



University of Suffolk
Suffolk Institute for Social
and Economic Research

Lowestoft Rising: Progress to Employment

**A study of the experiences of young people in Lowestoft who
are long-term unemployed**

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with David James



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report presents the findings of the research commissioned by Suffolk County Council (SCC), based on 52 interviews with unemployed young people in Lowestoft (aged 16 to 24). It details their experiences of employment support and services, and their perspectives on the development of a new, innovative approach to providing support into employment for young people. The commissioners wanted the research to engage purposively with a variety of young people in Lowestoft who were out of work, in order to explore their views on the potential development of an impartial, multichannel single point of access in the town which would endeavour to help young people make the best use of the employment services and initiatives that already exist.

The majority of the young people we spoke to were classed as being long-term unemployed (claiming–Jobseeker’s Allowance JSA – for more than 6 months), although some had been claiming for less than 3 months, and also young people who were not claiming any job-seeking benefits. The qualitative verbatim and visual data provided by participants provided detailed insights into their perceptions, experiences and the services available to them, and identified barriers (either actual or perceived) to accessing support. Some young people, for example, talked about using crystal meth and other drugs and the commissioners have asked us to point out that their intelligence and professional view surrounding the use of crystal meth amongst young people in Lowestoft indicates that this is not the substance that is being used. Young people, they suggest, are using various legal highs often referred to as ‘plant food’ and the effects of some of these Legal (but dangerous) Highs¹ when injected cause crystals to appear under the skin. Therefore, when the young people who participated in the study refer to being on crystal meth, the commissioners view is that they probably mean Legal Highs which, although pose a real health risk, are not as dangerous as crystal meth.

It should be noted that this study is based on the views and experiences of the 52 young people who participated voluntarily in the study and are, therefore, not fully representative of all young people in the town. Although concerns may be raised from a positivist perspective over the small sample size, and the difficulty in replicating and generalising from the study, these are common disadvantages associated with qualitative research. Our methodological approach was appropriate to meet the objectives of the study and other methods may not have provided the rich insights into the young people’s experiences which are presented in this report. Furthermore whilst opportunity sampling is sometimes viewed as a less robust form of sample selection (than, for example, a random sample strategy more commonly used in surveys), it is widely accepted in the research community as being employed by social researchers studying hard-to-access groups.

¹ See for example <http://www.talktofrank.com/drug/legal-highs>

The objectives of the study were to:

1. Engage with a minimum of 50 unemployed young people from Lowestoft, with a particular emphasis on young people who have been unemployed for more than three months.
2. Provide a detailed understanding of the characteristics and circumstances of unemployed young people in the Lowestoft area.
3. Identify barriers which prevent or discourage young people from engaging with existing employment support services and consider how these may be overcome.
4. Describe the levels and types of support unemployed young people would like to be able to access to inform an innovative approach to tackling youth unemployment.
5. Seek young people's views on potential locations for a youth employment centre and what this should look and feel like in order to provide a welcoming and supportive environment.

OBJECTIVE 1

The study successfully engaged with 52 unemployed young people. The independent evidence gathered as part of the study is based on data collected through a variety of research methods, including informal one-to-one interviews; focus groups and guided walks² with 52 young people in Lowestoft who are unemployed. The sample is composed of an opportunity sample, and whilst some participants were accessed through current training providers and support organisations in Lowestoft, many were interviewed after being approached in the street.

- 28 females and 24 males, aged between 16 and 24 voluntarily took part in the study,
- 46 out of the 52 participants had been unemployed for more than six months.
- 38 of the participants had been unemployed for more than a year.

OBJECTIVE 2

The characteristics and circumstances of the unemployed young people in Lowestoft reflected the fact that parts of the town are some of the most deprived in the country with more than 1 in 5 children living in poverty. Youth unemployment is high, compared with national and local benchmarks, and there are areas with up to a quarter of the population on benefits. Currently, there are 375 18–24 year olds claiming JSA in the Lowestoft area; 20 per cent have been claiming for more than 6 months. Many more young people will be looking for work, but not claiming any job-seeking benefits. Approximately 10 per cent of 16–18 year olds in the town are not in education, employment or training (NEET). This represents a significant proportion of young people failing to achieve their full economic and life potential.

- The majority of the young people we spoke to live independently or in a hostel, rather than living with family.³
- Nearly half the participants in the study talked about being homeless at some point.
- All the young people discussed their experiences of living in poverty; many had often gone hungry.
- There were frequent references to homelessness, poverty, drug use and mental health issues.
- Perceptions of crime were a key theme to emerge from the analysis of the data.
- Some had committed crimes, for example, stealing food or dealing drugs in order to survive.
- All the participants in the study held a negative view of Lowestoft and described it as ‘a *shit hole*’ or ‘a *shitty place*’.
- Most of the participants had very few formal educational qualifications and had left school early.

² There are significant advantages to including guided walks alongside other types of qualitative research approaches. The guided walks made it easier for participants to take part in the study, provided context-rich research interactions, and often led to serendipitous encounters for both participants and researchers.

³ Although comparisons should be treated with caution, it is worth noting that the numbers was far higher than in a similar study undertaken in Ipswich in 2013; see Agnew, S. and Bond, E. (2013), ‘Findings from Progress into Employment: Understanding Youth Unemployment in Greater Ipswich’. Available to download from:

<http://www.ucs.ac.uk/SchoolsAndNetwork/UCSSchools/SchoolofAppliedSocialSciences/iSEED/Images/Progress-into-Employment---Report-2013.pdf>.

OBJECTIVE 3

The barriers which prevent or discourage young people from engaging with existing employment support services included the following:

- The perception that there are very few jobs available in Lowestoft was the main barrier for engaging with existing employment services.
- The participants' accounts highlighted many examples of a lack of social capital and lacking support from family.
- Poverty was also identified as a barrier, in that many participants could not afford internet access, a mobile phone or smart clothes.
- Many young people we interviewed who had visited the job centre expressed the view that that the job centre staff did not have the time to help them.
- JCP staff were generally viewed as unhelpful.
- Fear of having their benefit sanctioned prevented many of the young people from having a positive view of job centre staff.
- Some said that they had been asked to leave the job centre on more than one occasion when looking for information about jobs on a computer at the job centre.
- Lack of access to the internet was a problem for most participants.
- Universal Job Match was not seen as compatible with mobile technology.
- Other than the job centre, the young people felt that there was little information available about job and employment services in Lowestoft.
- 50 of the 52 young people who took part in the study talked about '*being judged*', and that that was an important factor in not only how they felt about being unemployed in Lowestoft but also in accessing different types of support.
- A number of young people in the study said that they did not go to the job centre because they did not want to be seen or judged as '*unemployed*', even though they were.
- Many participants felt that dealing drugs (mainly crystal meth) provided a more secure financial return than being unemployed and signing on.
- The participants often associated different places and organisations with different factors, or with various degrees of '*stigma*'.

OBJECTIVE 4

In order to overcome these barriers, and the levels and types of support unemployed young people would like to be able to access, suggestions included the following:

- All 52 participants said that they would welcome the support of a one-to-one case worker.
- The lack of help they felt they had from the job centre was important to what support they wanted, and they all said they wanted to have the support of '*someone who actually wanted to help them*'.
- Many young people spoke of the importance of trust, and this was a key concept in most of the young people's narratives.

- The participants highlighted the importance of effective communication and being able to contact someone similar or '*get in touch*' when you needed to via text, email, telephone or Facebook.
- All the participants, without exception, said that internet access and Wi-Fi would be essential in a new centre.
- The data suggests that, whilst they could see that having access to a laptop or tablet may be helpful in searching for a job, they were, however, simultaneously concerned about the theft of IT equipment.
- The young people who took part in the study emphasised the need for improved links with local businesses to increase opportunities for employment and also for work experience.
- Many said they would welcome additional advice on money management.

OBJECTIVE 5

The young unemployed people who took part in the study had very clear views on their preferred location for a potential new centre in Lowestoft.

- The vast majority of the participants said that a new centre should be located in the town centre near to McDondald's.
- They did not want a new centre to be located south of the bridge which was viewed as having higher levels of crime and was associated with drug dealing.
- Most of the young people we interviewed did not want a new centre to be in the same location as other services – for example, youth offending, drug advice, or sexual health.
- The participants wanted a new centre in Lowestoft to be '*bright*', '*fresh*', '*welcoming*' and '*modern*'.
- Having somewhere to '*hang out*' and have a drink and '*somewhere to chill*' was also important.
- They emphasised again, though, that it was not the appearance of the new centre as such that was as important as having someone to actually help them.

1. INTRODUCTION

The commissioners of this research, Suffolk County Council (SCC), sought independent evidence in relation to unemployed young people (aged 16–24) and their experiences of being unemployed in Lowestoft. Specifically, SCC wanted to explore what young people in Lowestoft believed would assist them to progress into employment, training or additional learning. It was essential to gather a broad base of opinion from the young people currently unemployed in the town so that their lived realities could inform future developments in Lowestoft. Furthermore, the commissioners wanted the research to engage purposively with a variety of young people in Lowestoft who were out of work, in order to explore their views on the potential development of an impartial, multichannel single point of access in the town, which would endeavour to help young people make the best use of the employment services and initiatives that already exist.

This report presents the findings of the research commissioned by SCC based on 52 interviews with unemployed young people in Lowestoft (aged 16–24), their experiences of employment support and services, and their perspectives on the development on a new, innovative approach to providing support into employment for young people. Possible features of a new support programme may include:

- Dedicated and impartial 1:1 support for each young person;
- The delivery would be provided through multiple channels (in person, on line, telephone, etc.) and in an employment centre in a prominent position in the town;
- Access by all young people aged 16–24, whether claiming benefits or in employment;
- A ‘drop in facility’, with a day one offer of support towards employment.

The independent evidence gathered as part of the study is based on data collected through a variety of research methods, including informal, one-to-one interviews; focus groups and guided walks⁴ with 52 young people in Lowestoft who are unemployed. The majority of the young people we spoke to were classed as being long-term unemployed (claiming Jobseeker’s Allowance – JSA – for more than 6 months), although some had been claiming for less than 3 months, and also young people who were not claiming any job-seeking benefits. The qualitative verbatim and visual data provided by participants provided detailed insights into their perceptions, experiences and the services available to them, and identified barriers, either actual or perceived, to accessing support.

This research initiative project aims to provide robust evidence to support the actions of SCC and offer a strong, empirically grounded insight into the life narratives of unemployed young people in Lowestoft. This will provide the evidential basis upon which to develop evidence-driven developments, both in the physical location of services but also with regard to policy-related and support strategies designed to help those in need of support. It is hoped that by reflecting on the lessons learned from the project it will be possible to identify and overcome existing barriers to the way this support is offered to young people in Lowestoft and identify ways in which the young people themselves would like to be supported. It may also provide the evidential basis that will enable those providing unemployment services to young people in Lowestoft to draw down further funding to develop and inform other related initiatives, thus providing greater sustainability for the future.

⁴ There are significant advantages to including guided walks alongside other types of qualitative research approaches. The guided walks made it easier for participants to take part in the study, provided context-rich research interactions, and often led to serendipitous encounters for both participants and researchers.

2. BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

The issues facing Lowestoft are well documented. Parts of the town are some of the most deprived in the country, with more than 1 in 5 children living in poverty. Youth unemployment is high, compared with national and local benchmarks, and there are areas with up to a quarter of the population on benefits.

Unemployment has a negative impact on people, no matter what their age, but it has a particularly negative impact on young people. When people are unemployed at a young age, they are more likely:

- To be unemployed and welfare-dependent in later life;
- To be paid less in later life;
- To suffer mental and physical health problems, both now and in the future;
- To get involved in anti-social activity.

Currently, there are 375 18–24 year olds claiming JSA in the Lowestoft area; 20 per cent have been claiming for more than 6 months. Many more young people will be looking for work, but not claiming any job-seeking benefits. Approximately 10 per cent of 16–18-year-olds in the town are not in education, employment or training (NEET). This represents a significant proportion of young people failing to achieve their full economic and life potential.

2.1 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- Engage with a minimum of 50 unemployed young people from Lowestoft, with a particular emphasis on young people who have been unemployed for more than three months.
- Provide a detailed understanding of the characteristics and circumstances of unemployed young people in the Lowestoft area.
- Identify barriers which prevent or discourage young people from engaging with existing employment support services, and consider how these may be overcome.
- Describe the levels and types of support unemployed young people would like to be able to access to inform an innovative approach to tackling youth unemployment.
- Seek young people's views on potential locations for a youth employment centre, and what this should look and feel like in order to provide a welcoming and supportive environment.

2.2 METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

The research presented in this report adopted a broadly ethnographic participatory approach throughout to empower young people to share their experiences, views and ideas. Our approach set out to be both flexible and adaptive to the context of the participants, and we worked collaboratively with commissioners, key stakeholders and young people to investigate the experiences of unemployment for young people in Lowestoft. This study stemmed from a post-positivist research perspective as participatory and collaborative, inductive, dependable and auditable, which seeks findings that are idiographic, valuable and qualitative.⁵ This study acknowledges that it is those that actually experience unemployment and who access support services that are the experts in their own lived realities, and as such the data collection method is broadly ethnographic. Using ideas from anthropology and human geography, the methodological approach stems from an interpretative framework which has historically argued for the uniqueness of human inquiry (Denzin and Lincoln, 1998).⁶ The paradigm of childhood and youth sociology, emphasising children's and young people's position as 'social actors' – as creative and

⁵ O'Leary, Z. (2004), *The Essential Guide to Doing Research*. London: Sage.

⁶ Denzin, N. K. and Lincoln, Y. S. (eds) (1994), *Handbook of Qualitative Research*. London: Sage.

inventive users of the world around them – has nurtured blossoming conceptual and empirical explorations of young people’s agency in a range of diverse settings (O’Brien et al., 2000).⁷

Adapted from the Mosaic approach developed by Clarke and Moss (2001) for undertaking research with young children,⁸ this study incorporated guided walks, creative focus groups and self-directed photography to engage the young people actively in the study. There are many different research strategies based on interrelated epistemological, ontological and practical foundations, and it is essential in devising a robust research strategy that the research methods effectively meet the aims and objectives of the study. Our methodological approach was appropriate to meet the objectives of the study, and other methods may not have provided the rich insights into the young people’s experiences which are presented in this report. Throughout the research we were keen to address the traditional imbalances of power, and strived to ensure that the young people’s voices remained at the centre of the research strategy and in the way that the findings of the study are reported.

