have multiple and complex ACEs and in the light of our knowledge of trauma informed practice.

### Five guiding principles of Trauma Informed Practice



The 5 Guiding Principles of trauma informed practice are - safety, choice, collaboration, trustworthiness, and empowerment. It is important that when the young person enters a mentoring relationship, they are clear that, whilst the mentor will provide a “safe space” , that this relationship will be time-limited. The ultimate objective is to build skills and empower the young person to the end point whereby the young person has developed their social and emotional capabilities in the 4 Zones of Learning, Leisure, Life and Work to a point of resilience and independence.

Every young person is unique, and the duration of the mentoring relationship should be based on the assessment of the individual young person's specific needs - the key issues in the young person's life and the most pressing needs these issues give rise to.

Nevertheless, evidence suggests that a typical mentoring relationship lasts for a period of 6-9 months, although this can be longer depending on the needs of the young person. It is important that during this period and at every review point, the mentor reminds the young person that this is a time-limited relationship which is working eventually towards a positive closure.

The transition plan is the final tool which brings the mentor and the young person towards the end of their mentoring relationship; hence, the importance of ensuring that the transition plan is co-designed, clear and comprehensive.

A well-designed transition plan, which has a detailed "Resources Available to Me" section in each of the 4 Zones of Learning, Life, Leisure and Work, can become a long-term support tool for the young person - referred to time and time again and accessed throughout their lifetime - see a sample plan overleaf.

# Sample plan

## Resources available to me

Assistance Type	Eligibility (To Qualify)	Who to contact/ how to apply
Housing Advice	N/A	<p><b>Housing Rights</b></p> <p><b>Address:</b> The Skainos Centre, 239 Newtownards Rd, Belfast BT4 1AF</p> <p><b>Email:</b></p> <p><b>Phone:</b></p> <p><b>Ask for:</b></p>
Money Management & Debt Advice – benefits, debt, EU Settlement Scheme, Tax Credits, HMRC Services	<p>Free, confidential tailored debt advice</p> <p>Budgeting advice</p> <p>Solutions to deal with the debt</p> <p>Negotiate with creditors on your behalf.</p>	<p><b>Advice NI</b></p> <p><b>Address:</b> 1 Rushfield Ave, Belfast BT7 3FP</p> <p>e-mail: <a href="mailto:advice@adviceni.net">advice@adviceni.net</a></p> <p><b>Freephone:</b> 0800 915 4604</p> <p><b>Phone:</b></p> <p><b>Ask for:</b></p>
Law Centre NI	Free independent legal advice and assistance on immigration, employment, benefits and general	<p><b>Law Centre NI</b></p> <p><b>Address:</b> 10-12 High St, Belfast BT1 2BA</p> <p><b>Telephone:</b></p> <p><b>Ask for:</b></p>
Careers Advice	Free & informed advice and guidance on training, education and employment	<p><b>Careers Service</b></p> <p><b>Address:</b> NI 210 Anne Street, Belfast BT1 4QN</p> <p><b>Telephone:</b></p>



Mental Health Support	Free advice, guidance and over 30 services for people impacted by mental health issues	<p><b>Mindwise</b></p> <p><b>Address:</b> 72 Fortwilliam Park, Belfast BT15 4AS</p> <p><b>Telephone:</b></p> <p><b>Ask for:</b></p>
Addiction	Reducing Harm & Promoting Recovery, free advice, guidance and service	<p><b>Addiction NI</b></p> <p><b>Address:</b> 219 Albertbridge Rd, Belfast BT5 4PU</p> <p><b>Telephone:</b></p> <p><b>Ask for:</b></p>
Family Support & Suicide Prevention	<p>Bespoke training includes:</p> <p>Grief and healing</p> <p>Self-harm</p> <p>Stress</p> <p>Promoting positive mental health workshops</p> <p>Our service provision includes:</p> <p>Home Visiting across the Greater Shankill Area</p> <p>Listening Ear Sessions</p>	<p><b>Extern</b></p> <p>Family Support and Suicide Prevention Response</p> <p><b>Address:</b> Hammer Community Centre Agnes Street, Belfast BT13 1GG</p> <p><b>Telephone:</b></p> <p><b>Ask for:</b></p>

During the planned review meetings agreed at Part 4 of the transition plan, we would recommend a three-stage approach.

**In stage 1**, the meetings are led by the mentor from the sending organisation.

**In stage 2**, as the relationship and trust develop between the receiving organisation key contact and the young person, the key contact should gradually take on the lead role in the review meetings.

Finally, **in stage 3**, as the young person moves towards empowerment and independence, we recommend that the young person takes charge of their own transition plan.

It is also recommended, at this point, that the mentor refers to the Transitions Readiness Assessment Evaluator (questionnaire). This is the ideal time to check in with the young person, measuring progress against the various questions outlined and assessing progress along their direction of travel. See below:

## Life zone

- Makes others feel appreciated.
- Demonstrates awareness of their own mood and emotions.
- Notices when someone needs support and responds effectively.
- Expresses thoughts and feelings in a way that is sensitive to those of others.
- Honours commitments and keeps promises.
- Responds effectively when challenged.
- Consults others in decision-making
- Manages their emotions effectively in difficult situations.
- Demonstrates a positive, energizing demeanour.
- Manages their time effectively.
- Quickly adapts to new circumstances.

