Young people and progression in rural Suffolk: a report for the Seckford Foundation

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Executive summary

A growing bank of research evidence about Suffolk suggests it is a place of hidden need where great advantage sits alongside disadvantage and where inequality in life chances is increasing. By drawing on sophisticated statistical analysis and interviews with young people and professionals, the research examines the experiences of young people as they attempt to negotiate the transition from secondary education to higher education and employment. It goes beyond what was previously known about progression for young people in rural Suffolk and focusses on what might practically be done given the current funding context. The research reveals that educational and income deprivation appear the largest barriers to progression. While accessibility for young people in rural areas remains an issue those not experiencing deprivation are more able to surmount accessibility difficulties. The research also suggests that the resilience of Suffolk’s young people, and the county’s range of community and voluntary sector organisations point to ways forward in improving progression. While some young people in the county live with disadvantage, some appear to be developing a set of capabilities to cope with and surmount it. The report suggests what Suffolk’s community and voluntary sector organisations might consider doing to build on/foster these capabilities. A key element of this is sharing some of the resources in the county that help advantaged young people with those disadvantaged.

Key Findings

- 36 per cent of young people in Suffolk progress to higher education (HE) – comparable to rates regionally and nationally. However, when actual rates of participation are compared against expected rates the county does not appear to be fulfilling its potential. Over 20 per cent of rural wards in Suffolk are among the bottom 10 per cent in England in terms of the gap between expected and achieved rates of progression to HE.

- Disadvantage in rural areas is typically explained as a consequence of a lack of access to services and opportunities. However, our analysis finds that geographical accessibility is not in itself the most serious barrier to progression to higher education. In fact, rates of HE progression were higher in the most rural neighbourhoods than in other neighbourhoods. This reflects the fact that more rural neighbourhoods tend to be more affluent.

- Progression to HE is more strongly related to the relative income and educational deprivation of the neighbourhoods in which young people live than accessibility.
• Tackling accessibility issues is unlikely to be the most effective means for increasing HE progression in rural neighbourhoods. Instead, a broader perspective on young people’s needs is required.

• This is not to suggest that accessibility is irrelevant. Indeed, young people with limited financial support referred to accessibility problems. The issue is how low income and limited family resources compound accessibility problems in rural neighbourhoods. Seeking more tailored intervention to support particular young people - rather than seeking changes to more universal public transport – appears the most effective approach.

• Youth unemployment and economic inactivity in Suffolk are lower than average for England. Unemployment is lower in rural areas than in urban areas of Suffolk, but the rate of economic inactivity is higher. ‘Economic inactivity’ includes young people in education who are not in work or looking for work – and so, in the main, this finding reflects the higher HE progression rate in rural areas. However, economic inactivity also includes young people who, together with unemployed youth, can be considered ‘NEET’ (not in education, employment or training). The analysis suggests that, on this measure, 12 per cent of young people in rural areas are NEET.

• While rates of youth unemployment and economic inactivity in Suffolk are lower than national rates this should not be equated with affluence and financial security. Suffolk also has an established history of low wages and a relatively high rate of manual and low skilled jobs. Disadvantaged young people in the research spoke about local job markets being largely comprised of low skilled, low paid and unstable jobs.

• As with progression to HE, progression to employment for young people appears less influenced by accessibility and more closely related to income and educational deprivation in young people’s neighbourhoods.

• Some young people in the research suggested they had been discouraged by schools not addressing their learning needs and being too academically focused. Expectations for high grades at GCSE and A-levels and the prospect of accruing debt in higher education reportedly put some off from pursuing HE progression. A key theme was that school did not sufficiently prepare or support young people for entering employment.

• Education, income and accessibility issues were often combined and compounded disadvantage. Lack of qualifications alongside lack of accessible job opportunities represented a particular challenge. The need to cover transport and living costs
meant some young people had to work long part-time hours which, in turn, put pressure on their academic studies.

- The research highlighted young people living complex lives. While attempting to negotiate progressions to employment and education, at the same time as overcoming rural accessibility issues, some also had to manage poverty, family caring responsibilities, homelessness and mental health issues. These complex and compounding challenges resulted in young people having restricted access to opportunities and a sense of being ‘spatially locked-in’ and disconnected.

- By examining the experiences of young people who were able to negotiate successful progressions, the research highlighted the importance of ‘connectivity’ and ‘capability’. Connectivity includes physical access to opportunities but it also includes other factors which mediate the distance between young people and opportunities. The research identifies these as including: education, qualifications and employment skills; contacts and networks; and knowledge and motivation.

- Capability is required to overcome barriers to connectivity. Insofar as connectivity relates to social capital (the quality and type of relationships between social networks), ‘capability’ relates to cultural capital (the personal, non-financial assets that mediate social mobility). Capability then is the leveraging of cultural capital in order to identify and use the resources and opportunities required to foster aspiration and access opportunity. Young people in the study often expressed aspiration and self-determination but also doubt and powerlessness.

- Capability was fostered by: family support (financially but also in terms of knowledge transfer, brokering contacts and emotional support); progression tutors in school; youth and community organisations; peer-to-peer support; and the development of personal skills, such as time management and securing a driving licence.

**Recommendations**

The research highlights the need for improved educational outcomes for children and young people in Suffolk, and measures to better tackle income deprivation. However, there are also more immediate and practical actions that should be explored. These actions avoid calling for substantial new resources in a period of austerity and instead focus on enhanced practice and more efficient use of existing community resources. Our recommendations are as follows:

1. Parish Councils and community organisations devise strategies to halt and reverse the trend of declining youth provision in rural areas, with an emphasis on making creative use of existing provision. This might include developing the
county’s arts and sports infrastructure through better collaboration between public, private and commercial organisations.

2. Existing charities promote local employers and professionals giving talks in schools to broaden aspirations. Key business organisations might expand on the work of charities such as Speakers for Schools which already do this, adding their knowledge of Suffolk’s economy and existing concrete opportunities. This activity requires school-to-school co-ordination which might be informed and perhaps even spearheaded by Suffolk’s key business organisations including Chambers of Commerce, the Institute of Directors, the Federation of Small Businesses and Suffolk Agricultural Association. Such organisations, along with schools and the voluntary sector, are important in sharing expertise and networks to help connect young people to jobs, training and careers knowledge.

3. Outreach activities by Higher Education Institutions (HEI) and other organisations should take account of the particular challenges facing young people in rural areas and develop best practice to support increased and sustained HEI participation rates among young people. The new Network for East Anglian Collaborative Outreach is a £9m regional consortium aiming to double the proportion of disadvantaged young people entering higher education by 2020. Such best practice would be instructive in its work.

4. There is a pressing need to develop an overarching and integrated apprenticeship and higher apprenticeship strategy for the county. This could be constructed through collaboration between employers organisations such as the New Anglia Local Enterprise Partnership, regional Higher Education institutions, voluntary sector initiatives such as the Seckford Springboard and Community Action Suffolk’s ‘Mind the Gap’ and Suffolk County Council’s Apprenticeship Suffolk programme

5. Support should be made available to local community groups and Parish Councils to facilitate an audit of transport issues and options for bespoke and efficient alternatives. Again, overarching co-ordination of this planning will be key. Local community groups and Parish Councils could facilitate this audit with disadvantaged young people looking to access education and/or job opportunities in mind. This would expand/add to existing community transportation schemes in a context where the research notes infrequent and costly public transport appearing to further disadvantage young people in rural areas experiencing socioeconomic inequality.
6. There should be a review of currently available and new, possible micro-financing and affordable-credit schemes, with a focus on schemes to achieve the sustainable affordability of transport for young people and their families in rural Suffolk.
1. Introduction: young people and progression in rural Suffolk

This report investigates progression to employment and higher education for young people in rural Suffolk. The research evidence suggests that Suffolk is a place where advantage sits alongside disadvantage. This produces a range of ‘hidden needs’ and inequalities in the life chances of young people (Smith and Dogaru 2016). The issues were considered at a summit of voluntary organisations in October 2016 – the ‘Flourish’ conference – convened by the Seckford Foundation, Suffolk Agricultural Association, Suffolk Community Foundation and Community Action Suffolk. The summit gathered in response to increasing levels of deprivation and unmet need in rural Suffolk. It highlighted the key role of voluntary organisations in tackling these issues and, among other things, the need to better mobilise existing provision and networks in order to shape more effective and strategic solutions.

