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**WRITTEN EVIDENCE SUBMITTED BY FAIRBRIDGE DE CYMRU TO THE
WORK BASED LEARNING PROVISION FOR VULNERABLE YOUNG
PEOPLE INQUIRY**

OUTLINE

Fairbridge De Cymru appreciates being given the opportunity to comment on the Work Based Learning provision inquiry particularly in relation to that provision and vulnerable young people. We understand the fact that we are not a Work Based Learning provider but we feel that we have huge experience in delivering services to young people who are traditionally classed as hard to reach and disengaged from main stream society. Our approach is to work on the core skills such as confidence, self esteem and entrenched issues that affect their lives thus enabling them with the skills that they can move on into employment, education and training opportunities. A detailed explanation of the Fairbridge De Cymru approach is at Annex A to this letter.

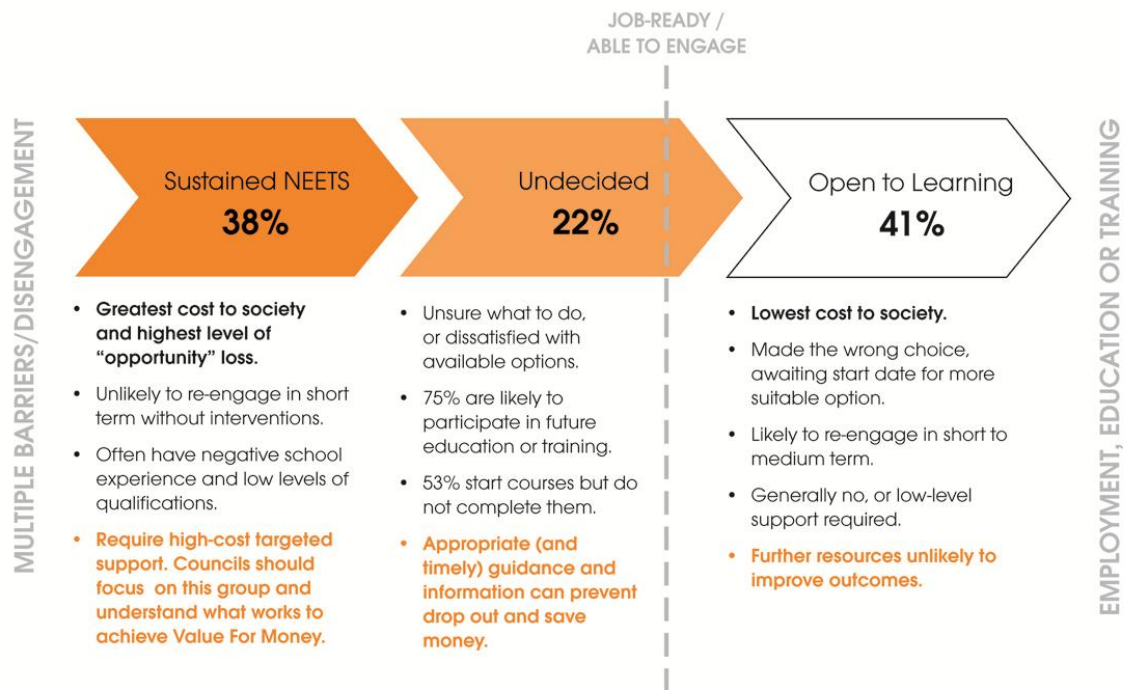
AN UNDERSTANDING THAT NO NEETS ARE THE SAME

As a first steps provider the majority of the young people that come that choose to engage voluntary with Fairbridge De Cymru have three or more presenting needs (issues that are barriers to progression in their lives), these are often issues such as housing status, low levels of literacy and numeracy, substance misuse, offending behaviour, low self esteem etc. We often engage with what are classes as the “entrenched NEETs” those that are furthest from the job market, have the lowest levels of qualifications and often linked with this is low aspiration. Many have negative experiences of education and been permanently excluded for the majority of their time in secondary school.

The approach to engaging with and motivating this client group is completely different from those that are on the verge of the employment market. They require time, patience, one-2-one support and an understanding that there will be ups as well as downs with engaging with these young people.

They need to be engaged with opportunities that will motivate them, develop their confidence and build them as individuals before they can move on to the next step in the ladder. The slide below demonstrates the NEET spectrum and the complexity of the issue.

Defining the NEET Environment



IS WORK BASED LEARNING PROVISION SUITABLE FOR ENTRENCHED NEETS?