Whilst opportunity sampling is sometimes viewed as a less robust form of sample selection than, for example, a random sample strategy more commonly used in surveys, it is widely accepted in the research community as being employed by social researchers studying hard-to-access groups. Although concerns may be raised from a positivist perspective over the small sample size, and the difficulty in replicating and generalising from the study, these are common disadvantages associated with qualitative research. It should be noted that this study is based on the views and experiences of the 52 young people who participated voluntarily in the study and are, therefore, not fully representative of all young people in the town. Our methodological approach was appropriate to meet the objectives of the study and other methods may not have provided the rich insights into the young people’s experiences which are presented in this report. Furthermore whilst opportunity sampling is sometimes viewed as a less robust form of sample selection (than, for example, a random sample strategy more commonly used in surveys), it is widely accepted in the research community as being employed by social researchers studying hard-to-access groups.

In undertaking research of this type it is important to remember that the young people participating in the research are ‘often marginalized and vulnerable’, and that ‘participation in research provided an opportunity for some people to be listened to by a person who really did want to hear their story’ (see Dickson-Swift et al., 2008: p. 42).⁹

2.3 DATA ANALYSIS

The data from the audio-recorded interviews were transcribed by the researchers, and the analysis was initially carried out manually. The data were analysed following Miles and Huberman’s (1994)¹⁰ recommendations to affix codes to interview transcripts and sorting, and to identify similar phrases, relationships between variables, patterns and themes, and common sequences. The data were then analysed further, and analytical trees were designed to explore the main themes that arose from the categorised data in relation to the research objectives. The method of *verstehen* necessarily produces empirical data of a very different type than that generated by positivist research techniques, and qualitative data do not lend themselves to

⁷ O’Brien, M., Jones, D., and Sloan, D. (2000), ‘Children’s Independent Spatial Mobility in the Urban Public Realm’, in *Childhood*, Vol. 7, pp. 257–77.

⁸ Clarke, A. and Moss, P. (2001), *Listening to Young Children: The Mosaic Approach*. London: National Children’s Bureau, in association with the Joseph Rowntree Foundation

⁹ Dickson-Swift, V., James, E. L. and Laimputtong, P. (2008), *Undertaking Sensitive Research in the Health and Social Sciences*. Cambridge: Cambridge Medicine.

¹⁰ Miles, M. B. and Huberman, A. M. (1994), *Qualitative Data Analysis*. London: Sage.

enumeration, tabulation or statistical analysis (O'Connell Davidson and Layder, 1994).¹¹ Qualitative data are a source of well-grounded, rich descriptions and explanations of processes (Miles and Huberman, 1994),¹² and the emphasis for analysis therefore lies in collating, prioritising and summarising all the information acquired and in categorising the data (Coolican, 1996). This is what Strauss and Corbin (1998: p. 19) refer to as 'conceptual ordering' and the 'organization of the data into discrete categories'. The data produced relates well to the aims of the study and is discussed in categories related to the objectives.

The very nature of knowledge is a debatable concept in itself. Qualitative research of this nature lends itself to the more idiographic view of knowledge, considering nomothetic knowledge as insensitive to local meanings, and favouring understanding and interpretation as research goals (Punch, 2005).¹³ Denzin and Lincoln (1994)¹⁴ suggest that the social constructivist approach views knowledge as local, partial and situated. Grover (2004: pp. 84–5)¹⁵ further outlines how a 'phenomenological study', that allows 'subjects to communicate their experience without having it transformed by the researcher so as to alter its meaning in any significant manner', produces phenomenological data, adding a dimension which has its own 'authenticity and validity'. The data are presented within the emerging themes, but are presented as the participants themselves stated using verbatim quotes.

2.4 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

'Ethics are a set of moral principles that aims to prevent researchers from harming those they research' (Dickson-Swift et al., 2008: p. 26).¹⁶ Ethical approval for the research was gained from the Research Ethics Committee of UCS and ensured that participants were protected throughout the project. Frankfort-Nachmias and Nachmias (1996)¹⁷ suggest that two common issues within the ethical decision-making framework are informed consent and privacy. In order to be mindful of ethical requirements and meet the principles of high quality research, written information about the research, its aims, design and process, were available to all the participants. The participants' names have been rendered anonymous. The researchers had up-to-date Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) certificates and are experienced in conducting research interviews and focus groups, and in researching sensitive topics. Convenient times for all the participants for each group were negotiated and arranged, and the interviews took place in various locations in Lowestoft, including at the premises of training providers and organisations providing support to young people who are unemployed, and in locations chosen by the participants themselves, for example, cafés and coffee shops. Our approach endeavoured to ensure ethical sensitivity based on the participant-centred approach that we aimed to achieve throughout the process.

¹¹ O'Connell Davidson, J. and Layder, D. (1994), *Methods, Sex and Madness*. London: Routledge.

¹² Miles, M. B. and Huberman, A. M. (1994), *Qualitative Data Analysis*. London: Sage.

¹³ Punch, K. (2005), *Introduction to Social Research Quantitative and Qualitative approaches*. London: Sage.

¹⁴ Denzin, N. K. and Lincoln, Y. S. (eds) (1994), *Handbook of Qualitative Research*. London: Sage

¹⁵ Grover, S. (2004) 'Why Won't They Listen To Us? On giving power and voice to children participating in social research', in *Childhood*, Vol. 11(1), pp. 81–93.

¹⁶ Dickson-Swift, et al., *Undertaking Sensitive Research in the Health and Social Services*.

¹⁷ Frankfort-Nachmias, C. and Nachmias, D. (1996), *Research Methods in the Social Sciences* (5th edn). London: Arnold.

In addition, this research project complied with both the British Sociological Association (BSA) and the British Psychological Society's (BPS) guidelines, and adhered to the guidelines set out by the UK Research Integrity Office's (UKRIO) (2009)¹⁸ code of practice for research and the Singapore Statement on Research Integrity,¹⁹ based upon the principles of:

- Honesty in all aspects of research.
- Accountability in the conduct of research.
- Professional courtesy and fairness in working with others.
- Good stewardship of research on behalf of others.

All participants were provided with appropriate information detailing the aims and objectives of the research, how the data collected from them would be used, especially with regard to confidentiality and anonymity, and how the contributions would be published and the findings disseminated.

Our grateful thanks are extended to the organisations which supported this research initiative, in particular, LifeSkills; Tomorrow's People; Talent Match; the Kirkley Centre; Access Community Trust; The Junction, and McDonald's, Lowestoft. Most importantly, however, our gratitude goes to the 52 young people, who were themselves unemployed at the time of the research and who kindly volunteered to talk to us about their experiences. This report is based on their knowledge of being young and unemployed in Lowestoft, and it is their voices that illustrate and provide evidence for the findings presented in this report. It is their real-life and often very difficult experiences that provide the much needed detailed illumination to the often hidden realities of so many young people's lives.

¹⁸ UK Research Integrity Office (2009), *Code of Practice for Research: Promoting good practice and preventing misconduct*. Available from <http://www.ukrio.org/publications/>.

¹⁹ Singapore Statement on Research Integrity. Available from <http://www.wcri2010.org>.

3. THE CHARACTERISTICS AND CIRCUMSTANCES OF UNEMPLOYED YOUNG PEOPLE IN THE LOWESTOFT AREA

Fifty-two young people, 28 females and 24 males, aged between 16 and 24, voluntarily took part in the study. Forty-six out of the 52 participants had been unemployed for more than six months; 38 for more than a year. The sample is comprised of an opportunity sample and, whilst some participants were accessed through current training providers and support organisations in Lowestoft, many were interviewed after being approached in the street. The participants felt that the characteristics of Lowestoft itself were fundamental for understanding their experiences of unemployment in the town, with many shops in the high street either empty or being charity shops. The nature and character of seasonal work available and cost of travel to these jobs were also highlighted as important. Many said that if you were looking for work it was often a matter of '*who you know*' that was important, and some of the participants, including those with level three qualifications, had been made redundant more than once. Levels of homelessness were high and most of the participants lived independently without the support of family. There were very high levels of poverty in the cohort, and participants in the study talked about the hardship of living on benefit and the impact of having financial sanctions imposed on them. There was a very strong theme in the data relating to the relationship between unemployment, poverty, drugs and crime, and all the participants without exception discussed this. Some of the young people we spoke to had additional characteristics which made their search for employment even more problematic, for example, a criminal record, learning disabilities and mental health issues.

A recent study funded by the RSA (2015, p. 2)²⁰ to explore the potential for a localised 'Matching Skills Project' based in Lowestoft highlights how 'young people are increasingly responsible for navigating their own career trajectory in a complex landscape. This poses a particular challenge for young people in areas of multiple deprivation'.

²⁰ Gartland, C. (2015), *RSA East of England: Matching Skills* Online: RSA

3.1 LOWESTOFT: A BRIEF OUTLINE OF THE SOCIAL AND EDUCATIONAL CONTEXT, COMPILED BY DAVID JAMES

3.1.1 THE GEOGRAPHY

Lowestoft had a population of 62,000 at the 2011 census and is the largest town within the district council area of Waveney, which had a total population of 115,000 in 2011. The district council comprises 23 District council wards, and includes the town of Lowestoft which comprises 10 district council wards as shown above. This is the simplest way to define Lowestoft within the district council of Waveney. The 10 District council wards also correspond to 42 Lower Super Output Areas (LSOAs), with 3 or 5 LSOAs for each Ward. One geographical anomaly is that the Norwich postcodes of NR32 and NR33 are identified as Lowestoft postcodes.

3.1.2 WORK AND INDUSTRY

Occupational structure is the key to identifying the social contours and patterns of advantage and disadvantage in an area. Broadly, Lowestoft and Waveney mirror the UK, with the dominance of a diverse range of service sector industries that account for 76 per cent of employment (see Figure 1). This compares to 81 per cent overall in England. This includes both higher skilled and lower skilled occupations. The importance of accommodation and food service activity at 8 per cent, compared with 6 per cent in England and 5 per cent, in Suffolk shows the importance of tourism for the town. Employment in the primary sector of agriculture, forestry, fishing, mining and quarrying is small (1.8 per cent), smaller than Waveney (2.7 per cent) and Suffolk (2 per cent), but larger than England (1 per cent). Overall this reflects the national picture of a small primary sector. The manufacturing or secondary sector (manufacturing and construction) is slightly larger (21.8 per cent) than in England (17.8 per cent) overall, but again not in any disproportionate way. The largest individual industrial sector by employment is the wholesale and retail trade and repair of motor vehicles, with 18.4 per cent, compared to 15.9 per cent overall in England. This shows potential for a skills overlap for an emerging and consolidating renewable sector. The other strong overlap sector is construction, with 9.2 per cent of employment compared with 7.7 per cent overall in England. Broadly, however, employment in different industrial sectors mirrors that of England as a whole.

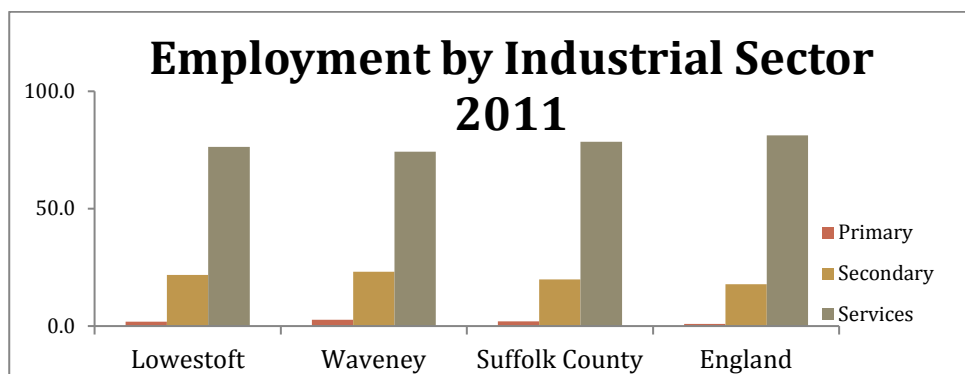


Figure 1. Source: ONS Census 2011.

3.1.3 OCCUPATIONAL STRUCTURE

The occupational structure shows lower levels of skills in Lowestoft and Waveney compared to both the East of England and England as a whole. There is a notable lack of professional occupations and an emphasis on skilled trades compared to the wider region or England (see Figure 2). One can also note a large number of process, plant and machine operatives (13.5 per cent) compared to England as a whole (7.2 per cent). The same is true of elementary occupations, with 13.5 per cent in Lowestoft, compared to 11.1 per cent in England as a whole.