Within this context, this new research - commissioned by the Seckford Foundation - provides fresh insights into the issues facing disadvantaged young people in rural Suffolk. It shows a complex picture of multiple barriers to a positive pathway to progression affecting disadvantaged young people. The analysis suggests some young people are leading complicated lives involving factors including providing care/financial support to their families, low wages, high transport costs, insecure housing and personal health issues. Importantly, however, it also shows young people’s drive, resilience and skills amidst adversity in seeking out successful progression. Other young people appear to benefit from financial, family and community support and a positive experience of school. Our analysis suggests that change may be possible by drawing both on the drive of young disadvantaged people, and by opening up the networks and resources in the county that advantaged young people appear to be benefitting from. Communities and the Third Sector have a crucial role here.

Objectives and context

The Seckford Foundation promotes and supports the education and care of the young and elderly throughout rural Suffolk. To mark its 500th anniversary, and as part of its mission to support young people to achieve their potential, the Foundation commissioned the University of Suffolk to investigate the experiences of young people in their attempts to negotiate the transition from secondary education to both employment and higher education. The objectives of the research were to:
1. identify the relative rates of progression to higher education and employment among young people in rural Suffolk;

2. explore the factors which mediate progression in these areas;

3. develop targeted strategies to address specific obstacles to progression, in collaboration with stakeholders

The challenge in researching progression for young people in rural areas in Suffolk is two-fold. Firstly, Suffolk is a county of hidden needs. The county as a whole has lower rates of multiple deprivation than England, with large parts of the county having better rates for progression into higher education and employment than average for England (Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission, 2016). However, looking beneath aggregate, county-wide statistics, there is much variation across local areas – and the county includes some of the most deprived neighbourhoods in England. Deprivation and unmet need become harder still to identity in rural neighbourhoods. Statistical analysis defines areas in terms of headcount (rather than geographically) and rural areas represent households dispersed over a wide space. While average deprivation in a particular area might be low, this can often obscure the reality of deprivation within that area, with disadvantaged households living alongside affluent households.

Secondly, the quality of evidence regarding how to improve pathways to progression for young people in rural areas remains limited. Research on rural areas¹ in the UK suggests that young people face additional obstacles to education and employment opportunities such as but not limited to:

- infrequent and costly public transportation,
- low aspirations,
- extra living costs,
- difficulties in obtaining affordable housing,
- limited training opportunities,
- a narrow range of jobs available, often concentrated in low paid occupations and employing people on a temporary or casual basis, and

¹ CRC, 2006; Midgley and Bradshaw, 2006; Burgess, 2008; Glendinning et al., 2008; Taylor 2008; Spielhofer et al., 2011; Matthews et al., 2009; Culliney, 2014.
the need to have family and community contacts to find work.

Within Suffolk, there has been some recent research focusing on youth progression in market towns such as Lowestoft\(^2\). While the availability of public transportation and the distance needed to travel to connect to opportunities may be less of an issue in these market towns, they are also places where disadvantaged young people reported being isolated and caught between low educational qualifications, high rent, low pay and limited job opportunities. This limited the extent and scope of their opportunities to progress. In addition to educational inequalities, the research also points to limited aspirations among disadvantaged and less well connected young people. Raising aspirations requires developing realistic and identifiable pathways to sustainable and enriching progression opportunities. Without these, aspirations will not be raised or can seem unrealistic.

A key context for research on youth progression in Suffolk is the deepening educational deprivation the county over the last decade (Smith and Dogaru, 2016). One of the sharpest increases in relative deprivation over the last five years relates to educational outcomes. Suffolk is behind the Eastern region and England in the proportion of children achieving five A*-C grades. Using the broader measure of educational deprivation (including GCSE results, Key Stage 2 results, and school attendance and progression rates), 8 per cent of rural neighbourhoods in Suffolk are among the 10 per cent most deprived neighbourhoods in England. Children from poor households fare worst. Only 33 per cent of children eligible for free school meals attained five good grades compared with 70 per cent overall. Six per cent of young people in the county do not progress to any formal education, training or work.

In terms of labour market opportunities, Suffolk enjoys low unemployment. However, compared regionally and nationally, fewer people work in managerial and professional jobs and more are employed in less skilled and elementary occupations. Wages in the county have remained persistently lower than average wages regionally and nationally for more than the last decade. This combination of low pay and limited opportunity for career progression fuels sustained in-work poverty and can represent an obstacle for young people’s social mobility.

At the same time, the continuing roll-out of austerity measures mean that large scale infrastructural spending to transform education, labour markets and deprivation seems unlikely in the foreseeable future. As the Flourish summit highlighted, strategic change in

\(^2\) Gartland 2014; Bond, Manning and James 2015
this context needs to be designed on the basis of creative and efficient ways of working. Consequently, this report focuses on the concepts of ‘capability’ and ‘connectivity’ to suggest a way of thinking about change that may be practical for services, communities, families and young people.

**Connectivity and capability**
The French sociologist Manuel Castells contrasted the circumstances of those with advantage and disadvantage when analysing global society. He distinguished the two through reference to the networks the advantaged could connect to when compared to those disadvantaged. The advantaged had access to ‘flows of capital, flows of information, flows of technology flows of organisational interaction, flows of images, sounds and symbols’ (Castells, 2010:57). Castells contrasts this with the networks of the disadvantaged, who have constrained opportunity to communicate, innovate, produce, consume and move. In our context, those who are advantaged or disadvantaged have differing abilities to connect and to achieve positive pathways to progression because of such networks. David Harvey (2006), an influential geographer and anthropologist, observes how the ability to connect is not only about distance but about the institutions, technology, transportation and wealth resources that allow distance to shrink for some and not for others. In this report, ‘connectivity’ also goes beyond issues of locality and physical access and further describes the function of accessing opportunities through networks and resources.

The report also refers to ‘capability’. Developed by the economist Amartya Sen (2001), this refers to a person’s ability to be or do something, often amidst adverse circumstances. In this research, capability refers to how young people develop skills sometimes through the adverse challenges they face which help them achieve the life and outcomes they value. In this sense, capability is required to overcome barriers to achieving connectivity. Resilience is a key element of ‘capability’ but while resilience refers to the qualities and emotional strength helping young people to adapt and surmount the negative risks and barriers they face (Gallagher et al., 2016), capability goes beyond this. Capability is about the skills young people develop, which can be fostered through connectivity to resources and networks that open opportunities and build aspiration.