We deal with many young people who have negative experiences of Work Based Learning providers, this is not aimed at a criticism of the WBL provider but more a reflection of the failings in the placement and referral systems.

If their needs are not assessed correctly then they can find themselves on a course that they are not prepared for. This then places them at a disadvantage for a number of reasons:

- Work Based Learning staff are not often qualified to act as Youth Workers and mentors they have a specific role to complete
- If a young person arrives at a WBL provider unprepared they can very often fall behind, become negative and not engage. If this results in them being marginalised or removed from the course then the failure and the worthlessness of that individual is reinforced – the “I’m worthless” factor that our approach looks to deal with.
- If they do complete the course then they can be awarded with a qualification but lacking the skills to engage meaningfully with the world of work. Here I am stressing the skills of team work, effective communication, problem solving and confidence that only come via improved self esteem.

The following case study from one of our young people reinforces this argument:

“Before I came to Fairbridge I was getting in trouble with the law all the time – burglaries, shoplifting. I was bored, stupid and horrible. My mum was frantic over me. She kept trying to get me on those training schemes but they never worked. I have dyslexia and everyone was always having a go at me if I got things wrong...

At Fairbridge I found things different straight away – I felt supported and ,it might be a bit cheesy, but part of a big family. There needs to be more places like this so that other young people like me can be helped”.

This reflects the points identified above if the needs and issues surrounding these young people are not assessed or factored into the approach used by Work Based Learning providers then in some regards the young people are set up for failure.

BENEFIT OF CORRECT IDENTIFICATION OF NEED AND PROGRESSION ROUTES

What Fairbridge De Cymru feels is lacking with regards to WBL provision is identification of need but also pro-activeness in correct placement for these individuals. Often young people who are placed on WBL provision and are not ready for it are and sidelined when they become disruptive or negative on the placement. What is lacking is collaboration between organisations that identifies progression but also regression routes for individuals. I personally feel that an element of this is down to payment profiles for this type of provision that can turn it into a production line for accreditation and not a holistic approach to the young people’s needs.

The following case study identifies how with correct engagement young people can progress and tackle new challenges with the correct support.

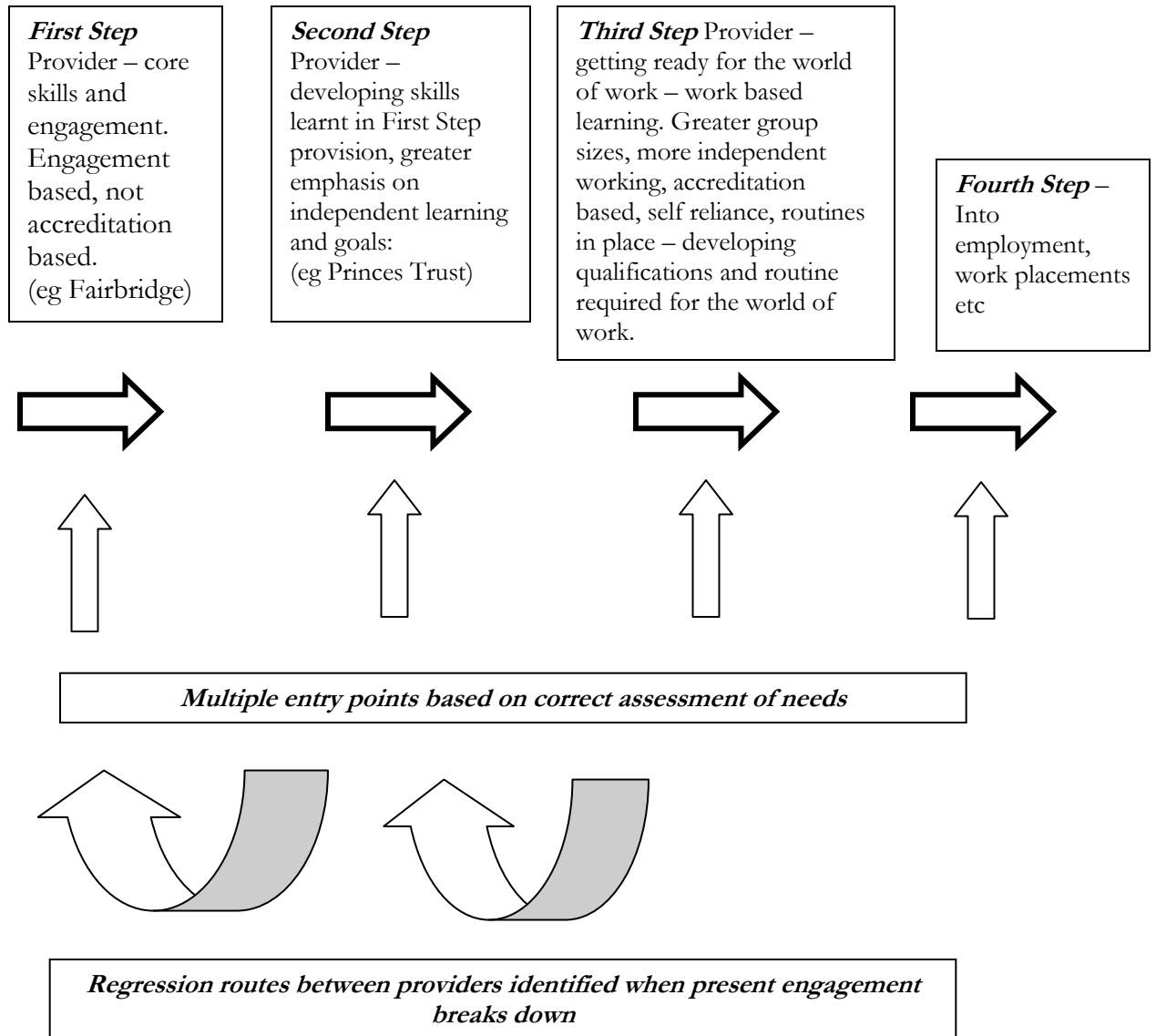
“I enjoyed Fairbridge course because I met new people and made more friends and became a bit more confident. It was good to get out of the house because before Fairbridge I hadn’t been in school for a few months. We did a gorge walk which was good, had a BBQ on the beach and walked along by the sea and we went to the Brecon Beacons to walk through a tunnel. It was horrible because it was dark and cold!