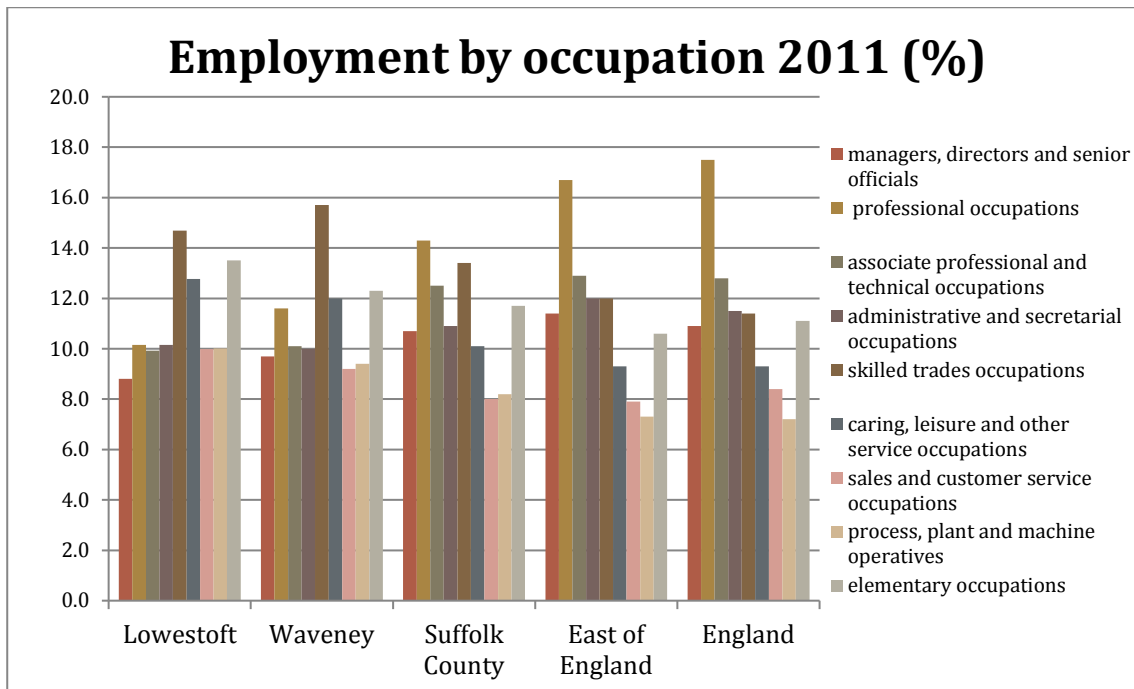


Figure 2 Source: ONS, Census 2011

3.1.4 SOCIO-ECONOMIC CLASSIFICATION

The employment patterns of the occupational structure work their way through into the different socioeconomic classes, and show more distinct differences from the regional and national picture. Socioeconomic classification is the dominant variable that accounts for differences in educational outcomes. From Figure 3 we can see there are higher levels of routine occupations (16 per cent in Lowestoft, compared to 11 per cent in England as a whole), and semi-routine occupations (21 per cent in Lowestoft compared to 11 per cent in England as a whole). There are much lower rates of higher managerial and professional occupations along with lower managerial, administrative and professional occupations compared with England as a whole (5 per cent and 10 per cent, and 17 per cent and 21 per cent, respectively). Overall rates of those who have never worked or who are long-term unemployed are similar to the national English picture, but are higher than those within the region or county.

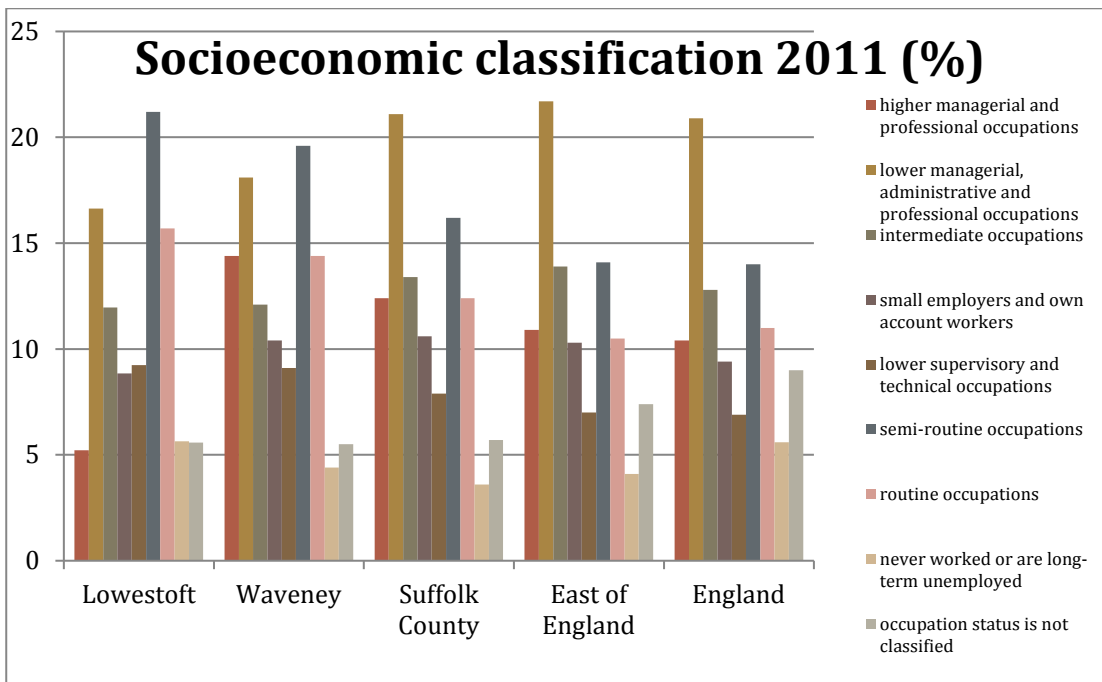


Figure 3 Source: ONS, Census 2011

3.1.5 POVERTY

The index of multiple deprivation shows that much of Lowestoft is in the poorest fifth of areas nationally when looking at the Index of Multiple Deprivation 2007, 2010, and the Index of multiple deprivation child poverty index. Six out of the 10 wards in Lowestoft are in the most deprived quintile. Lowestoft also has the 4 most deprived wards in Suffolk according to the 2010 Index of Multiple Deprivation.

3.1.6 EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES

There are 5 mainstream state-funded secondary schools and 20 primary schools in the Lowestoft area. The secondary schools include two new schools that as yet have no KS4 results. Overall, A*-C achievement rates, including English and maths, are significantly lower than both the county and national English average.

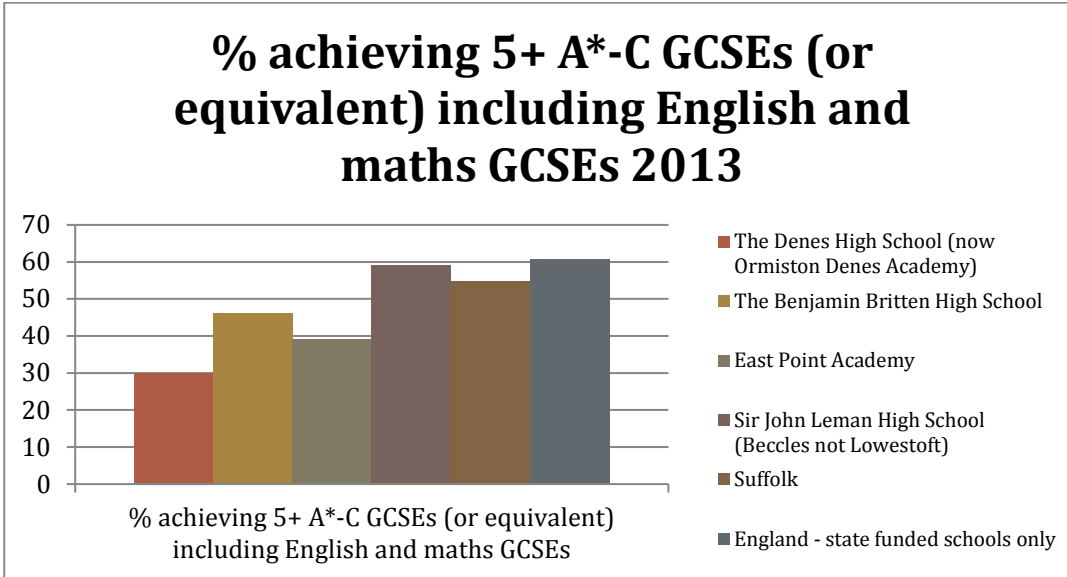


Figure 4 Source: Department for Education

A similar picture of low attainment can be found when looking at the Key Stage 2 attainment by district. Waveney is notable for a lower rate of attainment in either the county or in England as a whole.

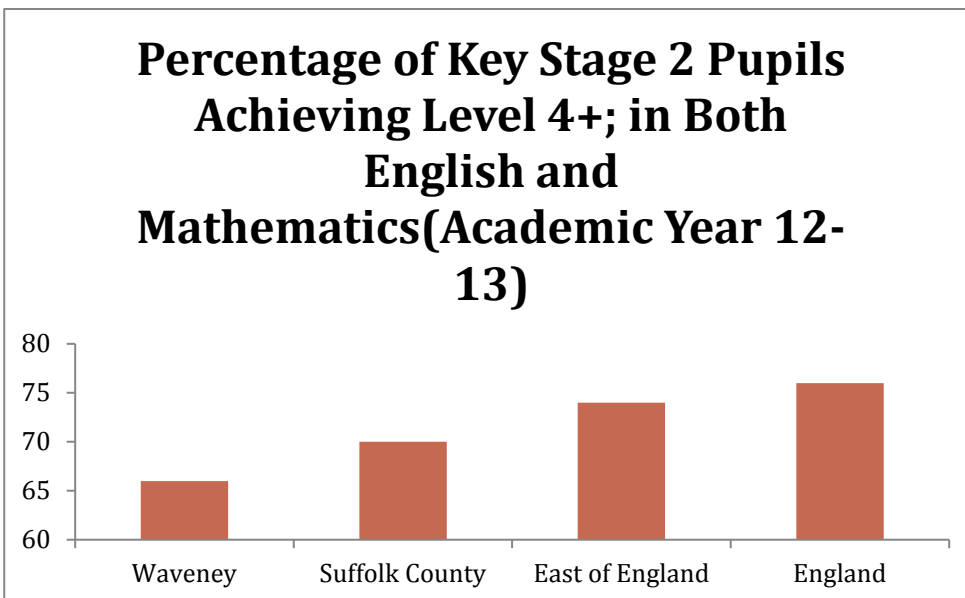


Figure 5 Source: Department for Education

As with the index of multiple deprivation above, there are high levels of deprivation apparent among school pupils in secondary Schools in Suffolk. Similar levels are to be found in many of the primary schools. This may go some way to explaining the lower levels of attainment, as this fits with aspects of the socioeconomic profile of the area.

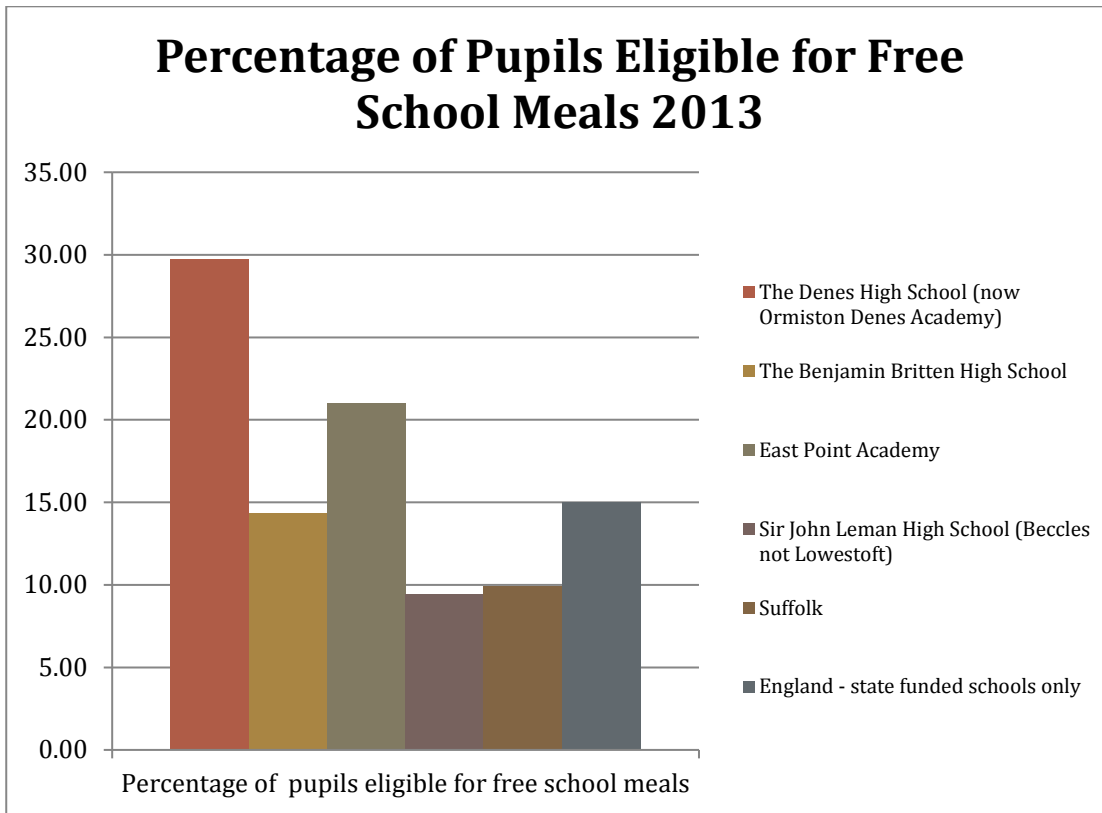


Figure 6 Source: Department for Education

There are high entry rates into the Ebacc Science subjects at KS4, but within Lowestoft the achievement rates are low compared to the national average and the school in the nearby market town of Beccles.