**About the research**
The research combined quantitative and qualitative analysis. The quantitative work analysed data from three sources: various datasets produced by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE); 2011 Census; and the English Indices of Deprivation 2015. These statistics provide an overview of the rates of progression to higher education
and employment among young people in rural Suffolk, and give insight into the factors which mediate progression. The qualitative research involved talking with young people to gain understanding about how they experienced progression – particularly looking at what supported their progression, what obstacles they faced, and if and how they negotiated these obstacles. Thirty young people, aged between 17 and 19 were interviewed; this included 16 young men and 14 young women. All lived in rural towns and villages in Suffolk. None of the young people were in higher education. Fifteen were in part-time work while also in sixth form or further education. Eleven were in sixth form or further education colleges and not in any form of paid work. Four were not in employment, education or training. The qualitative research also included five professionals in social care, youth work and educational roles, with job responsibilities relating to policy development or frontline work with young people.
2. Progression to higher education in rural Suffolk: the statistical evidence

This chapter provides an analysis of three issues. First, it identifies the proportion of young people in Suffolk who progress from secondary education to higher education, and how this varies across different areas. Second, it considers how the actual rates of progress to Higher Education (HE) in rural Suffolk compare with the rates that what we might expect, given their characteristics. Third, it examines the factors that mediate whether young people in rural Suffolk progress to HE. The analysis suggests that Suffolk is not fulfilling its potential in terms of the proportion of rural youth progressing to HE and that, while rural accessibility has an important effect, the chances of going on to university are more closely associated with local educational and income deprivation.

HE participation in rural Suffolk
Overall, current participation in higher education in the county is on a par with regional and national trends. An average of 36 per cent of young people progress to university. This is a comparable rate to the Eastern region and only a little short of the UK rate of 37 per cent. Young people in rural areas are much more likely to enter higher education than their urban counterparts. Participation rates average 40 per cent in rural wards compared with 31 per cent in urban ones.

The map below shows the proportion of young people progressing to Higher Education in different wards across Suffolk. Wards with the lowest rates of progression are shown in red; those with the highest rates are in green with those in the middle of the distribution are grey.
This map reveals a complex geographical picture of HE participation. Wards where there are low participation rates tend to be clustered together and concentrated, as apparent around Waveney and Forest Heath. This might suggest that barriers to higher participation are related to geographical location. However, other areas of low participation are situated amidst areas of higher participation. For example, Wickham Market has a participation rate of 27 per cent, but it is surrounded by wards with much higher participation rates ranging from 35 to 61 per cent. As such, it would appear that factors other than geographical location are also in play in mediating progression.

**Actual versus ‘expected’ progression**

One of the methods HEFCE uses to assess progression is to compare the proportion of young people in an area who actually progress to university with the proportion of people who might be expected to go, given the characteristics of that ward. Expected rates of progression are modelled based on ward-level statistics of Key Stage 4 results and ethnicity. This modelling is based on cohorts of young people aged 18 in maintained schools in 2006-2007 and 2010-2011.
Using this method, our analysis found that in more than half of wards – 54 per cent - in Suffolk, fewer young people progressed to HE than might be expected. In the remaining 46 per cent, the progression rate was the same as or better than the expected rate. This gap in expectation was smaller in rural wards than urban wards but still the majority of rural wards fell short of expectation. That is, fewer-than-expected young people progressed in HE in 56 per cent of urban wards compared with 52 per cent of rural wards. Of these, some wards fell only a little short of expected progression rates but for others the gap between expected and achieved rates was substantial.

To illustrate this, wards across England were ranked in order based on the size of the gap in each ward between expected and actual HE participation. If Suffolk had, on average, the same sized progression gaps as the rest of England we would expect to see, for example, 10 per cent of Suffolk wards among the 10 per cent of wards in England with the biggest progression gaps. However, the analysis found that Suffolk was over represented among the worst performing wards in the country. That is, 22 per cent of the county’s wards are among the 10 per cent of wards in England with the worst participation gaps. There is a relatively small difference between Suffolk’s rural and urban wards on this measure. Some 23 per cent of urban wards fall in the bottom 10 per cent in the country, with rural wards not far behind at 21 per cent.

Some rural wards in Suffolk exceed expectation. For example, Boxford and Bures St Mary in Babergh, Debenham and Thurston-Hessett in Mid Suffolk, and Nacton in Suffolk Coastal all combine being in the highest quintile for participation in higher education with having higher than expected HE participation. Conversely, rural wards around Brandon in Forest Heath combine being in the lowest quintile for participation rates in HE with having lower than expected HE participation. Overall for rural areas in Suffolk, while more young people progress to university than their urban counterparts, this analysis suggests that they are nonetheless falling short of fulfilling their potential.

It is likely that many young people will have decided not to progress to HE. However, University of Suffolk statistics suggest that many others who do not progress to higher education have, at an earlier point, considered doing so. These statistics concern those who applied to the University in 2016, were offered a place but then declined it. Of these, 24 per cent did not then go on to any other higher education institution in that academic year. This may include young people who do not achieve requisite grades and return to re-take exams with a view to re-applying the following year. But it is also likely to include young people who
do not go on to progress to higher education. The fact that this will be young people who had gone as far as to make an application and receive an offer reiterates the sense of an unfulfilled potential in the county.

Factors shaping HE participation
What factors mediate whether young people in rural Suffolk progress to university? To explore this, the analysis combined HEFCE data on progression with findings from the Government’s Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD). The IMD collates various national datasets to rank neighbourhoods in terms of their relative deprivation. It calculates an overall deprivation ranking for neighbourhoods, but this is developed from analysis from seven domains of deprivation relating to income, education, employment, barriers to housing and services, health and deprivation, crime, and the living environment. Of these, the analysis suggests that three domains are most helpful in understanding barriers to HE progression in Suffolk:

- income deprivation, measured in terms of the proportion of people in a neighbourhood who are claiming means-tested welfare benefits;
- educational deprivation, based on statistics related to Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 4 attainments (GCSEs or equivalent), secondary school absence, staying in education post-16 and entry to higher education
- the ‘barriers to services domain’ is based on road distances from neighbourhoods to post offices, primary schools, GPs and food shops and so provides a measure of geographical accessibility.

The research found that progression to HE was lowest in rural wards with the greatest income and educational deprivation. In sharp contrast, progression was highest in rural wards with the greatest deprivation in terms of barriers to services. As Table 1 below shows, in the 20 per cent most income deprived rural neighbourhoods, an average of 28 per cent progressed to HE; in the 20 per cent least income deprived, an average of 44 per cent progressed. The same pattern is true in terms of educational deprivation, but with a more extreme range: a smaller proportion from the most deprived areas progressed to HE, as did a much higher proportion from the least educationally deprived neighbourhoods. When it comes to distances to services, the 20 per cent of neighbourhoods most deprived in terms of geographical barriers saw an average of 45 per cent progression – more than average rate of HE progression in the least deprived neighbourhoods on this measure.
Table 1: Average rates of progression to HE by IMD indicators: rural neighbourhoods

*Source: IMD 2015*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quintile</th>
<th>Income</th>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Geographical barriers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Quintile 1 (most deprived 20%)</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quintile 2</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quintile 3</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quintile 4</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quintile 5 (least deprived 20%)</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Using an analytic approach termed multivariate regression analysis, the research was able to consider the *relative* effect of these three factors on HE progression. This analysis found that when rurality, income deprivation, education deprivation and accessibility and geographical barriers were taken together, the only statistically significant factor influencing HE progression is educational deprivation. To illustrate this, it is useful to consider Suffolk’s neighbourhoods divided into 10 groups or deciles, from the 10 per cent most educationally deprived to 10 per cent least educationally deprived. For each step up from the most to least deprived decile, participation in HE increases by 4.3 per cent.