I did the Bleeping Babies course which was four days. You have like a real baby – you’ve got to feed them, change their clothes, change their nappies, wind them and wake up when they’re crying. It was good but hard. Its hard being a parent and it makes you feel for all the single parents out there – how hard it is for them. We took the babies out to Roath Park and people thought they were real. It was horrible going on public buses because they cry all the time on you. On the last night the baby was crying all night. I only got 2 hours sleep. I felt like **!!***

Fairbridge helped me because I’ve learned to be more confident and tried new things, I am now engaged with (unnamed training provider). I would never have done that before Fairbridge because I didn’t have much confidence. Here I’m learning plastering, painting and decorating, electrics and tiling, because I want to be a painter and decorator when I’m older.”

The following flow chart could demonstrate a more effective partnership working and regression and progression route:

Effective Agency Collaboration and Assessment of Young People within the Work Based Learning Environment



I appreciate that this might be a rather simplistic view of the situation but if young people are to be supported, engaged and developed by all providers then greater collaboration is required.

This also needs to reflect how outcomes are assessed and remunerated, the development of soft skills are just as vital as the attainment of qualifications is securing employment.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE INQUIRY

My recommendations to this inquiry are as follows:

- Greater collaboration is required between all interested parties in the NEET's agenda
- The emphasis on accreditation as a form of driving outcomes (and thus payments) is looked at
- Correct assessment of young people's needs before entry into any form of engagement take place.
- Incorrect assessment is identified and rectified by progression or regression routes.
- Young people are placed at the centre of the process

I understand that I cannot answers all the questions in the Terms of Reference but I do feel that Fairbridge De Cymru can contribute constructively to the argument.

If you have any questions or any points of clarification then please do get in touch.

Regards

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Annex 1: About Fairbridge

The Fairbridge philosophy is simple. We believe that many young people become disengaged and disaffected not because they are 'bad', but because they lack the personal and social skills and confidence that allow most people to cope with and get on in daily life. We know that these young people can turn their lives around and cope independently if they are given the right opportunity to develop the skills they need, and the support and encouragement to do so.

The Fairbridge Programme is our practical solution to this. It is based upon two key ideas:



1. Fun and challenging activities engage young peoples' interest and can be used as a medium for learning. We offer young people activities which are fun, challenging and engaging. What makes the Fairbridge programme different to other 'fun and challenging' activities is that it is developmental rather than only diversionary. We deliver every activity so that it becomes a vehicle for developing one or more key skills that will develop young peoples' ability to get on and cope with daily life.