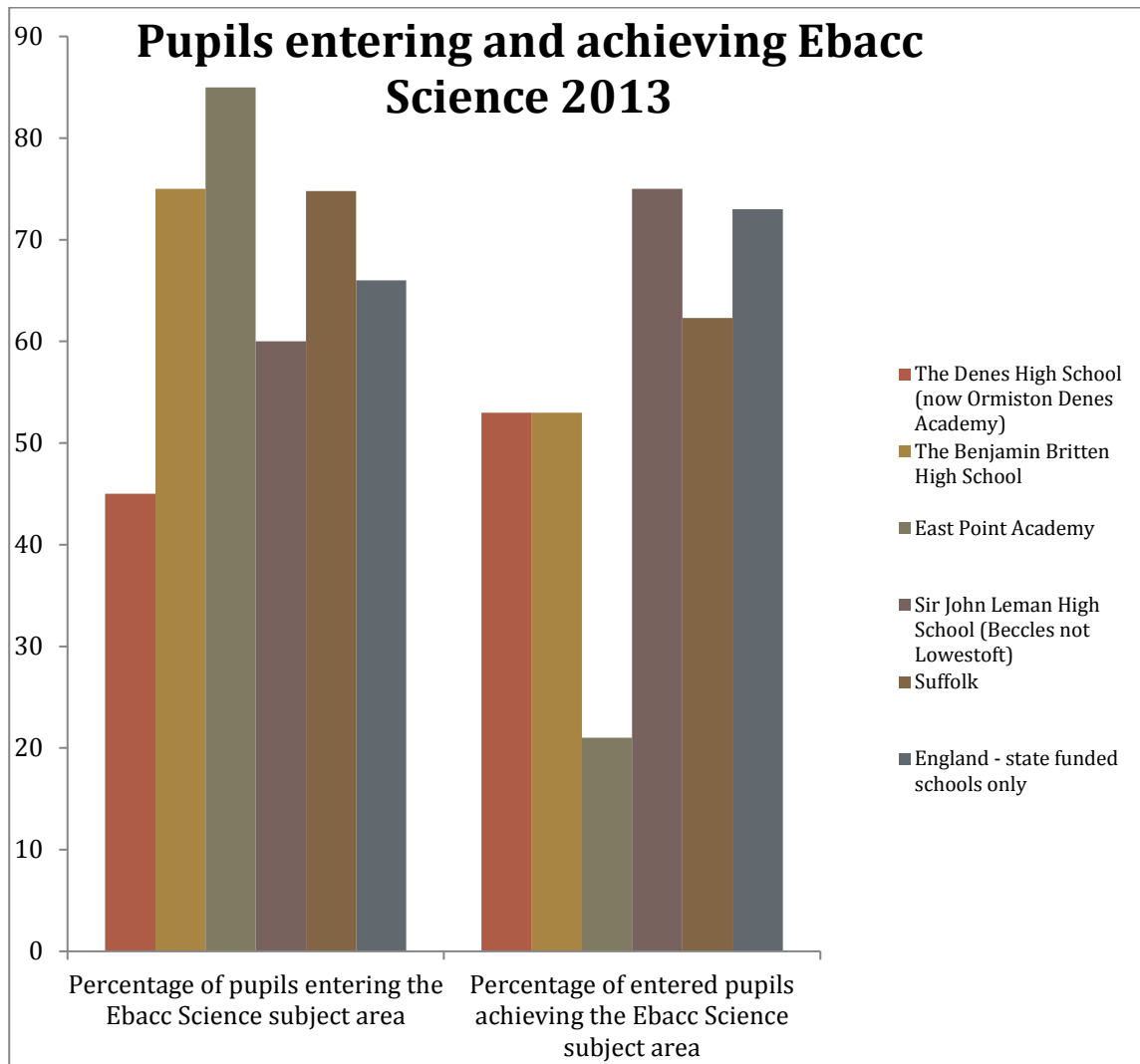


Figure 7 Source: Department for Education

Many young people stay on in education after the age of 16, as can be seen by the high participation rates. 88 per cent of young people after year 11 stay on and enter either sixth form or further education.

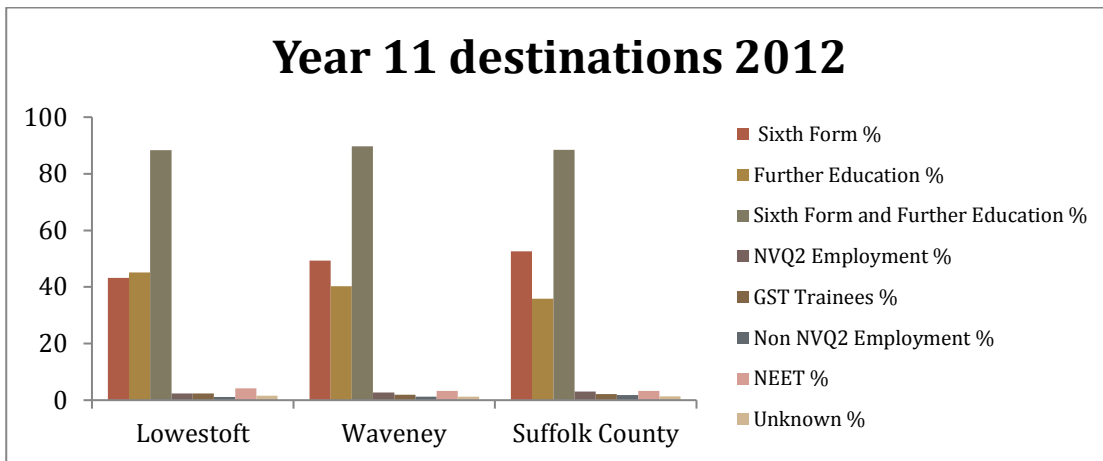
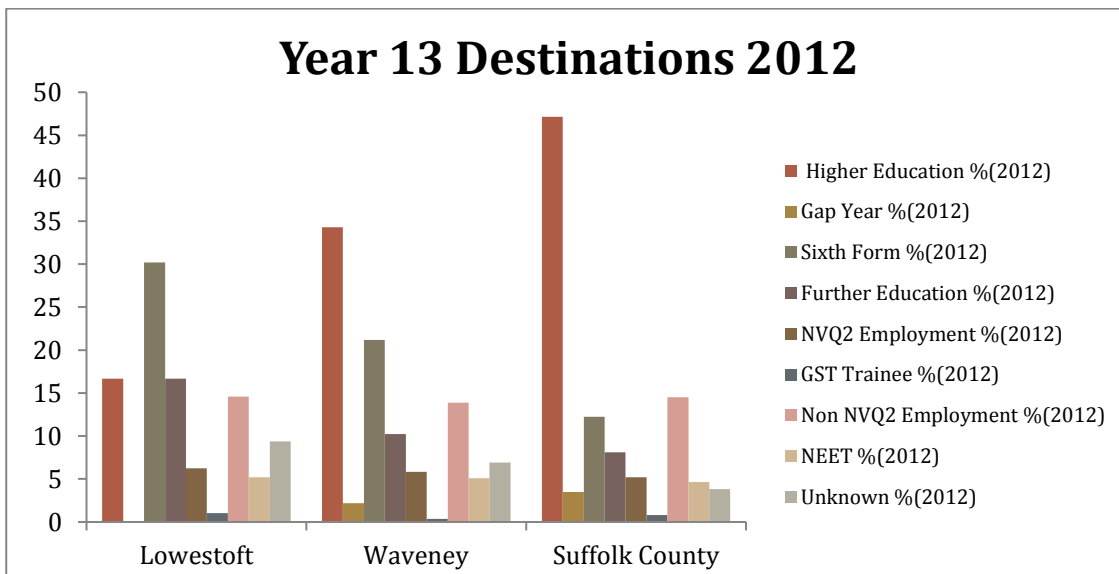


Figure 8 Source: Department for Education

What seems to be different about Lowestoft is the relatively low levels of attainment, and that many young people spend more than two years in post-6 education. It is notable that there are low rates of young people going to university at the end of Year 13, and that many are staying on or going to sixth form or further education at this age.



4. THE STUDY

4.1 THE SAMPLE

We interviewed 52 young people, aged between 16 and 24 in Lowestoft, during March 2015. This number consists of 28 females and 24 males who voluntarily took part in the study. Most had been unemployed for more than a year, and although eight participants told us they had good Level 3 qualifications, the majority of the young people who took part in the study had left school at 15/16 with few formal qualifications. Under half the participants, 22, were accessing some form of employment support or training programme at the time of the study, with LifeSkills, Tomorrow's People or Talent Match. Thirty participants were not accessing any such support. Most of the young people we spoke to were living either independently or in a hostel, and only a few of the young people who took part in the study talked about having support from family or parents. Many, although not all, had a low level of educational attainment and lacked any work experience, either paid or voluntary.

4.2 UNEMPLOYMENT IN LOWESTOFT

When asked what sort of work they were looking for, the majority of young people stated they did not care and would be happy with anything as long as it was a job. As Jo (17) told us, she would be happy to find:

... anything, anything at all – it's not really a place to be picky.

The young people who took part in the study felt that the general absence of employment opportunities in Lowestoft meant that other people judged them negatively. They felt that they were frequently '*being judged*' by others, and they described how they felt people were '*looking down their noses*' at them.

Sam (23) told us:

One of the reasons we can't find work is because we have been unemployed for so long we are a waste of space. No one wants us because we have nothing. No experience, nothing. People think there must be something wrong with you if you have been unemployed for so long but they don't see how hard you have tried, the shit you have been through and the sacrifices you have made. I've gone hungry so many times. People just look at you like you are worthless and shit and half the time they are the people that should be helping you.

David (20) had applied for 30 jobs in the previous two weeks, and the lack of employment opportunities in Lowestoft, the town, (as described above) was seen by the participants in the study as the main barrier to finding employment. Many had repeatedly given out what they often described as '*hundreds of CVs*', but mostly to no avail. Jadene (17) had managed to find employment in Norwich over the Christmas period in a retail store after she gave out 200 CVs in Norwich town centre:

When I was looking back in September I gave out 200 CVs to like every shop in Norwich and I got 2 responses.

Many others told us of similar experiences, but they had not been so lucky and had had not found employment, even temporary employment, in spite of giving out CVs on a regular basis. Abbey (18), for example, said:

I gave out over 50 CVs to every shop in Lowestoft and I got 1 reply.

Like the account above and many others we heard during the fieldwork, Holly (18) had tried hard to find work but had been unemployed for over a year. She described how she felt:

It's shit, It's hard – you go out and give CVs to any shop and fish and chips and that but you never hear anything back – not one person got back to me, not one – and if you live on your own and you don't have a family and that it is really hard and you have to pay your bills and that there is never anything left it's hard. You never have any money for food or clothes or going out – not that there is anywhere to go – but even to meet your friends for a cup of tea – it's lonely and there is no hope. No hope of a job because there aren't any. I don't know how to explain it but it makes me feel stressed, worried and sad – I am on income support and I have no money but if I could get a job I know income support take money off you but it would just be nice to have a job and have a little bit more so I could afford food and that.

4.2.1 GETTING HELP

Mickey (17) said:

I don't know anywhere else that you can go for help – there is only the job centre and they won't help you but I don't know anywhere else in Lowestoft that you can go for help. I have been round all the shops and all the bars and restaurants loads of times and asked if they have any work and they say they will get back to you but they never do. I try and try but it's pointless.

Many young people in the Lowestoft study described feeling very despondent as a result of their situation. They felt that they had tried everything to get a job but could not find anything and they were also very pessimistic about their chances of finding a job in the near future. Will's (17) account illustrates how many young people felt. He had completed a catering course and had been looking for work for two years. He described being young and unemployed in Lowestoft as:

I have been to the job centre but they don't help you – just do this and that, but they never get back to you and it is just confusing. It's really annoying and really frustrating and if you see something and you go in, but they say that there is nothing for you. I mean I went into [name of place] and asked them but they said that they don't have any jobs. So it is really stressful as I would like to get a job and earn some money and do something good with my life. But I notice now when you go down the high street and that there are a lot of youths like hanging about and just causing trouble and that and there is just nothing for them and it just causes a lot of trouble. Like you get people shouting and getting drunk and shouting stuff and it intimidates the older people in the town. I have been walking with my Mum and Dad in the town in the evening and you get people just shouting stuff and it is not a nice thing to see. It is like it doesn't seem to me that there is any help around here for young people that really want to get a job and it is really hard for people like me to find a job but I really want to get a job.

4.2.2 SEASONAL WORK

All participants felt there was 'nothing for young people in Lowestoft'. There was nothing for them to do and 'no hope of getting a job'. They did, however, often talk about the possibilities of seasonal work as Lowestoft is a seaside town, but even these opportunities they felt were not as available as one might expect, and were only very temporary. They tended to be linked to caravan parks, Southwold, Pleasurewood Hills, or Yarmouth beach, but even these jobs were hard to get, badly paid, and you have to 'know someone to get one'. The nature of this work included cleaning caravans, and most of the young people we spoke to said that they would be

grateful to get any such employment. Some participants described how if you had previously had a summer job, the employers often called those people first and offered them the job before it was advertised. As a result they said, some people worked in a job over the summer, were unemployed over the winter, and then were re-employed in their former job the following summer.

Jadene (17) told us about the employment situation for young people in Lowestoft, and said that there were more possibilities in the summer months:

In my year, out of everyone who left there are only about five people out of over a hundred who have got a job and they have got rubbish jobs at that. They can get like bar work in the summer and kebab shops and that but it is rubbish work for rubbish money so what's the point in that? I mean it is like three pound something an hour for three or four hours a week. In the summer the bars take on more people so like now because it is cold and that you just get regulars in the bars so they don't need anyone else but then in the summer with better weather and more tourists they take on more staff because they are busier. More people are out and visiting because of the beaches and that so they do food and stuff in the summer too so you can get some waitressing work then too.

CJ (20), for example, had previously worked in Great Yarmouth cooking burgers which he enjoyed:

Yes I did that, I cooked burgers and they paid me cash in hand 140 pound a week and a free burger. I don't mind that. I liked it. So I started at 9 in the morning and I finished at 9 at night but I loved it.

4.2.3 4.2.3. COST OF TRAVEL

Similarly, Kelly (17) had found seasonal work in Great Yarmouth, but also told us that whilst she was grateful for the work the cost of travelling had a significant impact on the money she earned:

I worked on the doughnut stall last summer but it was over £13 in bus fares for a week. They will employ you on the ice cream stands and that because you don't need experience.

This is a point also made by others such as Jadene (17) who had found some employment during the summer in Southwold:

Because this is a seaside town and you have like Yarmouth and the Caravan parks, all the jobs are like for the summer or sometimes over Christmas if you are lucky but that is more like in Norwich. So all my jobs have been temporary. In the summer I worked in Southwold waitressing in a café but you end up spending all your wages on your bus fare. At the end of the week of working I was only left with a fiver.