In summary, growing up in a rural area no doubt has a role in shaping the chances of progression to HE – but it may in fact be as much a motivating factor as a barrier. This could be the case if, for example, lack of employment and career opportunity in remote rural areas limited progression choices for young people and propelled them towards university. The influencing potential of income and educational deprivation as barriers to HE are more clear cut. Growing up in a poorer neighbourhood, with relatively greater unemployment and in-work poverty, is likely to undermine chances of entering higher education. Growing up in an area with schools that achieve poorer outcomes is likely to have an even sharper impact on HE progression.
3. Progression to employment in rural Suffolk: the statistical evidence

This chapter investigates young people’s participation in the labour market in rural Suffolk, and compares this with urban areas. It reports that while youth unemployment is low in rural areas, a sizeable proportion of rural youth are disconnected from education and work. The chapter goes on to consider the factors mediating young people’s progression into employment. Mirroring findings in the previous chapter, progression to employment appears to be less influenced by rurality (geographical accessibility) and more closely related to the relative income and educational deprivation of young people’s neighbourhoods.

Unemployment and economic inactivity in rural Suffolk

This analysis focuses on young people aged 16 to 24 and draws on data from the 2011 Census and the Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD). Economic activity is defined as when a working-age person (over 16 years of age) is either in employment or unemployed but seeking employment. Working-age people who were not in employment and not actively seeking employment are classified as ‘economically inactive’.

As Table 2 below shows, the rates of young people in employment in Suffolk are comparable across rural and urban areas. Unemployment is lower in rural areas compared with urban areas, averaging 9 per cent in rural areas compared with 12 per cent in urban areas. However, the opposite is true for economic inactivity where rates are higher in rural areas.

Table 2. Youth economic activity in Suffolk (averages for wards)

| Source: Census 2011 |
|---------------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
|                     | All wards | Rural wards | Urban wards |
| Employment          | 62%       | 61%         | 62%           |
| Unemployment        | 10%       | 9%          | 12%           |
| Economic inactivity | 28%       | 30%         | 26%           |

Youth unemployment in Suffolk can be mapped and presented in Figure 3. This shows that some of lowest concentrations of unemployment are found in rural neighbourhoods – such as the neighbourhoods around Great Bricett in Mid Suffolk, with a rate of two per cent. The
heaviest concentrations are urban; for example, 40 per cent unemployment is to be found in one neighbourhood around Norwich Road in Ipswich.

**Figure 2. Unemployment rates among young people in Suffolk**

*Source: Census 2011*

Unemployment is clearly an important measure, but economic inactivity should not be overlooked. Young people defined as ‘economically inactive’ include different groups: young people in training or education (and not seeking work); those unable to work because of poor health or caring responsibilities; and ‘other’ – that is, young people who are not in education or training and not in work, looking for work or claiming benefits. This latter group represent young people who would appear disconnected from the education system and the world of work.
Table 3. Economic inactivity among young people (as a % of all young people in Suffolk)

*Source: Census 2011*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Overall</th>
<th>Rural wards</th>
<th>Urban wards</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In education</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Looking after home or family</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disability or poor health</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inactive ‘other’</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3 shows that most young people are economically inactive because they are in education. Reflecting findings in the previous chapter, this includes a greater proportion of young people in rural areas than in urban ones. While unemployment is higher in urban areas, these figures also show that the rate of the more disconnected ‘inactive other’ is comparable across rural and urban areas and may even be marginally higher in rural wards.

A broader understanding of disconnection is expressed in terms of categorisation of young people as ‘NEET’ – not in education, employment or training. An approximation of the rate of NEETs in Suffolk can be achieved by combining the number of unemployed young people together with that of the ‘inactive other’. Using this measure, wards in Suffolk include an average of 13 per cent NEET young people. The rate of NEET young people in urban areas is 14 per cent, slightly higher than the overall rate. The average NEET rate in rural wards is lower at 12 per cent, but the difference is not large. The fact that being out of work with no training or education profoundly risks the life chances of this NEET group makes this a matter of serious concern.

**Factors shaping participation in employment**

In order to consider the factors which mediate young people’s progression into work, the research looked at local employment rates in relation to local deprivation using the IMD. The overarching finding here is that not being in employment or education is associated with a range of dimensions of deprivation: income deprivation; educational deprivation; barriers to services; health deprivation; and poor housing conditions. Focusing on the key dimensions, Table 4 below shows that average rate of NEET young people decreases in more rural areas (neighbourhoods more deprived in terms of geographical barriers). The opposite is
true for income and educational deprivation: the rate of NEETs increases as areas become more deprived.

Table 4: Average rates of NEET (unemployed and economically inactive other) by IMD indicators: all neighbourhoods
*Source: IMD 2015; Census 2011*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quintile 1 (most deprived 20%)</th>
<th>Income</th>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Geographical barriers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quintile 2</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quintile 3</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quintile 4</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quintile 5 (least deprived 20%)</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Multivariate regression analysis was conducted here too to consider the *relative* effect of these three factors on progression to work. This found that if we consider unemployment specifically, both rurality and educational deprivation were found to be statistically significant: rurality lowered unemployment rates and educational deprivation increased them. Different dynamics are revealed when we consider NEET young people (unemployed plus economically inactive ‘other’). In this case rurality has a less influential role, educational deprivation remains significant and income deprivation becomes statistically significant. This can be interpreted to suggest that growing up in a rural area is not in itself a significant barrier to employment. Growing up in an area with schools that achieve poorer outcomes appears to be more influential in terms of youth unemployment. Growing up in a poorer neighbourhood, with relatively greater unemployment and in-work poverty, appears to be have a particular relevance to being NEET and disconnected from the world of work.
4. Barriers to progression: young people’s perspectives

The quantitative analysis found that young people in rural Suffolk were more likely to enter higher education than their urban counterparts but that, even so, not as many as might be expected followed this route. It also found that youth unemployment is lower in rural areas, but that 12 per cent of rural youth were not in education, employment or training. There were clear rural-urban differences. However, for progression to both education and training the analysis suggests accessibility seems less important as a factor than the relative educational and income deprivation of the neighbourhoods in which young people live. The qualitative research examined rural progression further by interviewing young people and professionals about their experiences. We talked with 30 young people - none of whom were in full-time work or higher education - at community centres, colleges, employment agencies and social care charities. We also spoke with 5 professionals; a teacher, two social care workers, one employment agency worker and a youth worker. Our conversations highlighted some of the obstacles to progression, including transport and income constraints, unmet need at school, the complexity of some young people’s lives, and the overlapping and compounding of these different factors.

Transport and income

A number of young people and professionals talked about a lack of transport to educational and employment opportunities. For example, a youth employment professional reflected on how accessibility problems in rural areas hindered young people’s access to jobs and training: ‘I’m working with some customers, there’s one bus a day in the village they live in’. This theme was picked up too by young people. Lack of public transport constrained job opportunities; some suggested that local jobs in rural areas tended to be part-time and that travel was required for more substantial opportunities. Connor (18 year old young man) commented, that ‘most of the jobs are in Ipswich or Bury’. Sam (18 year old young man) explained that he ‘wouldn’t mind getting a part time job but obviously full time is better because the pay is better and it makes it more worthwhile’. Lawrence (18 year old young man) added that he found a full time job in Sudbury but realised that without public transport he could not get there in time for work: ‘to get there by train, it takes absolutely ages – Stowmarket is bad for public transport, so unless I had a car, I wouldn’t be able to get there’. Connor added, ‘it is basically just Ipswich, Needham Market and Bury you can access and then it’s only places close to the train stations you can get to. If it’s on the other side of Ipswich, forget it’.
Reflecting findings about the significance of income deprivation reported in the quantitative analysis, it is salient to note that the young people placed particular emphasis on the high transport costs they faced as an obstacle to opportunities. A number highlighted the costs of bus fares they incurred travelling each day to further education colleges, citing fares totalling £30-35 a week. Rhys (17 year old young man) explained that he took the bus from Stowmarket to Ipswich for college each day because although it sometimes took over an hour - compared to 15 minutes by train - he saved £1 on his fare. Georgia (a 17 year old young woman) argued that it was unfair that young people should have to face such costs in order to access an education.

