INTRODUCTION

This study was designed to investigate the use of RONI (Risk of NEET Indicator) data, which is used to identify learners perceived as having an increased possibility of becoming NEET (Not in Education. Employment and Training), at school leaving age. Interview questions were designed to collate information on how RONI data was being used and manipulated within schools. The selected schools were all presented RONI data by their local authority (LA) for their current Year 7 (Y7) and Year 10 (Y10) learners.

The author specialised in working with disaffected and disengaged learners and felt that there was an inconsistency in the way that secondary educational establishments design and deliver mandatory academic curricula for learners that were consistently demonstrating disengagement and/or disaffection from their mainstream schooling. The author felt that a formalisation of a nationally recognised RONI data collection, that resulted in a learner being assigned a red/amber/green 'RONI' score, would be hugely beneficial to aid schools in implementing positive interventions and reducing the likelihood of the identified learners becoming NEET at school leaving age.

The intended outcome of this study was to establish if secondary educational establishments should be mandated to collect standardised RONI data to be national Ofsted statistics. published in Would this aid in enhancing disaffected/disengaged learners' educational offers. further highlight the establishment's learner demographics and aid in forming an additional progress measure? Ultimately, would this aid in reducing the number of Post 16 NEETs?

LITERATURE REVIEW

NEETs

A report by the Social Exclusion Unit (1999) cited in Furlong (2006: 554) defined the NEET population as "young people aged 16-18 years who neither participate in education or training nor have a job... and are therefore at risk of exclusion"; this was cited by Serracant (2014, p.402). NEETs are commonly defined within UK communities as persons who are 'not in education, employment or training'. NEETs are more generally associated, in UK media and statistics, as being aged between 16 (school leaving age) to 19, or up to the age of 25 if they are deemed a 'care leaver' or to have 'special educational needs'.

Furlong's definition differs from the accepted Spanish definition, which is quoted by Serracant (2014, p.403) as "'ni-ni' ... those people who neither study or work". Serracant further details that, "most European studies on the NEET population are based on a broader group (mostly 15-34 years)".

RONIs

In 2015, the 2008 Education and Skills Act mandated that young people in England engage in either education or formalised training until their 18th birthday. This was likely intended to be a proactive measure to decrease the possibility of a young person becoming NEET. To support these legislative changes, the Department for Education (DfE) funded Local Authorities (LAs) to participate in four-year trials aimed specifically at raising the participation age (RPA). Maguire and Newton (2013, ix) concluded that critical success factors to trials, in all four phases of a commissioned DfE study, to be due to one of three influencers:

- i. "intervening early to prevent entry to NEET status...
- ii. supporting vulnerable young people through suitable provision...
- iii. ...developing a deeper understanding of disengagement... and increased emphasis on work-based learning opportunities".

A popular method of 'intervening early to prevent NEET status' has since emerged nationally, through the development of RONIs. The earliest references to RONIs appear to be in the academic year 2009/10 when Maguire and Newton (2013, p.7-8) documented 20 LAs as developing RONIs. In 2010/11, RONIs were stated to "remain an important mechanism *[for identifying young people at risk of disengaging from education]*" for 27 LAs. Furthermore, an evaluation in 2011/12 "found a strong focus on identification of young people at risk of becoming NEET and the use of RONI tools was widespread" and specifically in 2012, "22 of the 36 respondents to the Phase 4 survey reported that their RPA strategies included the use of RONI tools" (Maguire and Newton, 2013, p.30).

RONI IDENTIFIERS

Following research that sought to specifically develop indicators for early identification of young people at risk of temporary disconnection from learning, Filmer-Sankey and McCrone (2012, p.v) suggested that,

LAs and schools would welcome a list of indicators to **guide** them in their identification of young people at risk of becoming NEET... which give them flexibility to include local factors... a national set of indicators is not perceived to be workable as there is considerable variation by, and within, LAs.

Filmer-Sankey and McCrone (2012, p.vi) further defined sets of 'hard' and 'soft' RONIs that they noted as widely used within LAs; "i.e. 'hard' ones that describe more measurable, factual information and 'softer' factors that include more attitudinal and personal information".

Both of Filmer-Sankey and McCrone's observations are supported by Ealing's working practices. In November 2012, Ealing categorised individuals at a more significant risk of becoming NEET according the following data:

- White girls who received free school meals (FSM)
- Persistent absences in Year 5
- Looked after child in care (LAC)
- FSM and special educational needs (SEN) statement
- Fixed or permanent exclusion during primary school

Alongside the provided data, Ealing (November 2012) clearly stated, "this is just intended as a starting point to help schools identify who might be at risk. There may well be students on the list who are not at risk and students who the school knows are at risk who are not identified". Ealing recommended that schools add to the initial list of indicators, suggesting they may consider additional characteristics such as:

- Key Stage 2 (KS2) attainment
- Key Stage 4 (KS4) attainment
- Exclusion
- Attendance
- Known to the Youth Offending Team
- Known to Social Services
- Housing Issues

Ealing's November 2012 report advised its secondary schools to "moderate the Ealing RONI list and arrive at a final RONI group for your school…". Ealing supported the selection of their principal and secondary characteristics with internal profiling data that gave both a statistical significance and a 'yes/no' risk factor for each characteristic, based on previous NEET outcomes within their LA.

