

Narrowing the Gap  
27/8/09

The basket of indicators used to assess the effectiveness of the narrowing the gap strategies shows considerable variation. The education results for this year are becoming available and will be verified over the coming months. Overall progress can be judged as amber.

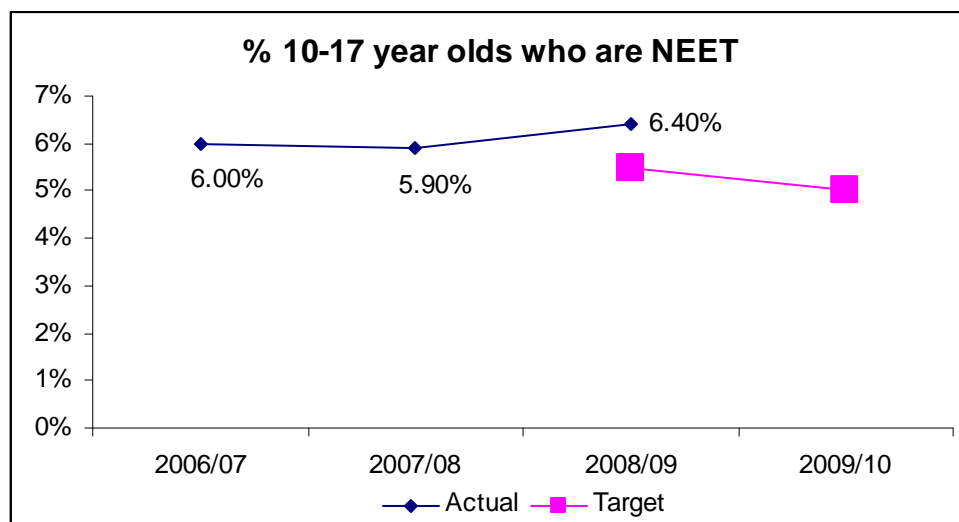
Two targets are of particular concern:

- NI 163 stability of placements of looked after children: length of placement
- NI 117 16 – 18 year olds who are not in education, employment or training

### 16 to 18 year olds not in education, employment or training (NEET)

Being persistently not in education, employment or training between the ages of 16 -18 is a major predictor of later unemployment, low income, poor mental and physical health, criminal behaviour and other problems.

The percentage of 16 to 18 year olds who were not in education, employment or training during 2008/09 increased to 6.4%, up from 5.9% in 2007/08. This growth can be directly attributed to a fall in employment opportunities for young people. There has been an increase in those taking up learning but this has not entirely offset the effects of job losses. The rate of increase peaked in February in Devon when it stood at 11.5% higher compared to a regional average of 6.2%. Since then the rate of increase has slowed in Devon and risen in other parts of the region so that the comparable figures for June were Devon 2.1% and South West Region 14.8%. The increase is mainly in the 18 year old age group. This would suggest that the IYSS / 14-19 NEETs strategy and the recession strategy adopted by Connexions have had some impact. The situation is being closely monitored.



### Stability of placements of looked after children: length of placement

It is vital for looked after children to have stable placements. Frequent movement may lead to emotional stress and practical problems including moving home, having to establish a relationship with a new carer, a change of

school or loss of contact with friends. These stresses can have a considerable impact on a vulnerable child.

Long-term placement stability remains a challenge. The proportion of children who have been in the same placement for 2.5 years or more declined further in the first quarter of 2009/10 to 59.7%, down from 61.7% in 2008/09. An action plan is in place to address this but the situation has been exacerbated by the Southwark judgement (see below). Stability of placement is often harder with adolescents where behaviour can be a significant factor. Devon already has a higher proportion of adolescents in care than other areas and the action plan to address stability of placement focuses on ways to support families to prevent young people having to come into care at all.

The Southwark judgement was a House of Lords decision that young people presenting as homeless were children in need and thus appropriate for the care system. This has greatly increased the number of young people coming into care nationally, especially in two tier authorities. Work is in hand to ensure that the good supporting systems that we have to prevent young people coming into care are used appropriately to address their needs. The existing influx already puts great strain on capacity and the achievement of this indicator.