I pay termly so it's like £190 a term so that's quite a lot I think. Especially, since I am supposed to be like in education at this age and I don't feel like we should have to [pay]. See, it's free up until you reach sixth form so I don't think we should pay that much because I should sort of still be here anyway.

**School, education and progression**

When discussing their experiences of school, the young people brought up a number of themes. Some suggested they had been discouraged by schools which did not address their learning and career needs and were too academically focused. While some talked about not receiving help with specific issues such as dyslexia, others suggested feeling sidelined by teachers who concentrated on more academically able pupils. As Connor (18 year old man) put it:

I've had enough of school and college... they didn't help with my CV's or anything. They only were concentrating on you in the lessons if they thought you were going to university or something.

Maverick (17 year old young) stated, ‘I was never gonna go university, so it's like they never bothered [with him]’.

Other young people and professionals suggested that expectations for high grades at GCSE and A-levels and the prospect of accruing debt in higher education put them off from pursuing HE progression. A Head of a Suffolk sixth form noted how entrance requirements to further and higher education could disadvantage young people by representing a barrier to broadening their educational and career horizons. The Head felt that sixth forms and colleges ‘have in many respects heightened their entry requirements as well and that has an effect on whether working class children could access further education’. The Head added:
if you are asking children to study 3 A-Levels and get at least 5 GCSEs A to C, with a mark of B in the subjects they want to study and in some cases A in what they want to study, then you are presenting quite a significant academic hurdle for working class children to jump over when they might not have the same kind of opportunities at home or have enjoyed the same kind of opportunities in school that the children of a different social class have.

James (17 year old young man) gave an example of how grade requirements can thwart aspirations. Having researched career options, he had set his sights on becoming a computer games programmer. However, he did not get the B grade he needed in the relevant subject at GCSE which the school required in order for him to be allowed to do an A level in Computing:

The school are strict with their entrance requirements. You need to get the grades to do the courses. I didn’t and, so I couldn’t do A level computing and you know that was a big shame really. That’s what I wanted to do.

As well as the educational barriers to progression to higher education, young people also mentioned the cost and the prospect of debt as a deterrent. Donovan (17 year old young man) mentioned how he is not well off financially so getting to university ‘is going to be a struggle’. He stated that the expensive tuition fee (£9000 per year) and the maintenance loan - as well as the cost of commuting to and from the University – would create the ‘toughest situation’. Callie (17 year old young woman) was one of the young people who suggested that she wanted to go to university but did not want to get into debt. She remembers being put off higher education after a visit to a university:

I found out it was like £400 [per month] to stay in one of their accommodation and then on top of that you got to pay everything else. And I just feel I wouldn’t be comfortable with this.

While these were factors deterring progression to higher education, the young people suggested that progression to employment was mediated to some degree by schools. A theme in the interviews was that school did not sufficiently prepare or support young people for entering employment. Maverick, for example, recounted his experience of a careers service advice visit arranged by his school. He did not find the advice and information provided to him useful in connecting him to the labour market: ‘there were stands with lots of
leaflets, I didn’t take any!’ The leaflets described certain careers and jobs, but did not address what he felt he needed to know in terms of; how he could get the required qualifications for the job: how he would manage transport; the extent to which those jobs were available in the local area; and how he could afford rental costs if he moved elsewhere, especially given his financial responsibility to his family. Sam similarly felt that he was not prepared by school and his sixth form college for entering employment:

School and sixth form don’t tell you your options, they say this how you apply for uni’s, this is how you look for uni’s and then a tiny amount of the time they’re like, “oh and this is how you look for work”. They call it ‘ready for work’ so if you have already decided you don’t want to go to uni, they do a little bit to help but they don’t do enough – it is more weighted towards people who want to go to uni, it’s like 95% to 5%. They never once told us how we should be writing CV’s or cover letters or like that.

The educational context in which Sam was studying is one where the schools careers service Connexions was abolished in 2010. This, alongside an increasingly academic curriculum, leaves less room for vocational qualifications. Such changes mean preparing young people for labour market progression is more difficult.

**Complex lives**
A number of young people in the research had complex lives and this posed additional challenges. While attempting to negotiate progressions to employment and education, at the same time as overcoming rural accessibility issues, some also had to manage poverty, family caring responsibilities, homelessness and mental health issues. These complex and compounding challenges resulted in these young people appearing to have restricted access to opportunities, which as a result left them with a sense of being ‘spatially locked-in’ and disconnected.

The young people included those who were homeless and living either in temporary charity provided accommodation, or with friends. Because of this they had to satisfy more immediate needs, they struggled to maintain a focus on education whilst recognising that this was vital for their long term goals of achieving stable accommodation and a decent salary. The need to hone careful coping strategies in this situation was illustrated by Reece (17 year old young man). While studying he also works in a restaurant, ‘working 12 hour shifts some days even though I’m not meant to’ and ‘you don’t get breaks either, you get like
a 5 minute fag break’. Despite this, he explained, ‘we live on pretty much nothing all week, we have to make our food last so long, we had to share a foodbank last night’.

Harley (17 year old young woman) is homeless. Although she lives apart from her father she also cares for him because he suffers from vascular dementia. She wants to rent accommodation in the town but cannot afford it. She thinks that surrounding villages are more affordable but then they are too far out and she cannot get regular affordable public transport: ‘all of the close villages are really hard to get in and out of’. She has been unsuccessful finding work: ‘it’s hard to get a job with no GCSE’s and not being able to work on a weekend or at night or early morning because I am looking after my dad’. For these reasons, Harley has become disconnected from opportunities because of her family responsibilities, lack of education and lack of mobility.

Charley-Ann (17 year old young woman) typified how young people leading complicated lives had to juggle many balls just to create the time to study and work. During the week she was responsible for getting her younger brothers up and ready for school. Her father takes her to Stowmarket by 8.20am where she catches a bus to a college in Ipswich. The bus costs £191 per term, and on days when her father cannot drop her at Stowmarket she has to pay £15 in a taxi to get her there. After college, she gets the bus back to be in Stowmarket for 4:30 where, on three days a week, she teaches a dance class finishing at 5:30 p.m. When she gets home she makes dinner for her brothers and gets them ready for bed. Eventually, she starts her homework around 8:30 p.m. Despite her hard work, she still finds her bus fares to college hard to afford and struggles to have enough time for her homework.

**Compounding factors**

Education, income and accessibility issues often combined and compounded disadvantage. As the examples above demonstrate, the need to cover transport and living costs meant that some young people had to work long part-time hours which in turn put pressure on their academic studies and, by association, their progression chances.

Other young people highlighted how being young and lacking qualifications combined with a lack of accessible job opportunities and low wages to present a particular challenge. Donovan (17 year old young man) commented that none of his peers really has a ‘proper job’ because there were too few jobs in the local area and, when they did become available, employers wanted ‘someone in their 20’s or 30’s who has more qualifications and can do more hours’. He suggested that the problem of low wages in his locality was exacerbated by
being young: ‘the jobs are all basic wage and because of our age, the wage is even lower’. High travel and rent costs, he observed, took a relatively bigger chunk out of any pay.
5. Connectivity and capability: pathways to progression

By examining the experiences of young people who were negotiating progressions – particularly those who were negotiating obstacles and achieving with some success - the research highlighted the importance of ‘connectivity’ and ‘capability’.