## Leisure zone

- Responds effectively when challenged.
- Manages their emotions effectively in difficult situations.
- Demonstrates a positive, energizing demeanour.
- Quickly adapts to new circumstances.

## Learning zone

- Is aware of their strengths and limitations.
- Expresses thoughts and feelings in a way that is sensitive to those of others.
- Manages their emotions effectively in difficult situations.
- Learns from mistakes.
- Quickly adapts to new circumstances.

## Work zone

- Behaves in a way that is consistent with how they expect others to be.
- Is consistent in what they say and do.
- Accurately views situations from the perspective of others.
- Notices when someone needs support and responds effectively.
- Expresses thoughts and feelings in a way that is sensitive to those of others.

- Honours commitments and keeps promises.
- Responds effectively when challenged.
- Consults others in decision-making
- Demonstrates a positive, energizing demeanour.
- Manages their time effectively.
- Learns from mistakes.
- Quickly adapts to new circumstances.

# Part three

# Young person's transitions plan template

Part one: Contact details		
Young Person Information	First Name:	Family Name:
	Date of Birth:	National Insurance Number:
	Programme Leaving	Dates enrolled on programme leaving:
Sending Organisation Primary Contact Information	Name of Primary Contact:	Relationship to young person:
	Primary Contact Number:	Email Address
Other Key Contact 1 information*	Name of Key Contact:	Relationship to young person:
	Primary Contact Number:	Email Address:
Other Key Contact 2 information*	Name of Key Contact:	Relationship to young person:

\* If young person is under the age of 18 at the time of handover their parent/guardian details must be included.

<b>Part 2: Training programme/course details</b>	
Name of course enrolled on:	Date of Registration:
Level of Course Qualification:	Duration of course:
Start Date of Course:	Course End Date:
Location of course (address and department if applicable)	Summary of course schedule commitments - (Days/week and hours/day)

The Transitions Action Plan Aligned to 4 Zone final assessment and transitions questionnaire outcomes.

Particular focus to be given to addressing concerns/worries about transitioning to vocational education/training. See Appendix for sample questions for each zone but will assist mentors and mentees to assess scale of readiness / transition.

<b>Life zone summary</b>	
Strengths:	Areas for Development:
.	.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•</li> <li>•</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•</li> <li>•</li> </ul>
----------------------------------------------------------------	----------------------------------------------------------------

**Current Scale Needs work 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Prepared**

<b>Resources available to me</b>		
Assistance Type	Eligibility (to Qualify)	Who to contact/how to apply

<b>My Plan</b>		
Short Term Goals	Steps Required	Progress


**Transitions Scale (readiness) Needs work 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Prepared**

<b>Leisure zone summary</b>	
<b>Strengths:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•</li> <li>•</li> <li>•</li> </ul>	<b>Areas for Development:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•</li> <li>•</li> <li>•</li> </ul>

**Current Scale Needs work 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Prepared**

<b>Resources available to me</b>		
<b>Assistance Type</b>	<b>Eligibility (to Qualify)</b>	<b>Who to contact/how to apply</b>



My plan		
Short Term Goals	Steps Required	Progress

Transitions Scale (readiness) Needs work 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Prepared

Learning zone summary	
Strengths: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•</li> <li>•</li> <li>•</li> </ul>	Areas for Development: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•</li> <li>•</li> <li>•</li> </ul>

Current Scale Needs work 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Prepared

Resources available to me		
Assistance Type	Eligibility (to Qualify)	Who to contact/how to apply

My plan		
Short Term Goals	Steps Required	Progress

Transitions Scale (readiness) Needs work 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Prepared

Work zone summary	
Strengths: . . .	Areas for Development: . . .

Current Scale Needs work 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Prepared

Resources available to me		
Assistance Type	Eligibility (to Qualify)	Who to contact/how to apply

My plan		
Short Term Goals	Steps Required	Progress

Transitions Scale (readiness) Needs work 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Prepared

# Moving forward

<p><b>Contact Plan</b> Young person and Sending Organisation key contact.</p>	<p><b>Preferred Method(s) of contact:</b></p>	<p><b>Frequency of contact:</b></p>	<p><b>Date of first contact:</b></p>
<p>Contact Plan Young person and Sending Organisation key contact.</p>	<p>Preferred Method(s) of contact:</p>	<p>Frequency of contact:</p>	<p>Date of first contact</p>

<p><b>Review Meetings</b> young person, Sending Organisation contact &amp; Review Organisation contact  (up to 26 weeks post transition)</p>	<p><b>Schedule for review meetings</b></p>	<p><b>Location of meeting</b></p>	<p><b>Date of first meeting:</b></p>
<p>Agreed arrangements where additional issues emerge:</p>			

<p><b>Sending Organisation Final sign off</b></p>	<p><b>Agreed Date for withdrawal</b></p>	<p><b>How this will be done:</b></p>	<p><b>Where this will be done:</b></p>
-----------------------------------------------------------	----------------------------------------------	------------------------------------------	--------------------------------------------

# Agreement

We, young person, Sending organisation key contact, Receiving organisation key contact, have been fully involved in the preparation of this transitions plan and, by signing this document, agree to contents and timeframe stated.

## Young Person

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

## Sending Organisation Key Contact

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

## Receiving Organisation Key Contact

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_



To Contact us please complete the form on  
our website <https://www.iter-project.info/>