Julie (18) amongst others had considered looking further afield to find work, but also pointed out the cost of travel which was often prohibitive in getting a job elsewhere:

Norwich is better – there are more opportunities because there are more shops there but then you have to get a train and that is about £10 to get there but it is more expensive early morning than in the day but if you have a job in a shop you have to get there early don't you? But then that is really expensive.

Another participant, McKenzie (18), had previously travelled from Beccles to Lowestoft on her moped at 5.00 p.m., returning home at 11.00 p.m. or later to wash dishes for £2.69 per hour. For Abbey (18), having to work on Sunday was prohibitive for her employment as the cost of the taxi was more than she earned:

I worked in Tesco but I had to work on a Sunday and there is no bus on a Sunday so I had to spend 20 quid on a taxi so it was not worth it. I had no money.

4.2.4 WHO YOU KNOW

The majority of the young people who took part in the study perceived that 'repeated seasonal work' was the best you could hope for, but that you still 'needed to know someone'. Whilst there was a lot of talk in the young people's accounts of seasonal work in places such as Southwold and Great Yarmouth, especially in the holiday camps, there was nevertheless a perception amongst the young people in the study that you still had to know someone to find employment there. For example, John (17) said:

They just phone up the people who worked there the previous year so you find that the same people time and time again take the same jobs in the holiday camps and that so it is really hard to get in and get work even cleaning jobs in the holiday camps. I have tried and tried but I just get turned down because the same people get the jobs that they had before.

This was also certainly the viewpoint that was held about more permanent jobs with local employers, and also apprenticeship opportunities. As Marco (17) stated:

To gain employment at Sizewell you had to know at least three people who already worked there to even get a look in and Adnams in Southwold was the same. You have no chance if not.

4.2.5 REDUNDANCY

Aside from the seasonal work detailed above, some of the young people who participated in the study had got some experience of work through part-time or temporary jobs, but these were often transient and therefore not seen to be a reliable form of income. Of those who had had some experience of paid work, most had been made redundant as Abbey (18) described:

I was a receptionist and they laid me off because they did not have enough hours and then I worked at Tesco and they laid me off because it was a temporary contract and they did not have enough hours.

Three females we spoke to (who were unknown to each other) during the field work for the study had good Level three qualifications and had found employment through a recruitment agency, but had been made redundant shortly before the end of their probationary period. In Juliette's case (24) this had happened twice and at the time of the fieldwork she had been unemployed for 18 months. She told us of the implications that that had had for her:

Basically I found work initially through a recruitment agency and I was really happy but both times I was told one day; 'Oh you don't need to come in tomorrow' and I was devastated. One did it six days before my probation period ended so I was not eligible for any redundancy payment or anything. So that meant moving back home to my parents, having to move out of my flat which I could not afford which put me into debt and it put me into debt with my parents as well and I am now in [x] pounds of debt with no money coming in, losing my car as well so I am getting right to the bottom. I am just grateful that I am not homeless. If it hadn't have been for my parents I would be but I am rock bottom.

4.3 THE PARTICIPANTS

Although making comparisons with the data from the Greater Ipswich study²¹ undertaken in 2013 is difficult and should be treated with caution, it is worth mentioning here that amongst the 52 participants in the Lowestoft study there were far higher numbers of young people living independently or in a hostel (rather than living with family) than in the Greater Ipswich cohort. There are far more references to homelessness, poverty, drug use and mental health issues, and perceptions of crime is a key theme to emerge from the analysis of the present data. Most of the participants had very few formal educational qualifications and had left school early. Only 8 participants had Level three qualifications, and all were critical about their school experiences. They felt that they had left school unprepared for work and that school had not helped them find employment.

Mave (21) stated that:

I worked really hard at school and got A levels in spite of them. School was shit. The teachers were shit. They didn't care. Their idea of you getting a good job is working in a supermarket but it's not mine. I know loads of people who could have got A levels and even gone to uni but they don't encourage you to do that. They just get you through. They don't care. They certainly don't prepare you for what it is like trying to find a job or how important qualifications are or even that experience is important. They don't encourage you. A career? What's that? You would be lucky to find a job, any job here.

Abbey (18) said:

School does not prepare you for the world of work they prepare you for college but not to get a job. So they don't tell you how to pay your bills or how to find a job. They just expect you to leave and either go to college and just walk into a job but they don't prepare you or help you get a job. They expect you to go to college.

4.3.1 HOMELESS

Many of the young people we met in Lowestoft who are unemployed are living independently, often in hostels where the living conditions are poor with what they described as '*holes in the walls, toilets not working and in damp conditions*'. They often have to share washing and toilet facilities with the opposite sex. We were also told that if they do not pay their rent for 2 weeks they get thrown out, so sanctions from their benefits payment can have very serious consequences for them. Nearly half the participants in the study talked about being homeless at some point, and all the young people we spoke to discussed their experiences of living in poverty. Many had often gone hungry, and some disclosed they had committed crimes, for example, stealing food or dealing drugs in order to survive. They also disclosed their personal disgust with having to do that in order '*to survive*'. We heard many accounts of what it was like to be homeless during the fieldwork for the study, and the examples below are just two of many that occur in the transcripts of the data.

²¹ Agnew, S. and Bond, E. (2013), 'Findings from Progress into Employment: Understanding Youth Unemployment in Greater Ipswich'. Available from: <http://www.ucs.ac.uk/SchoolsAndNetwork/UCSSchools/SchoolofAppliedSocialSciences/iSEED/Images/Progress-into-Employment---Report-2013.pdf>.

Gav (17) told us:

When I was homeless I went to Waveney district council and to the job centre but they just gave me an appointment and told me to come back in a week. I had nothing absolutely nothing.

Gav eventually went to The Junction in Lowestoft, where he was referred to a hostel where he now lives, but he was without benefit for 14 weeks and admits that in that time he did things that he was 'ashamed of' just to survive.

Soho (23) was made homeless after her son was taken into care. She had been unemployed for 7 years at the time of the research:

I was in a mother and baby unit with my little boy and then he was taken into care so they kicked me out three days later, just three days after he was taken away because they said I couldn't stay there no more, because it was a mother and baby unit and I no longer had him so they kicked me out and sent me to [hostel] where everyone is on drugs and so that's what I did. I was so unhappy I had lost my baby, I had no support, I had nothing.

4.3.2 POVERTY

All the young people who took part in the study talked about being poor, whether or not they had been, or were currently, homeless. Many described severe hardship and the relationship between poverty and unemployment. In their opinion, it was not just about being poor or going without things that you wanted or needed, but they felt that being poor, or not having enough money, actually affected your ability to find a job, as not having enough money to attend an interview, look smart or print out a CV in the library, were all examples given during the fieldwork. As they were expected to look for jobs online, having access to the Internet was crucial for fulfilling the requirements of being a 'Job Seeker', but if you had no money this was almost impossible to achieve. If you were not seen to be looking online for enough hours in a week, you faced having sanctions imposed on your benefit.

David (20) said:

You have no money for like topping up credit on your phone, let alone pay for internet and even if you have a minimum wage job and you work 40 hours a week you can just pay your bills and that's it.

David's observation above was typical of many we heard, and many participants felt that poverty prevented them from optimising their chances of finding employment. For many, though, the consequences of poverty were far more personal, and affected even being able to obtain the basic necessities as Lucile (16) described:

Often you have to go without food because you can't afford to eat. I have 11 quid a week for food, toiletries and clothes and travel and that – 11 quid has to pay for everything including buying things for my daughter. I can't manage. Even if I buy the cheapest Asda value stuff I can't manage. I go hungry most days.

4.3.3 CRIME

The link between the young people's experiences of poverty (as exemplified above) and the frequent occurrence of crime-related talk in the data cannot be overlooked, as it was by far the most common theme to emerge from the qualitative analysis and appears in every young person's narrative, even though we did not directly ask about crime. Through their talk of their

experiences and their views of what it was like to be young and unemployed in Lowestoft, poverty and crime was a constant undercurrent in the 52 narratives.

Michael (18) explained:

Money isn't it? You need money just to get through life – I know people who don't do drink or drugs or nothing but they still need money just to survive so they commit crime. Things like burglaries, robbing people, stealing stuff just to survive.

Will (17) said:

No there's nothing else – there is only the job centre and they are useless. There is nothing to help young people in Lowestoft. I mean even the youth clubs have closed down. I used to go to one in [name of place] but even that has closed down so I have nowhere to go and that's why you end up with so many youths just hanging around on the street – there are no jobs and nowhere to go and that's when all the trouble kicks off because you get different groups of youths and that's when all the trouble kicks off and you get fights and that then the police have to come and break it up. Unemployment leads to crime because people have got nothing to do so they go out and steal something.

Nicole (18) stated:

I mean down here people will just go in and rob them and that and people just nick things to sell for drugs. Lowestoft is infested with drugs – weed and crystal meth and that. It is obvious what is going on but no one takes no notice and that and that's why I won't go I don't go to certain places but the police know but they don't do nothing about it they don't.

Joshua (22) has to pay back rent arrears after having financial sanctions imposed on his benefits; he has no money and has to rely on other young people in the hostel to feed him. Joshua told us of his experiences, saying:

There is nothing to do here other than drugs – it's shit. I never stole anything in my life until I moved here and now I go down the shops and go stealing from the shops everyday just trying to eat. I got money taken off me for three months for not looking for work hard enough.

Similarly Harry (19), amongst others, disclosed his own criminal activities in order to get food:

You have to steal stuff. It is the only way you can survive if you want to eat. I got banned from [name of shop] today.

Furthermore, every young person we spoke to told us that there was 'nothing' for young people in Lowestoft to do, and they felt that this contributed to the feeling of a fear of crime on the part of many young people, and other residents, especially in the town centre where young people 'hang about'. Ben's (18) account provides an illustration typical of many we heard during the course of the study:

Lowestoft has got a bad name for lots of different reasons – drugs and alcohol is probably higher in young people who are unemployed and because they have got addicted to it rather than doing it for the weekend. The crime then goes up because they are having to pay for it and start thieving to like fuel their drug and alcohol habits.

Michael (18) also felt that there was a correlation between a lack of jobs in Lowestoft and offending behaviour, and said that people commit crimes because they have no money. He felt that much of this crime was undetected and probably unrecorded, and it was interesting that he suggested a new centre and better support for young unemployed people in Lowestoft would go some way to reducing crime in the town.

4.3.4 DRUGS

Within the young people's accounts, there was a strong sense of awareness of the relationship between unemployment, poverty, drugs and crime, and it was interesting that this awareness was far more apparent than that which we found in the 2013 data drawn from the 51 interviews with young people who participated in the 'Progress into Employment' study in Greater Ipswich.²² That is not to say that in Lowestoft there is a different relationship between these factors, but they occur much more frequently in the narratives from the young people in the Lowestoft study than in the narratives in the Greater Ipswich study. The relationship between unemployment, drugs and crime is a common theme to emerge from the analysis of the interview transcripts unprompted by the researchers' questions. Most of the young people we spoke to talked about poverty or homelessness, drug use – either personal or related to others – their easy availability, low cost, and the perceived link between drugs with levels of crime in the town. As noted in the executive summary some young people, talked about using crystal meth and other drugs and the commissioners have asked us to point out that their intelligence and professional view surrounding the use of crystal meth amongst young people in Lowestoft indicates that this is not the substance that is being used. Young people, they suggest, are using various legal highs often referred to as 'plant food' and the effects of some of these Legal (but dangerous) Highs²³ when injected cause crystals to appear under the skin. Therefore, when the young people who participated in the study refer to being on crystal meth, the commissioners view is that they probably mean Legal Highs which, although pose a real health risk, are not as dangerous as crystal meth. We were told on many occasions that 'weed' and 'crystal meth' were cheaper than beer, and easy to get hold of.

Soho (23) told us:

You try and get it [weed] every day if you can – we share a bag of it and it's the first thing we buy when we get money.

Abbey (18) also told us how easy it was to obtain drugs in Lowestoft:

Cannabis is easy to get hold of but in Lowestoft I think it is easier to get hold of meth. I mean I could text any one of six people and get a wrap here in less than 10 minutes.

For many young people, the way that being unemployed and having no money made you feel was influential in drug use as a form of escape. Harry (19), for example, told us:

I understand what it is like. I understand what it's like to be depressed, to smoke weed and to drink until you can't feel what it is like any more. I get it. I get that people do stuff to escape and to try and cope with their situation and forget about it, at least for a while. That's why we do it. You have got to do what you have got to do to survive.

The use of drugs was often compared to alcohol as an escape mechanism, as David (20) observed:

Crystal meth is much more efficient than three pints of beer – a wrap of that and you are fucked. That's the point of it.

²² Ibid.

²³ See for example <http://www.talktofrank.com/drug/legal-highs>

Lucile (16) also compared what he referred to as crystal meth and alcohol, and explained:

Crystal meth is much better than alcohol because with alcohol it takes a while to get into you and then you are on a downer and that and with crystal meth you get it straight away and you are fucked.

Most of the young people who participated in the study discussed the relationship between unemployment and drug use. For Harry (19) and a few others, however, it was more the experience of being homeless that was linked to drug use:

There is more of a link between homelessness and drugs than between joblessness and drugs – I mean I have been through serious shit and I have gone for a week without sleep because I was high on crystal meth and I was so paranoid I was jumping at everything that moved.

Talk about drugs and unemployment appears in all 52 accounts, but not all are about personal use. For the majority of the young people we spoke to it was the fear of crime that was associated with drug use and unemployment, as Abbey (18) observes:

Fighting, robbery, drugs – that's what Lowestoft is like – I don't feel safe in Lowestoft at all. The drug problem is huge – I don't know one person that hasn't tried it. There is one drug that is taking over Lowestoft and that is crystal meth. I don't know one person that has not tried it.