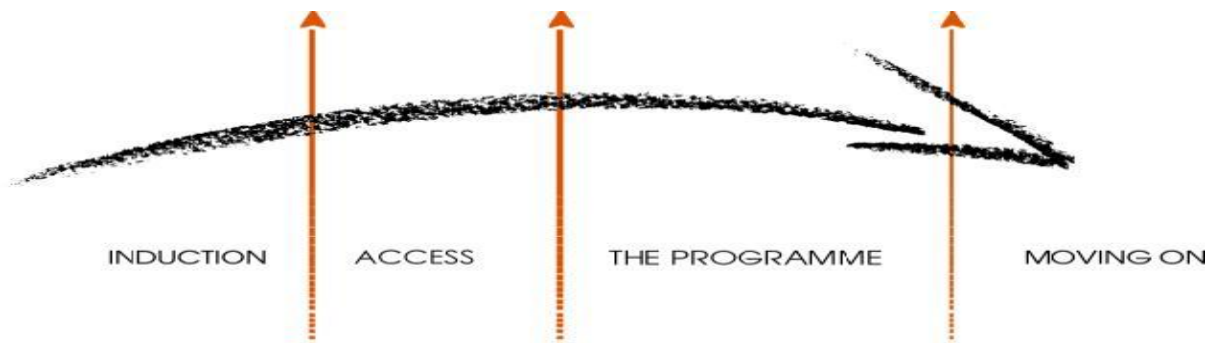
2. One to One support keeps young people focused, engaged and guides them towards positive goals and independence We provide every young person who comes to Fairbridge with a designated Outreach and Development Worker who provides them with advice and guidance through regular 1-2-1 support sessions.

We do this because young people respond well to consistent support from someone they trust. Focused support sessions provide an opportunity for young people to reflect upon and reinforce the skills learnt through courses and activities, and guide them towards applying them to all areas of their lives.

"The staff at Fairbridge never judge you...they actually listen and really get where you are coming from." Fairbridge Young Person, 2007

Fairbridge has developed two programmes based on age: U16 and 16+. We have separate programmes for 13-16 and 16-25 age ranges for a range of reasons, but mainly because young people of different ages tend to develop at different rates. Separate programmes allow us to offer courses and activities that match the needs and interests of the two age groups.

The Fairbridge U16 and 16+ Programmes consist of four stages shown on the diagram below:



Development tutors are key to the delivery of creative and engaging personal development courses that provide opportunities for experiential learning to take place.

Induction

The aim of the induction is to introduce young people to the Fairbridge staff, programme and general atmosphere and approach. It's an opportunity to show that Fairbridge isn't like other organisations (school, training initiatives) that they may have experienced and to show them where Fairbridge can lead - employment, education, training...or simply a reason to get out of bed in the morning!

Access

Once young people have completed a Fairbridge induction, they are invited to sign up for Access. Access is a short course (5-10 days depending on age group and Fairbridge teams) involving indoor and outdoor activities and usually including a residential programme (one or two nights away in a different environment). It forms an introduction to the Fairbridge approach and Programme by enabling young people to experience something new and challenging, and introducing the idea of personal development and personal development planning.

Fairbridge Programme

All Access completers are invited to engage in the Fairbridge Programme. This consists of a range of courses and activities which offer development and learning opportunities in the five different areas shown in the diagram below. The main focus in everything Fairbridge does is the development of Personal and Social Skills, so they are in the centre of the diagram below.



Fairbridge focuses on nine personal and social skills:

Communication - talking to people and listening to what others have to say

Managing feelings - recognising feelings and knowing how to deal with them

Establishing interpersonal relationships - establishing appropriate relationships

Understanding and identifying with others - getting on with people who wouldn't necessarily be considered friends (teachers, parents etc)

Understanding social values - respecting and understanding a range of different social values

Problem solving - dealing with problems and knowing how to get support in dealing with them

Negotiation - learning to compromise and give and take in a range of situations

Planning - thinking ahead and not jumping into situations

Reviewing - learning from successes and mistakes

Moving On

‘Moving on’ means moving on from the Fairbridge programme into some other form of positive engagement. This may be (amongst others) education, employment, volunteering or another personal development programme. Although in the diagram it’s shown at the end, young people should be supported, guided and focused towards moving on *throughout* their time at Fairbridge: the whole point of young people being on the Programme is to get them to a point where they have developed the skills to cope without it.

Moving on doesn’t mean cutting all ties with Fairbridge. Often it’s better for young people to maintain a supportive link with staff until they have completely stabilised in their new environment, when they can be formally ‘exited’ from the Programme. Every programme is tailored to personal needs and lasts for as long as an individual needs support. Our goal is simple: to build self-belief and motivation in the most challenging young people, offering them the foundations for a life full of choices and opportunity.