Connectivity

Connectivity includes physical access to opportunities but it also includes other factors which mediate the less tangible distances between young people and opportunities. Transport, as apparent from some of the accounts above, represents a more concrete example of connectivity to opportunities. However, less obvious but also important elements include guidance and direction, and personal contacts and networks.

Some of the professionals we interviewed recognised young people’s observations that schools have not sufficiently supported them with progression into employment. However, there were also examples of initiatives which had been effective in connecting young people to employment opportunities. In contrast to simply providing information and guidance, MyGo, for example, was presented as a service which aimed to both illuminate pathways to careers for young people and provide practical support in developing skills regarding writing CVs, completing applications and finding jobs. This includes keeping a database of young people and proactively bringing young people together with employers who are seeking to fill specific vacancies. Some of the young people mentioned receiving such help from MyGo. Sam, for example, commented:

I have been registered with MyGo for a month and I have found a lot of jobs and courses so that has been helpful. I have applied for an internship as events co-ordinator for six months and I should hear back from them soon – without MyGo I would never have heard about it so they have been very helpful.

The notable feature of this approach is its proactive measures to connect young people to actual opportunities in the community.

Other support with connectivity was less concrete but still important. A number of young people referred to support and guidance that that they had received from Personal Progression Tutors (PTTs) in school and colleges. Callie, for example, reflected that she was unsure about whether she wanted to go to university but that her PTT had been ‘really good’ in exploring her options, both within and outside of education. Other young people gave examples of particular teachers whom they had found inspirational and helpful.
Professionals also pointed out the distinct potential of teachers to provide information and guidance which would open up worlds of possibilities for students, particularly for those from less advantaged backgrounds. One teacher told us that progression to HE was largely influenced by whether young people’s parents had been to university. For those whose parents had not, university still represented what s/he described as being ‘a predominantly middle class territory’. Professionals felt teachers had an important role in bridging that gap.

The interviews with professionals suggested young peoples’ families could have either a connective or disconnective effect on progression. Young people could be disconnected from opportunity by having extensive family-related obligations and commitments. For example, professionals mentioned young people juggling family, work, education and other commitments indicative of complicated lives. On the other hand, it was clear that families were generally the most important link in young people’s connectivity to opportunities. This most obviously took the form of direct and practical support in accessing jobs and education. James (17 year old young man), for example, explained that his mother had informed him about a part-time job in a nearby town and encouraged him to apply. When he got it, she provided transport every Sunday so that he could reach his workplace, given an absence of public transport. There were others, like James, who were only able to work - and manage low wages and transportation costs - because they did not pay towards their living costs or rent.

The research also highlighted the importance of how families’ social networks could be key for connectivity. There were numerous examples of family and local networks linking young people to opportunities. Jean-Paul (17 year old young man), for example, explained his aunt had offered him an opportunity to shadow her at work in London. James had a neighbour who offered him work experience at British Telecom. Will (17 years old young man) was confident that family connections would help him get a job: ‘my family is quite good because they know a lot of people. My dad in particular has a lot of connections so he can usually find something’.

**Capability**

Capability is required to overcome barriers to connectivity. It refers here to the skills, knowledge, resilience, vision and attitudes necessary for identifying and utilising the resources and opportunities to access opportunity. It terms of vision and attitudes, the young people in the study often expressed aspiration and self-determination but also doubt and powerlessness. Capabilities here often developed out of, and sometime because of the adversity they faced, and required emotional resilience. Tom (17 year old young man) says:
I’ve got high expectations from myself because if I put myself down I will not be able to get to the goals I want to. If I like push myself it means I don’t want to stop so I want to get the job I want to do. So, I am going to try to push myself to the very end.

Similarly, Harley remarked ‘when you have got no one there for you, you need to be there for yourself’. At the same she talked about feeling spatially isolated and trapped:

Everyone who stays here, stays here. It is just like a box that you have to stay in. I will do the same as my parents and my kids will do the same as me. It happens with everyone

Family played had a profound impact on capability and a number of the young people noted the importance of the guidance and understanding they received from parents. JC (17 year old young man), for example, suggested his parents encouraged him to broaden his horizons regarding career pathways; he felt free to try whatever path he wanted knowing his family would financially support him if he failed. Charley’s (17 year old young woman) parents were more directive in encouraging her to select a specific career, but they were also prepared to support her financially. Rachael’s (17 year old young woman) family had a familiarity with higher education: ‘I have got an older brother that he has gone through uni and my mum sort of knows how it all works’.

Peer-to-peer support also appeared to have potential in fostering capability in terms of raising aspiration and knowledge sharing. When Charley-Ann (a different participant from Charley) reflected on her progression plans, she referred not to her parents but to the advice and encouragement she had received from older friends and cousins. These peers had been through the UCAS process and were able to inform her and help foster her aspirations.

Community and voluntary services provided further possibilities for supporting capability. Tom, for example, described how a local youth project had a profound impact on him. By connecting to the youth project - its workers and his peers there - he received encouragement, and help in first identifying who he might speak to at college about university courses and careers, and how to apply. Subsequently the youth workers and peers helped him think through his options, and in the process fostered his ambition and provided a context in which to develop his capabilities in. Tom now volunteers at the project
- where he ‘helps out with kids, making sure they are having a nice time’ – thus further improving his skills and CV.

Beyond perceptions, resilience and attitudes, capability can be understood as including a range of personal skills. As one of the professionals put it, reflecting on young people negotiating complex lives:

‘they have to have that grit, to keep going, and you know, they can develop great skills, emotional, organisational, a self-reliance, the ability to learn job skills, that communication skills they’ve had to improve, sometimes in a range of troubling situations. They’re all valuable resources.’

Examples of such skills were identifiable in the research. Planning and organisational skills, for instance, were demonstrated by various young people routinely managing complicated configurations of travel arrangements, college, part-time employment, caring responsibilities and so forth. Young people’s skills sets in this regard would be honed through their own lived experience and facilitated by parents. Additionally, families could at times be responsible for funding driving lessons, a skill recognised by young people as significantly improving their employment opportunities.

Community and voluntary organisations also played a part too. Maverick, for example, was a member of the Sea Cadets and was informed by them about opportunities for gaining sailing qualifications and apprenticeships. This led to an apprenticeship with a sailing club where he is undertaking an internationally-recognised qualification in sailing instruction. Such examples alert us to the role of community and youth organisations in providing skills and networks to young people, perhaps from more disadvantaged backgrounds, who cannot access the same help from their family and peer networks.
6. Structural and community responses to improving life chances

There is a tendency to romanticise rural communities as idyllic places. Superficially, youth progression in rural Suffolk bears this out: in most rural areas in the county, youth unemployment is low and the proportion of young people going on to university is high. However, our analysis presents a more challenging perspective. The proportion of young people who are NEET (unemployed or economically inactive ‘other’) is almost as large in rural as urban areas. When local level characteristics are taken into account, more than half of rural wards fail to meet expectations about the number of young people going to university. This ‘participation gap’ is, again, almost as large in rural as urban areas in the county.

Research on rural disadvantage typically emphasises accessibility problems. The advanced statistical techniques used in this research provide a deeper understanding of rural disadvantage. Poor public transport and accessibility in Suffolk’s rural neighbourhoods are clearly obstacles for many young people. However, other young people growing up in the same neighbourhoods, but from relatively more affluent families, find it easier to overcome such obstacles and access progression opportunities. Together, the statistical and qualitative research provide a more comprehensive understanding of the obstacles to progression, with multiple factors interacting and compounding the challenges some young people face.