Jadene (17) held similar views, and went on to explain why in her view it is so popular amongst her contemporaries:

Crystal meth is everywhere. It is only 10 pound a wrap and I haven't been to a single house party in the last two years where there hasn't been crystal meth. It is everywhere. If you don't have any money, an easy way to make money is to start dealing if you don't have a job. Like they need it so they either start dealing or they don't start dealing, they need it so much that the only way they can get it is to go out and rob people to get money. I have seen people gagging so much for a fix they will do anything get it. I mean, I'm not going to lie, I have tried it but I know people who tried it at the same time as I did and they are now like hooked on it and they are out doing like really stupid things and bad things to pay for it just so they can get more of it. Basically what happens when you take it for the first time that is the highest you will ever be, right? You feel oblivious to every trouble you ever had, that's why people take it. You are living a miserable shitty life, no hope of a job, living in a skanky place or homeless and on the street and for that time that you are on it everything is OK. You have no trouble, no worries – the bad things just go away. But then when you come off it, it takes you to the lowest point you will ever be and you miss the high so you do it again and then again but each time the effect for that you take is less and less and so you have to take more and more just to stay not even high but like just numb. Some people then just get hooked on it because it is addictive. I mean many people I know say that they cannot do it just for the one night they have to do it and like and binge all weekend because it is so addictive.

4.3.5 CRIMINAL RECORD

A small number of participants disclosed that they had a criminal record, which they felt prevented them from successfully finding employment. Michael (18) had been officially unemployed for 6 months, but having left school at 15 he had never worked. Like the others in the study who had a criminal record he felt that as such he did not 'stand a chance'. He said that he could not even get a job in a factory because of his criminal record; this, he felt, was

degrading. He described the Youth Offending Team (YOT) in Lowestoft as 'very helpful'; he said they had helped him claim benefit and got him clothes when he had nothing and desperately needed some. Michael described how, in his view, Lowestoft has intergenerational problems with unemployment and no good role models for young people. Michael receives £42 a fortnight, but he had recently been sanctioned as he had not turned up for an appointment at the Job Centre because he had been attending a voluntary Princes Trust initiative at Lowestoft College. Michael and his girlfriend have a daughter of a year old, and have continually struggled to make ends meet.

Michael (18) commented that:

Money is money I would do anything but there aren't enough jobs and if you have a criminal record no one will employ you because you have been naughty.

Darren (23) also had a criminal record, which he felt made it difficult for him to find work. Unlike Michael, who had not received support from training providers, Darren felt that his chances of finding employment and his circumstances had been 'turned round', thanks to the support he had received from Tomorrow's People and Talent Match and he had now 'turned his life around'. Although he was still looking for paid employment, he had become a youth assessor and had been going into school and working with groups of young people through organisations in Lowestoft to prevent other young people from committing crimes and going to prison as he had done.

4.3.6 LEARNING DISABILITY

Similar to the Greater Ipswich study, a number of the young people we spoke to talked about having been diagnosed with learning disabilities, which they felt made it even harder for them to find work than other young people:

Will (17), for example, had ADHD, and told us that he had been 'kicked out of main stream school' before he was 16. He lived at home with his parents, and had successfully completed a catering and hospitality training course, but said that he felt he lacked confidence and that young people like him who were unemployed, often felt 'undermined and put themselves down'.

CJ (20) had a learning disability, and said that he did not go to the job centre but instead went to The Junction to get help with his CV and to use the internet to look for jobs. He had completed a catering course and gained some work experience from his course, but he had been unemployed for two years. He had also completed a return to work course with a training provider in Lowestoft. For CJ, the difficulty came in applying for a job:

I can manage all the searches and that myself. I know how to look for a job but applying is not so easy for me and I need help to apply for a job and to understand the forms and that. Practising for interviews is important and I need someone to help me choose smart clothes for when I go to interview. I did my CV myself but other people might have a disability like dyslexia and they need help. I have dyslexia and I need extra help sometimes – for me it is big words that I find difficult I can understand little words but not so much the big words. Also paper like white paper like that – it is all blurry to me but if you stick in on different coloured paper I can understand it OK because I can see it better.

Similarly, Chelsea (17) (who had been badly bullied at school) also talked about having difficulties reading from white paper:

I can't read on white paper I have to have different coloured paper for me to be able to read and so that makes it even harder for me to find a job because employers don't

understand that and they just think I am stupid and would not be able to do the job but I just need different paper.

Like others, Darren (23) also told us of his plight to find work; even though he had good Level 3 qualifications, he had been unemployed for three years. He was looking for a job in retail, preferably in a gaming store or in a supermarket. He told us:

After school I went to 6th form and then college for a year and I have been out of work for three years.

He said that there were no opportunities to work in a gaming store in Lowestoft as he would have liked, but that even though supermarket jobs did sometimes come up,

When you go there to get in you have to answer questions in a certain way and sometimes that can be a bit confusing.

4.3.7 MENTAL HEALTH

A number of the young people in the study spoke about the recent tragic case of Fiona Anderson, who drowned her three children before taking her own life. They spoke of this event as an example of how desperate life was in Lowestoft.

Soho (23) told us:

It was like that woman. She killed her three kids and herself yet she cried out. She cried out in the Job centre and she cried out on Facebook but no one took any notice. No one cares. No one listens. She was crying out for help but no one listened no one heard her until she was dead. Hundreds of children have been taken into care in Lowestoft now because of that.

Eight of the young people we spoke to told us that they had, at some point, felt suicidal, and nearly all the accounts include reference to 'feeling down'; 'being depressed'; 'feeling isolated'; 'lonely', and 'really sad'. For young people, being depressed is a condition which is exacerbated when they have nothing to do, and they told us that they often can get very despondent and feel as though there is no point.

Bridget (20) told us:

I am ashamed to admit it but I did feel suicidal at one point. I felt so down after I was made redundant that I felt that there was no point. I had worked really hard at school and I got good grades but for what? I was happy when I got my job, it wasn't that well paid but it had prospects and a career path – or so the recruitment agency told me – I had my flat and that and I thought I was OK. But when it [the redundancy] happened I felt like I had been hit by a brick wall. I got really down especially when I went to the job centre and they would not help me. I felt so depressed. I could not afford my rent, I lost my flat and the few things I had saved up for. I did not know where to turn. I took drugs for the first time in my life – I felt so wretched, I wanted to die. I was too ashamed to tell my parents that I had lost my job. I was really down for about 3 months or so and survived on anti-depressants from the doctor then I phoned the Samaritans – that's when I realised things had got really bad.

5. BARRIERS WHICH PREVENT OR DISCOURAGE YOUNG PEOPLE FROM ENGAGING WITH EXISTING EMPLOYMENT SUPPORT SERVICES, AND HOW THESE MAY BE OVERCOME

The barriers identified in the analysis of the interview data included the Jobcentre Plus (JCP) and the perceptions that the young people had that the staff in the JCP (other than the one they identified) were unhelpful, that they frequently received financial sanctions which caused significant hardship including homelessness, that they found websites unhelpful or '*pointless*' in their search for a job, and that the Universal Jobmatch was difficult to use, especially via a mobile phone. Analysis of the data also highlighted that there was little awareness on the part of young unemployed people of the training providers and support services available, unless they had already accessed them, and that in their view they felt judged or stigmatised in the way they were associated with certain organisations. They saw their lack of work-related experience was a barrier to them both applying, but also in their view being considered, for a job, yet they were unable to get experience and were often frightened to undertake voluntary work in case they were sanctioned for not spending enough hours online looking for work.

5.1 JOBCENTRE PLUS (JCP)

Similar to the study undertaken in Greater Ipswich in 2013, the perceived experiences of young people concerning the Job Centre in this study have not been positively reported in their accounts. Other than one member of JCP staff, '*David*', who did come across favourably in some young people's narratives, the young people we interviewed who had visited the job centre expressed the view that the job centre staff did not have the time to help them, and several participants said they had been asked to leave the job centre on more than one occasion when looking for information about jobs on a computer there. Holly (18) had been unemployed for two years, and said that since they had removed the specific '*job search feature*' on the machines in the job centre, it was much harder to find information about local jobs. Especially as they had to search for jobs by '*sector*' and no one had explained what each '*sector*' meant.

Kelly (17) said:

It's not easy to ask for help – it is awkward to ask someone to help. They don't offer you help and it is hard to ask as they don't want to help you. They are too busy and they look down their noses at you. You are a nuisance so it's hard to ask to help.

Bob (19) told us:

The Job Centre, right, trying to make appointments it makes it so difficult and it is not just me that this has happened to but they say that they call you and left a message to tell you when you have to go for the appointment but they say that there is a record of them contacting you but on my phone there are no missed calls and no answer message and no voicemail and no record of them contacting you and then you get sanctioned.



Photograph: 'You walk in sign and walk out. No one wants to actually help you look for a job' (Julie, 17).

Joshua (22) suggests that:

The Job Centre are useless, they don't help you at all. They don't care. They are just like 'Sign here' and then they tell you to go on a website for 35 hours a week. On Universal Jobs Match you have to go on there for 35 hours a week and look for a job so you end up in the library until they kick you out, so you go to the Job Centre and use the computers there until they kick you out and then you have to try and find a friend who'll let you use their computer. It's pointless – absolutely pointless and they just sanction you anyway so you end up homeless because you can't pay your rent so you go back to stealing and that.

Harry (19) pointed out the frustration that many young people felt in their search for jobs, and that there was little available online so that it would be more effective to try to find work directly in the town. As noted above, many young people spent considerable time giving out CVs in the town, but this was not recognised by the Job Centre staff as 'actively looking for work'.

Harry (19) told us:

If you physically walk around and try to look for work by handing in your CV the Job Centre are like 'That's not good enough you have to look online'. But you know there is nothing available online because you have looked and let's face it if you have a shop or a fish and chip place or that would you advertise a job? Online? No fucking way. You would put a notice in the window or employ someone that you know not online. But the job centre say that is not good enough and you can't look for work that way. So they make you just sit and look online like a fucking idiot just because there is physical proof that you have done it. They are the fucking idiots.

The majority of the young people who took part in the study who had been to the job centre told us that that beside knowing that they had to go there to sign on, they had gone there originally to get help in looking for a job, but that their expectations had not been met. The young people interviewed said that the job centre staff were just there to get them to sign on and 'police' the hours that they had spent online looking for work, and did not have time to help them. For example, Julie (17) explained how she felt:

The way that it feels walking into the job centre is that you are there to do what you are told to do and that's it and then you leave. They are not there to actually help you it is just like, you have to do this and if you don't do this or you won't get no money. We are not

going to help you if you don't do this for us – it's not like they are there to actually help you.

Other examples included amongst many others:

Dominic (23) who said:

It would be nice to work with people that aren't as fed up with their jobs as they are at the job centre – you ask them at the job centre – you ask them for advice or help and they are just complete Dickheads. They are just too busy, they are not all Dickheads. But some of them are like this one ... They made me go in and I have to go in there every day and I missed one appointment in like 50 days and I was half an hour late and they were like I can't do anything about it and I was like you can because you have done it for other people you are just being a [.....] and just because you are having a bad day.

Ade (22) stated:

To be honest if they (in the job centre) are having a bad day they just take it out on everyone else it would be good if the staff actually gave a shit and understood what it is like. Now all they are interested in is getting you to sign and get out.

Tom (23) suggested that:

When you do see your adviser they can only see you for 5 minutes and they are not interested in you and the job centre is too busy and they tell you that they are understaffed and too busy to help you. If you are not doing enough to meet your job seekers' agreement they won't help you they just tell you that you aren't doing enough – get out! They don't help you and then you just get sanctioned.

This lack of help and support was a key factor, many young people felt, in young people not going to the job centre, or just going there to sign on and leave as depicted in the accounts above. It was a point well illustrated by David (20) who said:

The job centre is nearly empty now because people think there is no pointing going there because they are more interested in saving money than helping people especially unemployed homeless people. I remember going there and there would be twenty or thirty people waiting to sign on but you don't get that now people have given up going there. You only get 100 pound a fortnight and people can't live on that and so they don't go there besides all they do is sanction you anyway.

Similarly, Cathy (17) who lived in a hostel and had been unemployed for 18 months told us:

I think that that is the main thing that everyone hates about the job centre is that they are there because they are paid to be there not because they want help you and they are like 'well if I do this then I am going to get my money'.

For young people with a learning disability, from the participants' accounts the job centre process could be especially difficult if they did not have some help. As Darren (23) said:

My friend he had dyslexia and he went to the job centre and they expected him to fill out this form and know what it said and everything and he didn't so they decided like to sanction him so my mum went down with him and sorted it out which just proves that the job centre don't really help.

5.2 GETTING SANCTIONED

The participants who had experience of the job centre all articulated that, in their opinion, the job centre staff were more interested in 'sanctioning' them rather than helping them, and that sanctions had very serious repercussions for the young people that they were imposed on.

Harry (19) said:

The Job Centre staff just love being in control of your money and knowing that they can get it stopped and sanction you so you don't get nothing.

There were many examples in the data of young people saying that they felt that they had had a legitimate reason for missing or being late for an appointment, but that often the job centre staff did not listen. Michael's (18) account was a typical example of this:

I am sanctioned at the moment because I was at college and I missed an appointment – so they stopped my money. It went to head office but they did not accept it but I was at Lowestoft doing a charity thing – a Princes Trust event setting up a youth centre for younger kids. But I really do want to work. I know that there's loads that don't want to work and they are happy to just sit around and not work and drink alcohol and do drugs and that but I really do want to work.

Similarly, in Soho's (23) narrative she told us:

I have an appointment at the job centre on Monday and I went and she wasn't there, so I went on Tuesday and she wasn't there and again on Wednesday and I went again this morning and I am just told that she wasn't there and no one else can help me. Every day I have been told that she was not there and now I will get sanctioned and it is not my fault. So my 50 pounds will be stopped and I have to pay my rent and I won't be able to so I'll get kicked out and end up homeless again just because she was not there.

5.3 WEBSITES/ONLINE

The participants emphasised time and time again that the job centre and JSA process was based on the amount of time they evidenced searching for jobs online via Universal Job Match. Not only did they think that this was largely a waste of time and not an effective way of finding a job but they also often found the sites hard to use. Recent changes in the online access had also caused additional frustration, as Holly (18) explained:

When you walked in they [JCP] had machines and they were touch screen and you would choose but they have got rid of all the job search machines so now you have to use a computer but often they are all full so you can't get on one so it's really hard. You have to sign in to Gateway and then you have to pick what sector you want.

