

# Researcher examines challenges of raising school leaving age to 18 for young people who are NEET

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Some young people already find it difficult to enjoy and achieve at school. With the raising of the school leaving age to 18 by 2015, a new challenge is looming - of engaging them in learning for a further two years.

Contributing to the debate is Dr Barry Percy-Smith from UWE Bristol, who has conducted in-depth research into the experiences and attitudes of young people not in employment, education or training (NEET).

Barry has studied the [educational opportunities](#) for young mothers, [young offenders](#), young people excluded from [school](#), and young people

in care. He points out, "In most cases like these, young people do not suffer from a poverty of aspiration or motivation, indeed they have the same dreams as others, but they have a more disadvantaged starting point.

"It is a lovely ideal for young people to continue in education until they are 18 but it is a million miles away from the reality of many lives."

Barry will give evidence from his research at the All Party Parliamentary Group for Children (APPGC) inquiry into "School and beyond – ensuring children and young people enjoy school and continue in learning" on 16 December. Also contributing to the session will be Sir Michael Wilshaw, Director of Ofsted.

He said, "The challenge is not just about providing educational opportunities, but acknowledging why these young people are not engaging. My research shows a disconnect between [education policy](#) and information and guidance practice, and the reality of lives of young people who are NEET.

"The aim is to keep them in school longer – but many are not in school anyway. How can the raised participation age respond to their needs if they are disaffected with education by the age of 14?

"Contrary to popular opinion, young people are not work-shy. The biggest barriers for young people are a lack of apprenticeships and employment opportunities; [labour market](#) discrimination towards young people, and academic bias in vocational education and training provision.

"Among my recommendations will be:

- Need for pastoral support in schools for young people with

complex needs, with more effective early intervention to reduce issues escalating

- Need for diversity of educational provision, in and out of school to cater for the differential educational orientations of young people who are at risk of becoming NEET
- New approaches for information and guidance to connect with young people's realities and work from where they are at
- Real opportunities for young people including apprenticeships, work experience and incentives for employers to take them on

From 2013, 16 year olds in England will have to continue in education or training until their 17th birthday. In 2015, young people will have to continue until their 18th birthday. Other changes in the pipeline include the introduction of a new curriculum in 2014, reforms to Ofsted, reforms to alternative provision of education and reforms to special educational needs provision.

Barry continued, "The Parliamentary group wants to hear views that represent those of children and young people themselves, so that they can draw on this to develop legislation on a number of issues relating to children and young people. It is particularly interested in hearing representations related to disadvantaged and excluded groups including looked after children, SEN and disabled children, minority groups, and those with experience of the youth justice system.

"In contributing evidence to the group from my research, I hope to directly impact on this legislation. So often research such as this gets overlooked with the result that policy rhetoric suggests changes, but in reality nothing changes for the most disadvantaged [young people](#) because no one is really listening or taking seriously what they say."

The findings of the meeting will be collated into a report to be published in summer 2013.

Provided by University of the West of England

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