Growing up with income deprivation means transport costs can be an obstacle, families become more selective about making trips, and some opportunities have to be passed by. Coming from a poorer background can mean that parents are relatively less able to link young people into the networks, experiences and opportunities that give them an advantaged edge when negotiating transitions to work and higher education. Parents without experience of higher education are likely to be less able to connect their children with the world of university. For these parents, their children’s progression into higher education can represent a step into alien territory rather than a natural flow. On this point it is worth noting that Suffolk has a smaller proportion of adults with higher education qualifications than average for England: less than 22 per cent in 2014 compared with almost 28 per cent for England (Smith and Dogaru, 2016). As such, young people in Suffolk are less likely to have parents with experience of university compared with young people elsewhere.
Irrespective of accessibility, failing to secure educational qualifications will undermine progression opportunities. For some, emphasis in schools on the need for top grades at GCSE and A Level is in itself enough to dampen aspirations. The research also suggests that schools have an important role in connecting young people to local employment opportunities however their ability to do so in recent years has become increasingly challenging. The schools’ career service Connexions was abolished in 2010 and the increasingly academic curriculum leaves less room for vocational qualifications. Compounding this other factors such as the relative impact of school, family, income, neighbourhood and accessibility, have to be negotiated at the same time. The participants in the study remind us that young people in rural Suffolk can experience complicated and chaotic lives, weighty family responsibilities and severe forms of disadvantage.

Growing up in rural neighbourhoods experiencing income and education deprivation, with accessibility constrained by a lack of transport, and with a lack of help to connect them to opportunities can result in young people feeling ‘spatially locked-in’ to their immediate neighbourhood. The sense of being spatially locked-in may be all the more for young people in relatively disadvantaged families dispersed thinly in communities in which their more advantaged neighbours experience progression quite differently. For relatively disadvantaged young people, smooth flows of progression from school to work and higher education are interrupted or blocked.

This chapter explores potential ways forward. It is informed by insights from the range of organisations and practitioners at the recent Flourish summit as well as other practice and research. It is important to note while ideas for future action are posed, these are complex issues demanding high levels of inter-agency collaboration and so the report can only sensibly propose approaches towards development rather than specific interventions.

**Structural solutions**

The fact that educational outcomes in Suffolk’s schools are lagging behind national averages is widely recognised. As an expressed priority area for the county, it is the focus of much activity – across all schools and in such initiatives as Suffolk County Council’s ‘Raising the Bar’. It is beyond the scope of this research to contribute to efforts to tackle this problem other than to highlight its importance for rural progression.

Another key focus for development in the county is a relative lack of high quality employment opportunities. While unemployment is low, Suffolk has low wages and a disproportionate number of less skilled jobs. Less than 40 per cent of jobs in Suffolk are professional or
managerial, compared with 45 per cent in England; 22 per cent of jobs are in less skilled and elementary occupations, compared with 17 per cent in England (Smith and Dogaru, 2016). In 2015, median average weekly wages in Suffolk were 6 per cent less than the national average (Smith and Dogaru, 2016).

As one of England’s most rural counties, it is unsurprising that it has one of the highest rates of accessibility deprivation (the IMD’s ‘distances to services’ measure). Nearly 70 per cent of the county’s rural neighbourhoods are among the 20 per cent most deprived in England on this measure. Just over 13,000 households in rural Suffolk do not own a car (Smith and Dogaru, 2016). At the same time public transport in these areas appears to be in gradual decline. According to the Community Action Suffolk Rural Services Survey, 73 per cent of parishes reported having a scheduled bus service in 2008, falling sharply to 61 per cent in 2016.

Arguably, these are all important aspects of the county’s infrastructure that need to be tackled. No doubt, improved educational outcomes, employment opportunities and accessibility would have a major impact on youth progression in Suffolk. However, the feasibility of there being the size of immediate investment necessary to ensure progress on these matters needs to be considered within the context of austerity. According to the Local Government Association (2014), council funding in England is experiencing cuts of 40 per cent in real terms – the equivalent to £20 billion over five years. Councils in Suffolk are experiencing their share of these cuts. Given this context it is important to go beyond pointing to infrastructural issues and ‘top down’ development needs, but to also consider the role of ‘bottom up’ school, community and charity sector possibilities.

**Connectivity, capability and capital**

Our research suggests that, in order to be effective, community responses need to have a clear and deliberate focus on building connectivity and capability among young people in rural Suffolk. The theme of connectivity has been at the heart of the study, conceived of as the counterpoint to young people’s sense of being spatially locked-in. Connectivity requires not only geographical access but also, more generally, ‘social capital’. Social capital refers to the quality, range and type of relationships between networks of people. Ultimately, it describes the type of relationships necessary for society to function.

Capability has been discussed in this report as the set of knowledge, resilience, vision and attitudes necessary for identifying and utilising resources and opportunities in order to achieve connectivity. As connectivity requires social capital, capability requires ‘cultural
capital’ – usually defined as the personal, non-financial assets that mediate social mobility. A focus on capability in the context of efficient community development is vital. The provision of services or resources alone is likely to be inefficient unless young people are equipped to be able to identify them as valuable opportunities and to have the knowledge and skills to be able to exploit them.

**Ways forward?**
Recommendations for future areas of development can be organised in terms of the ‘student lifecycle’ – the different phases of the journey young people make moving from school to higher education and employment.

Young people’s social and cultural capital as they transition from school can be considered the starting position here. Some of the young people in the research suggested how youth groups they had attended had a profound impact on their progression by helping build knowledge, inter-personal skills and self-confidence. It is particularly concerning then that there appears to have been a sharp reduction in these activities in rural Suffolk. For example, the Community Action Suffolk Rural Services Survey found that 44 per cent of parishes reported having youth organisations in 2008, but by 2016 that had fallen to 25 per cent. As local authorities have increasingly divested responsibility for youth services, Parish Councils and other community organisations will need to take a pronounced role if these trends are to be reversed.

Redesigning existing provision could provide new options to engage young people and enable them to connect with local adults who might help them build their knowledge and skills. Building capacity here may not necessarily involve developing new activities. Existing community and outreach services – such as mobile libraries – might consider widening their remits to create activities and volunteer placements for young people. The Flourish summit also underlined the importance of local community groups and informal activities. Parish activities such as Young Farmers, Zumba classes and church events could be instrumental in building social and cultural capital through fostering familiarity and interacting with neighbours.

**Recommendation**
Parish Councils and community organisations devise strategies to halt and reverse the trend of declining youth provision in rural areas, with an emphasis on making creative use of existing provision. This might include developing the county’s arts and sports infrastructure through better collaboration between public, private and commercial organisations.
In Suffolk’s resource-rich rural areas, further possibilities for sharing resources might be explored. Sharing resources to enable young people to access broader cultural opportunities could be effective in helping them to develop informed world views, build networks and raise expectations. This would require a co-ordinated approach across, for example, fee-paying schools and large local organisations. The advantages of sharing resources for developing capability and cultural capital could be further explored with Suffolk’s existing arts organisations. This is particularly given that forms of artistic and creative learning through theatre and other art forms can build personal and social skills important for sustainable and meaningful progression. Existing resources in Suffolk which might provide a basis for this include the New Wolsey Theatre and its youth theatre group, touring theatre companies such as Eastern Angles, and other theatres such as The Seckford Theatre in Woodbridge and the Theatre Royal in Bury St Edmunds.

Recommendations

Schools and interprofessional arts, community and sports practitioners review and examine the feasibility of expanding arts and sports infrastructure at local fee paying schools to include disadvantaged young people.

The potential to increase the role of arts organisations across venues in providing support in kind to create/extend creative learning to disadvantaged young people could be explored. Such measures might also benefit from the involvement of Parish Councils in providing venues, local contacts and perhaps other support.