Some young people who participated in the study did not understand what 'sector' was the most relevant one for them.

David (20) said:

You look on the job website and every single website has got the same vacancies advertised so it's pointless. There are even old jobs still on there that are no longer available. It's pointless. It takes a few minutes to look at all the job websites and you can see that there is nothing available but yet you have to spend hours and hours and hours just pointlessly looking at the websites.

Bob (19) suggested that:

The internet is so slow in most places that I am surprised that anyone even bothers to try to use it. Most people just have to hang around outside McDonald's just to get Wi-Fi but then half the time your phone won't work with the job search websites so it's no good.

Dawn (18) had been unemployed for 2 years and had never been to the job centre. She had looked online but found it too hard to find anything:

I don't know I just don't understand it is really confusing not knowing where to look and all the different places – I get lost.

Ben (18) had been unemployed for 2 years and like Dawn's observation above, and many others in the study, he found the various websites confusing and suggested that they should be collated effectively on to one site that was straightforward to use:

It is like all over the place all the jobs are spread out over all these different websites, I personally think that it would be better if they just created just one website with all the jobs on that would be easy to use with every job there.

Just as the lack of response from giving out CVs was frustrating for young people who were unemployed, so was the lack of response or feedback from the online applications they submitted through websites of Universal Job Match. This was exemplified by Jo (17) whose account illustrates what many young people told us:

There's a few websites that people tell you about and I try there but they aren't very good and very slow and you apply for like loads of stuff but no one ever gets back to you or nothing even to tell you that they don't want you.

This lack of feedback and lack of response made them feel that the process was 'even more of a waste of time' or a 'pointless exercise'.

5.3.1 UNIVERSAL JOB MATCH

Whilst many young people talked in general terms about 'applying online' or 'using websites', many spoke specifically about Universal Job Match and the problems that they had using it. For example, Michael (18) told us:

I've been unemployed for 6 months – it's hard – I did 2 months voluntary work for [...]. I'm registered as NEET; I left school at 15 and have had three years of no work. I'd do anything really but I have to do job search all the time on universal job match and I apply for about 15 jobs a week but on a phone it is really stressful as it does not work well and every time you click on something it takes you to a different page and you have to upload your CV onto universal job match but then when you find something it takes you to a different page so you can't upload your CV. Or you have to go to the library or something but there's no one to help you.

Cathy (17) told us:

Yes it [Universal Job Match] is really bad 'cos you do like a search and put in what you want and the area and it only gives you a few things and then you put in Lowestoft and then you have to go through all these different categories and that. So you can find the job you want to do but there is nothing in Lowestoft or nearly so it's pointless. You need something that employers will advertise jobs on and everyone should know about it.

When asked who helped them, many young people said that they did not have anyone to help them look for work. They often used a pay-as-you-go mobile phone to access Universal Job Match on account of a lack of accessibility to other modes of internet access, but said that it was very difficult to use as the site kept opening up new pages on the mobile phone, which threw them off the site.

Tom (23) said:

In a new centre it would be important to have Wi-Fi and internet access – you have to save your search on Universal Job Match but normally if you do it on your phone your phone just fucks it up anyway and your search is not saved. I did like a whole two weeks job search on there with my phone but it was not recorded. It is not designed properly to work with phones.

5.4 INFORMATION

The majority of the young people we spoke to did not know what was currently available in Lowestoft to help young people find work. Unless we had contact with them through organisations or training providers, the young people who we spoke to were generally unaware of the availability of support other than JCP and did not know which organisations provided training in Lowestoft. Often if they had heard of the organisations, they had a misconception about the services provided, or felt that they would be judged or stigmatised if they went there. Certainly the perception of those whom we spoke to who were not accessing any support from training providers or other organisations was that there was nothing to help them and that there were no jobs anyway.

Michael (18) felt that no one told young people about the services available to them, and he said that this was often discovered by ‘*word of mouth from your mates*’.

Those that had received support were, without exception, very positive about the support they had received, and some had been to a number of different training providers in Lowestoft. A few said that they had been signposted on to some training courses by other support services, and it is worth noting here that the experiences of those who had received support by employment training providers were all discussed in very positive terms, and those young people who had access to services appreciated the support they were given.

Joshua (22) said:

The LEAP are good they will help you.

Harry (19) was also grateful for support he had received from the Bridge View Centre. He had been homeless for 6 months and finally went there:

I was on the verge of killing myself and a lot of other people and I went to Bridge View and I told them I was going to kill myself and others too and within two days they found me a place at the hostel.

Zara (19) felt that she had been lucky in being offered support and reckoned that this was because she had a baby. People had therefore been very helpful in telling her where she could go to access further training opportunities and support, but she felt that for young people without a baby the information was hard to find:

There is support but you have to find it yourself it was easier for me as I have a baby so people would signpost me where to go but for other people you have to go out of your way and look.

However, whilst those who had received support viewed it as helpful and positive, the view expressed by most was that whilst there were some training opportunities available there was ‘no point doing it as there were no jobs anyway’.



Photograph: ‘We go to the library a lot especially in the winter. We spend loads of time there looking for jobs’ (Mickey, 17).

Both Will (17) and Mickey (17) amongst others said they spent a lot of time in the library. Mickey (17) stated that:

there’s nowhere else to go so we go to the library a lot – at least it is out of the cold.

But as Angel (19) pointed out:

the problem is that the library is like supposed to be a quiet place to go and so you can’t for help or talk to someone who can give you help. It is variable where you can go sometimes the library is Ok but other times you can get thrown out of the library.

5.5 BEING JUDGED

Another main theme to emerge from the analysis of the data was ‘being judged’. Fifty of the 52 young people who took part in the study talked about this, and to them it was an important factor for not only how they felt about being unemployed in Lowestoft but also for accessing different types of support. A number of young people in the study said that they did not go to the job centre because they did not want to be seen or judged as ‘unemployed’ even though they were, and that they often associated different places and organisations with different factors, or with various degrees of ‘stigma’. It should be remembered in these accounts that they reflect the personal opinions of the participants, and are given here as an example of their perceptions of various services and places; they are not included as a form of criticism in the report. One example was given by Michael (18) about why he did not want to go the Junction:

But like the Junction you wouldn’t want to go there would you? I mean people would look at you funny if you went there. It is where people go with drug problems and sex problems and that so I wouldn’t want to be seen going there.



Photograph: 'I have been there but not because I am unemployed they help young people but not because you are unemployed' (Mickey, 17).

Kelly (17) said:

When I first started coming here to Life Skills people didn't realise that it had changed and they thought I was all about naughty people and that and they thought I was like that too 'cause no one knew it had changed. I don't want people thinking that I am like one of those drop outs.



Photograph: 'I think they help people to find jobs who have come from youth offending – I don't want people to think that's me' (Dominic, 23).

5.6 LACKING EXPERIENCE

Young people in Lowestoft talked in some detail about the problem with not having had any previous experience, which is something they felt employers were looking for.

Dawn (18), for example, told us:

It's impossible – no one will employ you 'cos you don't have experience but you can't get experience 'cos no one will employ you.

Nicole (18) similarly explained:

It is really hard though because there are very few jobs available and the few that there are they say that they want experience. But at our age we have not got any experience so no one will employ us. We are too young and have no experience I think that local employers should give young people the opportunity to get some experience – proper work experience – unpaid but you would have to make sure that you did not lose your benefit – so that at least we could get some experience. Maybe then we could also prove that we can work and do a good job and they may see that and even employ us but at least you would have some experience and that. Then you can put it on your CV and people can see that you have got experience. I mean I don't know how to go about getting experience of working in a bar or that because people won't give you a chance.

Many young people also talked about their frustration about not being about to undertake voluntary work because they were frightened of getting sanctioned. Dale (23) provides a good illustration in his account of the 'catch 22' that many described in trying to get experience through voluntary work, but then running the risk of being sanctioned because they had not completed the compulsory 6 hours a day online job search in order to qualify for JSA:

What am I supposed to do? I have no experience so I need to get experience and in order to get experience I need to go and volunteer somewhere but I can't commit to volunteering somewhere as I have to do my 6 hours a day job search and if I don't I get sanctioned. But I need to get some experience to have it on my CV to stand any chance of getting a job but I can't get it because I have to sit on my arse at a screen and look for a job that I know is not there.

6. THE TYPES AND LEVELS OF SUPPORT UNEMPLOYED YOUNG PEOPLE WOULD LIKE TO BE ABLE TO ACCESS TO INFORM AN INNOVATIVE APPROACH TO TACKLING YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT

More important than any other factor, having a one-to-one support worker was by far the most valuable aspect of support that the young people who took part in the study wanted. Whilst they were very enthusiastic about the idea of a new employment centre for young people in Lowestoft, the idea of having someone to actually help them was far more important. Trust and empathy were fundamental concepts to the relationship they wanted with a support worker, and having someone who cared and understood their situation was crucial. They also felt that being able to get in touch with a support worker and talk to them was also key to developing an effective mechanism of support. The participants in the study also highlighted that having access to the internet and Wi-Fi was important to them as they had to spend so many hours online searching for a job to avoid having financial sanctions imposed on them, but that this was often hard to achieve if there was no access to internet other than via the library or JCP. The other types of support that emerged from the analysis of the data as important to the young people were money management advice and links to local businesses.

6.1 A SUPPORT WORKER

All 52 participants said that they would welcome the support of a one-to-one case worker. The lack of help they felt they had from the job centre was important to the conversation they had around what support they wanted. They all said they wanted to have the support of ‘*someone who actually wanted to help them*’. Many young people spoke of the importance of trust, and this was a key concept in most of the young people’s narratives. They wanted to be able to have someone to sit with them and help them look for jobs, to complete forms, to give them advice about what jobs to apply for, how to approach an interview, and what to wear. The majority of the young people who took part in the study felt ‘*let down*’ by their school, not just in poor educational achievement but in the overall lack of support and advice they had had.

Alna (17) claimed that:

We had no careers advice at school you just had teachers going on at you but at 14 you don’t know what you want to do, at 16 you don’t know what you want to do. I mean I’m 17 and I still don’t know what I want to do.

All the participants wanted someone to give them advice that they trusted. Both Will (17) and Mickey (17) were very enthusiastic about the idea of a new centre for young people in Lowestoft as they felt that the job centre was intimidating. They wanted help and advice for building up a CV and how to write an application, and they said that the staff would need to be professional, able to engage with young people on the right level, be friendly, and treat them with respect, and ‘*not always trying to undermine you*’.

Michael (18) also explained:

Computers and someone to help you – someone to help you use the computer – growing up was hard, I grew up rough and I didn’t have no one to help me and I didn’t have computers not Xboxes and stuff. Someone to help you would be good but you would have to get to know them and be able to trust them and know that they were there to help you and not try to just get at you and then sanction you and not listen to you. Someone to help you who would listen and try to help would be good. There ain’t no one who you can trust and see really – I go to Youth offending and they help me, they’ve known me since I was 13 and they help me.

Similarly for CJ (20), trust was very important in effective support:

It’s important that you feel like you have a bond with them – someone who understands you and understands your needs and what you need help with. It is important that you feel like you can trust them and it is important that they feel like they can trust you. You have to be able to get to know someone for that to happen. Trust is important. Then you could get on quite good and then you would be able with their help to find a job. They need to be kind and easy to talk to, polite and that’s about it really. If they are like that they you feel like you would be fine really.

In Angel’s (19) account, trust for him was key:

I have been in care since I was 9 so I have had loads of experience with support workers and the problem is that 6 months down the line they leave and go and get another job elsewhere and then all the trust goes and you have to start again so it would be important that you get the right staff who actually want to work with young people and actually want to help them find a job. If they left then I would want to make sure that they told the next support worker everything about me and what my strengths are and what my weaknesses are so that the new person would understand me and I was able to trust them.

Abbey (18) said:

Having staff that are approachable that you can actually trust is really important.

For many young people, including Chelsea (17), examples of broken trust were highlighted as reasons why they had not engaged with support services previously:

Trust is really important as once it is broken it is very hard to get back – I mean I was bullied at school which is why I had to leave and all my grades went to all A to crap basically and that is why my grades dropped and no one would listen to me and no one would help and that's why I am here and trying to find a job.*

Another key concept in the types of support young people wanted was empathy. They wanted people who actually understood their situation and who knew what it was like, or were prepared to listen to what it was like to be unemployed or homeless.

Dave (22) said: 'It would just be nice to have someone to talk to who knows what they are talking about', and David (20) told us: 'You need to have someone who understands what your situation is and what it is like to be unemployed'.

Some of the young people we spoke to suggested that it would be a good idea if there were a peer support network attached to a new service provision. It would be a good idea to have someone who had actually been in a similar situation, that is, unemployed or homeless as a mentor, or someone to advise young people who actually understood what they were going through.

The participants all thought that a one-to-one support worker was a very good idea. They spoke about the importance of being able to trust and rely on someone, and the importance of feeling valued. The most important aspect of the support discussed by the participants was the one-to-one support of a key worker and having someone who took the time to help you. This was seen by most participants as more important than the appearance of a new centre. They also wanted to be able to have careers advice and for the support worker to be knowledgeable as well as helpful.

Bob (19) said:

It would be good if they would bring in people that we could talk to about different careers as what you may be good at as there was nothing at school and nothing is available on careers advice at all. It's crap. What young people need – and not just me – is some good careers advice because most of the time young people don't know what is possible or what might be available – they just look in the high street and they can see there is no jobs so they just give up and say it is pointless. We need someone to give us hope and give us some good advice for different options and different careers instead of just thinking there is no point.

Darren (23) felt that the:

staff in there should be really knowledgeable about where to go to for advice because like the job centre will send you to loads of different places it is just having that knowledge there so that you can go there with this problem and they go 'ah you need to see this person and you need to go here'.

Mickey (17) thought:

It would be really good to have access to Broadband and the internet so you could look for jobs but also to have someone to help you use it and help you look.

Darren (23) said:

Friendly and nice and committed to sitting down and listening to you and properly trying to help you. Right now in Lowestoft you have lots of people giving employability advice. Loads of different places but they pretty much all use templates and that so you don't get something that is just for you and it is exactly the same as everyone else and that does not benefit you all. So if there was staff who would sit down with you and go rather than here is a generic thing that we just print out for everybody let's sit down with you and see what qualifications you have got, what your background is and what you want to do and actually create stuff that will actually doing something that will help you rather than just ticking boxes.

All the young people also emphasised many times that, whilst a one-to-one supportive relationship was really important, if you can't see your support worker, knowing someone else would also help was important as well. They said it was therefore essential that everyone working in this area should have the qualities necessary to communicate and work effectively with young people. They repeatedly talked about wanting to be treated with respect, and they wanted to be listened to and to be able to work with someone who actually cared about helping them find work.

6.2 COMMUNICATION

Not only did the young people emphasise the importance of having a supportive one to one relationship to help them find work but they also highlighted the importance of effective communication and being able to contact their support worker or someone similar, or 'get in touch' when they needed to. These suggestions often arose from the very negative experiences they had had trying to contact JCP.

Will (17) explained:

You need to be able to get in touch with people like with text or email or on Facebook not like it is now if you contact the job centre you cannot get through and if you can it takes forever and it costs a lot of money. I have been told by EE that I have gone over on my monthly amount a number of times now and it comes from trying to call the job centre on 0800. I have ADHD so I get so get some help with an allowance for independent living but it is not much and I need help sometimes but I can't get it from the Job Centre.

Christof (16) pointed out it would be good to be able to use Facebook to contact the new centre or a support worker via a message, and Jaydene (17) also told us:

My dad tried to get through to the Job Centre for hours and hours but it's like really important to be able to get in touch and talk to someone. I bet loads of time is wasted by people who can't get through having to go in just to get an answer to a simple question that's why young people get so frustrated and so pissed off. If you could call or text someone you would save some much time and people would be much happier then.

6.3 TECHNOLOGY

All the participants, without exception, said that internet access and Wi-Fi would be essential in a new centre. They were, however, all very concerned about having portable technologies as they felt they would get stolen.

Abbey's (18) point illustrates the viewpoints of many others:

It would be really important to have internet access and Wi-Fi available there. I mean I don't have access to the internet at home so I tend to go to Norwich to get the internet and

Wi-Fi because you feel a bit weird going round to someone's house going 'erm can I just use your Wi-Fi?'.

Many of the young people we have spoken to like the idea of being able to use laptops and tablets, but felt they would be 'nicked'. They also said that whilst they liked the idea of having a centre with computer access and a technology-rich environment, they all expressed a view that it was likely to be a target for burglary because '*this is Lowestoft and crime rates are high*'. This was a strong theme to emerge from the data. Internet access as provided through consoles and provided laptops was important but so was the provision of Wi-Fi. A few participants had internet-enabled Smartphones and could access Universal Jobmatch, but many could not and they wanted able to access the internet. When we talked about the possibility of having laptops to use, the reaction was surprise and slight shock as many participants reckoned they would get stolen or damaged. For example, Ben (18) said: '*But this is Lowestoft. They will get nicked*'. When asked to explain, he said:

There are a lot of thieves in Lowestoft and they would take advantage of that they would just go.

Darren (23) agreed, and told us that a centre where he goes to spend time has been robbed twice.

When we spoke to the young people about the levels of support that might be helpful for them, we talked to them about the support available at the MyGo centre and the facility to use laptops and/or post-PC tablets, and every young person in the Lowestoft study had a similar reaction. Dominic (23) was emphatic:

You are joking! This is Lowestoft – they will get nicked.

The data suggests that whilst they could see that having access to a laptop or tablet might be helpful in searching for a job, without exception the participants felt that this was not a good idea because of the perceived high levels of crime in Lowestoft.

Michael (18) said:

To be honest in Lowestoft how long is it going to be before it gets trashed and that? People in Lowestoft would trash it or steal the computers and stuff – they would sell them for drugs they would.

Jasmine (18) told us:

Laptops – great but would they trust us with them? I mean Lowestoft has a really bad name and it is a dodgy place. No one will give young people an opportunity here.

Other examples included Angel (19), who told us:

It would be risky, they would either get nicked or if you gave young people a laptop or a tablet they would just sell it straight away. It's Lowestoft you know.

Jadene (17) also said:

If you did that and gave people laptops you aren't ever going to see them again – this is Lowestoft you would never going to see them again ever.

Similarly Chelsea (17) commented:

But every time something good happens in Lowestoft which is like never it manages to get trashed. If you give people stuff like that it will just get stolen and that will be that. If some people round here that don't like something they will go and demolish it and they would

trash the laptops and that and it would spoil it for everyone else. Some people just want to kick off and they would sell stuff like that for drugs.

6.4 MONEY MANAGEMENT

When we asked young people what other support services would be helpful to them, more than half said that money management advice would be very welcome. For example, Joshua (22) said:

Money management advice is needed we really need that because no one tells young people how to manage money and then you get into debt and that and then you have to steal stuff to get by.

Tom's (23) account also echoes this:

Money and debt advice is important – that is a pretty good thing to offer – benefit advice and that also support for people who find forms difficult like for people with dyslexia that's important and I think like people in the job centre if you have dyslexia they just take the piss and that. The CAB won't even help you if you need help with a form and that, no one with help you.

Over half the participants said that information on financial matters would be helpful as they felt that they were not given advice on money management and lifestyle decisions. They also wanted to be able to access debt advice, as well as how to set up paying for bills and budgeting.

6.5 GOOD BUSINESS LINKS

Another matter that the participants felt important was better links with local businesses, and to get them to come to the new centre. For example, Chelsea (17) suggested:

I think what would be good would be if big companies would come in and talk to you and tell you what they are looking for and the sorts of things that you could be doing or working on to help you get into that sort of company or that sort of work.

7. YOUNG PEOPLE'S VIEWS ON POTENTIAL LOCATIONS FOR A YOUTH EMPLOYMENT CENTRE AND WHAT IT SHOULD LOOK AND FEEL LIKE IN ORDER TO PROVIDE A WELCOMING AND SUPPORTIVE ENVIRONMENT

We asked the participants about their views on a new employment centre for Lowestoft and had some photographs of the MyGo centre in Ipswich to use as visual prompts to facilitate the discussions. The majority of the young people wanted a new centre to be located in the centre near McDonald's, and did not want it located south of the bridge. They wanted the centre to have a modern, bright and fresh appearance and stated that having somewhere welcoming where they could 'hang out' was very important. Whilst the majority of the participants were not too concerned about the brand of the new centre, most wanted it to have a clear identity and for it not to be associated with existing organisations. It is worth noting, however, that many participants also pointed out that other changes would need to come about if the youth unemployment situation in Lowestoft were to be improved.

7.1 LOCATION



Photograph: ‘Don’t put it down the shitty end’ (Jasmine, 18).

‘Don’t put it down the “shitty end”’ was a typical response from the young people we spoke to, and nearly all the participants felt that a new youth employment centre needed to be located in the town centre and not down what was often described as the ‘scanky end’ of Lowestoft which, when we showed them a map of the town, was pointed out by all to be London Road South. All the participants said that this area of Lowestoft was strongly affiliated with drug dealing, crime and ‘getting attacked’, and they did not want to go there.

Harri (18) said of South of the Bridge:

Scanky town – that’s where all the junkies live.

Alna (17) was insistent that:

Outside KFC there’s all those flats and all those junkies hanging around and that. I won’t go there I won’t.

The majority of the participants felt that the new centre should be as central as possible and near McDonald’s, as Mickey (17) suggested:

Right in the centre would be good near McDonald’s in that area would be good so everyone would know where it is.

Ben (18) also told us:

Because everything is in the centre and there is nothing else further away and so for most things you have to come into town so you would want it to be there also and not travel out.

Dawn (18) also felt:

It’s important that it would be in the centre and everyone knows where everything is in the in town centre so you could just like say ‘it’s down near this shop or near this shop’.

Julie (24) expanded further and said that she would not walk too far:

People are like ‘oh my God there’s a bridge and I can’t possibly cross a bridge’ – I know that sounds really lazy but that’s what people are like. Well I mean to be on the town centre is important ‘cos I’m fairly lazy and I couldn’t be bothered to walk very far so for me I would want it to be in the centre. There is not much over that side of the bridge anyway so even if you lived that side you have to come into the town anyway.

However, it was also pointed out by some that the area near McDonald's and the High Street (London Road North) also became undesirable after 5.00 p.m., with street drinkers and other young people '*hanging around*', and that they would not want to be in the town centre after that time.

Will (17) had recently moved from the south side of the bridge to the north side, and said that in his opinion there were definitely more opportunities on the north side of the bridge and that on the south side it was more industrial and that:

there are nastier people on the other side like druggies and in [name of road] there are lots of druggies and I stay away from people like that. I mean I used to have some friends and they started smoking weed and that and even doing crystal meth so I just like cut them off because I don't want to get involved with stuff like that so I keep away from them.

We also talked about other potential locations in Lowestoft, one of which was the Marina Centre and still central, but most participants felt that it '*wasn't very nice*' (Bridget, 20).



Photograph: 'No it's too out of the way there. No one would be able to find it and the McDonald's end is better. Much better. Everyone knows where it is' (Lee, 18).

7.2 WHAT IT SHOULD LOOK LIKE

The young people thought the photos we had of the MyGO centre in Ipswich showed that it had an attractive appearance, and that such a centre would be good in Lowestoft.



Photograph: 'The MyGo Centre in Ipswich'.

There was no clear consensus about what the young people who took part in the study wanted the outside of the building to look like – they felt that many of the buildings in Lowestoft were run down and decrepit, and that it would be nice to have somewhere to go that looked ‘smart’ from the outside. We showed them the photograph above and asked the young people what a new centre in Lowestoft should look like. When we asked them about the inside of the new centre, the words most commonly used to describe what it should look like were: ‘*bright*’, ‘*modern*’, ‘*fresh and colourful*’.

Ben (18) said:

It needs to be like modern and clean and not scruffy but nice and modern is important I think. A nice place to go.

Cathy (18) stated that:

‘You need to something nice to look at and not have to stare at the floor’.



Photograph: ‘The Outside of the MyGo Centre Ipswich’.

We showed the participants the photograph above to facilitate a conversation about the outside appearance of the new centre. Most felt that it should have a clear identity and be easily accessible, and liked the idea of a ‘*shop front*’, however, Darren (23), did not like the idea of people being able to see in and see what you were doing:

It needs to have a welcoming appeal and I personally feel that not having a shop front would be good as if you are in there and like at the computer then everyone could look in and see what you are doing. I would rather it was more private and not so everyone could see in from the street.

7.3 SOMEWHERE TO ‘HANG OUT’

The point made in the first section of this report, that in their view the young people had nothing to do, is important for understanding what they wanted from the new centre, and for their feeling that they should have somewhere to ‘*hang out*’. All the young people who took part in the study said that because there was nothing to do in Lowestoft and nowhere to ‘*hang out*’, it would therefore be important that a new centre had a social aspect and a friendly space where you could just be and ‘*hang out*’ if you wanted to.

Chelsea (17) said:

It is important that Lowestoft has somewhere for us kids to go and somewhere that would help us find a job. It would be nice if it was new and smart but nowhere in Lowestoft is like that so it might get trashed but it would be nice if it did look good.

Bob (19) stated that:

It is important that young people have somewhere to go and hang out rather than not just sit at home and get frustrated and depressed and that.

CJ (20) also emphasised the importance of having a friendly space where people could go and just have a chat and get support to relieve the isolation and stress of being unemployed.

When you get older people leave town and you end up getting bored and people end up frustrated and getting into fights and that because they get stressed and unhappy because you don't have a job.

Angel (19) had been to Suffolk Young People's Health Project (4YP) in Ipswich as he felt that having somewhere to go had really helped him and his friends, and because they had had somewhere to go they had stayed out of trouble:

There is a great place in Ipswich – 4YP – you need a 4YP in Lowestoft – that is what they need in Lowestoft as in Ipswich I have a lot of friends who were let's just say on the rough side and they used to get into loads of trouble and get arrested and that and they started going to 4YP because it was a place that you could go and hangout so your weren't on the street and getting into trouble so in a centre here you need somewhere you could go and have a game of pool or play on the Xbox and just relax a bit.



Photograph: 'I think it is really important to be able to get a cup of tea. That looks lovely – much nicer than anything in Lowestoft. That would be lovely' (Lee, 18).

We showed the participants the photograph above taken in the MyGo centre in Ipswich, and all the young people liked the idea of having somewhere where you could get a drink in the new centre. Like having somewhere to 'hang out', they felt that this would be an important social aspect.

7.4 BRAND

Overall, the participants in the study did not seem too concerned with regard to the brand of a new centre, although they did, however, think it was important that it was 'new' and not opened under an existing name like, for example, 'The Junction'. All the participants in the study were far more concerned that when they walked through the door there would be someone there who genuinely wanted to help them find a job and treated them with respect than with what the centre looked like.

Nicole (18) agreed that:

It should have some new branding so that people don't judge you and think you have done something wrong but it would be better if people saw that you were going somewhere because you are trying to make something of your life and you are trying to improve yourself.

7.5 FINALLY

Whilst all the participants in the study welcomed the idea of having a new employment centre for young people in Lowestoft and felt that it was very much needed, and that having access to a support worker would really help them, they all expressed their concerns that something else would also need to be done if things were really going to improve.

Juliette's (24) quote sums up the main findings of this report, and the views of the young people who spoke to us of their experiences and gave their views:

Yes it sounds fantastic and Lowestoft desperately needs a centre to help young people find work and that would be amazing but you know what? They need to do something about Lowestoft itself. You need to improve the schools as a starting point so that people can actually get a good education and get some qualifications and it's no good putting in a new centre to help young people find work if you are not actually doing anything about the town itself because if there aren't any jobs there's no point. It is still going to be a dead end. You can put in a new centre but if there aren't any jobs there's no point.