Youth provision depends on volunteer staffing. Where new youth provision is planned, or additional staffing is required for existing provision, targeted recruitment for volunteers could be orchestrated through large local employers and organisations such as the University of Suffolk and Suffolk Agricultural Association.

The next step in the transition journey can be seen as relating to how young people shape their aspirations and gain an informed understanding about career paths. Connecting schools and colleges to employers and professionals plays a valuable role here and Speakers for Schools is an important example in this context. Speakers for Schools is a national charity promoting local employers and
professionals giving talks in schools in order to broaden students’ aspirations and raise awareness of local job markets.

**Recommendation**

Existing charities promote local employers and professionals giving talks in schools to broaden aspirations. Key business organisations might expand on the work of charities such as Speakers for Schools which already do this, adding their knowledge of Suffolk’s economy and existing concrete opportunities. This activity requires school-to-school co-ordination which might be informed and perhaps even spearheaded by Suffolk’s key business organisations including Chambers of Commerce, the Institute of Directors, the Federation of Small Businesses and Suffolk Agricultural Association. Such organisations, along with schools and the voluntary sector, are important in sharing expertise and networks to help connect young people to jobs, training and careers knowledge.

Those participants in the research who had used MyGo clearly valued the help it offered in linking young people with actual employment opportunities and providing hands-on support with making applications and preparing for interviews. Other disadvantaged young people spoke about the limited employment opportunities they had despite their aspirations. Linking young people to concrete opportunities would facilitate the fostering of aspiration.

**Recommendation**

Businesses, educational institutions and the voluntary sector could share expertise and networks in connecting disadvantaged young people to jobs, training and careers knowledge. ‘My Go’ and also the Mason Trust’s ‘I Can Be A…’ website and schools programme do this. Business organisations could inform and perhaps take a major role in co-ordinating and expanding this. Again, there is a role here for Suffolk’s key business organisations.

In terms of shaping aspiration and knowledge about paths to higher education, the University of Suffolk shoulders a distinct responsibility. The University is part of the new Network for East Anglian Collaborative Outreach (NEACO), a £9m regional
consortium which aims to double the proportion of disadvantaged young people entering higher education by 2020.

**Recommendation**

Activity from the NEACO in Suffolk should take account of the particular challenges facing young people in rural areas and develop best practice to support increased and sustained HEI participation rates among these young people.

In addition to the work of the NEACO, there are a number of mechanisms by which young people are informed about different courses at university including: UCAS and on-line information and the University of Suffolk’s provision of face-to-face outreach work and Open Days. This supports that next step of the transition journey: the decision of what to do after leaving school. However, when it comes to information about job opportunities and how to apply for them, a similar set of mechanisms is not always available to young people. Nevertheless, there are initiatives in place which - although not universally available or used consistently - serve comparable functions.

In terms of on-line provision, the Mason Trust’s ‘I-can-be-a…’ website provides direct links to local employers for young people (www.icanbea.org.uk). Insofar as it represents an equivalent to a university Open Day, the annual Trinity Skills Show is salient to mention. The Skills Show – attended by over 100 employers and 4,000 young people – offers careers advice and real job and apprenticeship opportunities.

**Recommendation**

To support entry into employment and match provision for entry into higher education there is a need to build on and expand innovation and current good practice. This might develop a well co-ordinated and consistently available suite of mechanisms providing on-line and face-to-face support and open events.

Apprenticeships are an important means for young people’s progression. They are an element of the New Anglia Local Enterprise Partnership’s strategy and Suffolk is home to some particularly innovative apprenticeship schemes such as the Seckford Springboard, which both provides apprenticeships and supports disadvantaged young people to access them. Similarly, Community Action Suffolk’s ‘Minding the
Gap project’ supports those young people furthest from employment. The introduction of new Higher and Degree Apprenticeships are likely to further change the landscape. These will represent an alternative, skills-oriented and vocational-oriented route through higher education, with the potential to be more attractive to a wider range of young people than traditional university courses. Moreover, as higher apprenticeships become established they may offer the potential for young people to progress from existing/traditional apprenticeship onto higher apprenticeships. Opening up new high quality progression routes like this would offer young people enhanced life chances for career progression and social mobility, at the same time as raising the skills of Suffolk’s workforce.

Higher apprenticeships are likely to offer new opportunities for different industries. One such industry may be the agricultural sector, singled out in the recent Flourish summit as a high tech industry needing a well-trained workforce.

**Recommendation**

There is a pressing need to develop an overarching and integrated apprenticeship and higher apprenticeship strategy for the county. This could be constructed through collaboration between employers organisations such as the New Anglia Local Enterprise Partnership, regional Higher Education institutions, voluntary sector initiatives such as the Seckford Springboard and Community Action Suffolk’s ‘Mind the Gap’ and Suffolk County Council’s Apprenticeship Suffolk programme.

Poor public transport for young people in rural Suffolk mediates opportunities both in terms of employment, apprenticeships and education. The research has argued that poor transport has a disproportionate impact on young people from low income backgrounds. Transport is not a universal problem for rural youth (that is, those from relatively wealthier households do not appear disadvantaged by transport). Measures to transform the situation require major infrastructural funding not presently available. This means that attempts to improve public transport are likely to be ineffective and, instead, solutions for addressing the problem as regards its effect on progression need to be well tailored and targeted. There are good examples of community and voluntary organisation responses to draw on, including car-pooling schemes, volunteer drivers, and moped hire-purchase schemes to
create such connectivity. These include initiatives such as ‘Wheels to Work’ and ‘Liftshare’. Such initiatives are most likely to be cost efficient and sustainable if they are responsive to local demand and are shaped around other existing local transport services. Local community organisations and Parish Councils are well placed to guide the sensitive and responsive planning of such initiatives. Equally, collaboration across community organisations – taking into account key travel routes – is also vital.

**Recommendation**

Support should be made available to local community groups and Parish Councils to facilitate an audit of transport issues and options for bespoke and efficient alternatives. Again, overarching co-ordination of this planning will be key. Local community groups and Parish Councils could facilitate this audit with disadvantaged young people looking to access education and/or job opportunities in mind. This would expand/add to existing community transportation schemes in a context where the research notes infrequent and costly public transport appearing to further disadvantage young people in rural areas experiencing socioeconomic inequality.

Additionally, other possibilities might be looked at to overcome financial barriers to access. A variety of micro-finance schemes are being used across the world to boost progression and the entrepreneurial chances for young people. This may have resonance in Suffolk and includes forms of mutual credit and social banks.

**Recommendation**

There should be a review of currently available and new, possible micro-financing and affordable-credit schemes, with a focus on schemes to achieve the sustainable affordability of transport for young people and their families in rural Suffolk.

**Doing things differently and sharing advantage**

Overall, on aggregate, rural Suffolk is relatively affluent and advantaged, compared with urban Suffolk and compared with national averages. The fact that it also has deprived households and neighbourhoods means that (in order for there to be average advantage) rural Suffolk includes neighbourhoods that are rich in resources – materially, and in terms of
social and cultural capital. In a context where substantial investment is unlikely, it is all the more important to work towards a situation in which these resources can be better shared and used more efficiently for the greater benefit of all. The Flourish summit took this theme forward. It reflected on the ‘formidable alliance’ of the county’s community and voluntary organisations and their potential to develop and implement a co-ordinated strategy to do just this. Such an alliance - driving forward a well informed and targeted strategy from the ‘bottom up’ – seems the most concrete and constructive option at this time for improving the equity of life chances for young people in rural Suffolk.
References


Department for Communities and Local Government (2016) *The English Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD).*

Higher Education Funding Council for England (2016): *POLAR – Participation of Local Areas*