In an alternative model, Swindon LA (2011) used a weighted measures model to create their Risk of NEET lists. "Each characteristic [considered relevant to risk of NEET] returns a score dependent on whether it is present in the young person's record or not. These scores are added together and the higher the score the greater the risk of NEET at post-16". The referenced data produced scores between 79.30 and 175.70 leading me to speculate that whilst the data may have been accurate and well intended, it may have been labour intensive for school analysis and utilisation. As a comparison, in 2011, a local authority (LA) reduced a list of 9 'Connexions' risk identifiers and 8 LA risk identifiers to one list of RONIs that were communicated to all schools. Where a learner met three or more of the identifiers they were labelled red, a high risk. With only two identifiers, amber, a medium risk and with either zero or one identifier, green, a low risk. In 2011, a local LA trialled collating and presenting the data for use in five schools. In 2012 it was rolled out to eighteen schools and since 2013 they have produced the data, with explanatory reports, to all LA schools (including Academies) twice annually for both Year 7 and Year 10 learners. Adapting the RONIs slightly throughout their development, the local LA RONIs are currently where a learner:

- Has an SEN status
- Is pregnant or a teenage mother

- Is a looked after child
- Is supervised by the Youth Offending Team
- Did not achieve the LA average score at KS2
- Did not achieve the LA average score at KS3
- School attendance below 85%
- Experienced one or more Fixed Term Exclusions
- Experienced one or more Permanent Exclusions

In 2013, the local LA published *RONI November 2013 Destinations*. The data showed that of the identified 'red RONIs'; 85.6% progressed in education, 4.5% to employment, 1.5% to training, 3.8% were left on the school roll and a total of 4.5% were identified as NEETs. Whilst pre-RONI destination data has not been compared, this may suggest a 95.5% rate of successful 'red RONI' NEET intervention strategies were deployed throughout the local LA's schools during 2013.

Further data produced by the local LA in June 2014 compared the number of 'red RONI's' identified per district in Y7, to those in Y11. All six districts presented an increase in numbers of Y11 RONIs when compared to their Y7 data. Three districts increased by an average of an additional 8%, one by an additional 4.7% and one by 1.7%, however, one increased by 14.1%. This data could indicate that interventions were being implemented successfully in five of the six areas. Further research could be useful to identify the factors underlying the results.

In closing, when questioned whether RONI data could be solely relied on for accurately predicting the potential NEET outcome of a school-aged young person, following analysis of responses from all 4 phases of the DfE studies, Maguire and Newton (2013, p.viii) concluded that:

The full range of factors that can identify young people as being at risk of NEET status may extend beyond those typically included in RONI tools, as some young people who do not have characteristics that make them obvious targets for additional support may still be at risk. This can be addressed by using local intelligence in parallel with data driven tools.

METHODOLOGY

FRAMEWORKS

Creswell (2013, p.21) detailed four philosophical assumptions which he cited Lincoln *et al* (2011) and Mertens (2011) to refer to as paradigms, and numerous interpretative frameworks as being the basis for how a qualitative researcher ratifies their beliefs and theories. Creswell (2013, p.15) stated, "a close tie does exist between the philosophy that one brings to the research and how one proceeds to use a framework to shroud their inquiry". Of the four named philosophical assumptions, I adopt an epistemological assumption, which, Creswell (2013, p.20) defined as "researchers try to get as close as possible of the participants being studied... subjective evidence is based on individual views". The philosophical assumption, Creswell continued, is embedded within an interpretative framework. Whilst Creswell details nine such frameworks, Lowe (2007, p.8) prophers only three: positivist, interpretivist and critical realistic. Initially, I believed that my epistemological belief would be embedded within a positivist framework; which provides clear quantitative outcomes that have been reliably tested, with minimal bias and a level of statistical

significance that enables outcomes to be generalised. In previous studies where I have tested the effects of a substance or a behavior, this has been the only method I have encountered. Positivist approaches to research traditionally include experiments, surveys, questionnaires, and systematic observations.

Lowe (2007, p.14) commented that, "effective researchers have an understanding of the link between their choice of method and epistemology and are able to select the most appropriate tool to gather the data they need to answer their research question". To investigate my current research question, I believe, therefore, that a qualitative research method, more aligned of an interpretivist or critical realistic approach would best serve my research framework. Qualitative approaches may include field notes, interviews, observations, novels and diaries. Whilst understanding that quantitative and qualitative research methods can be mixed, in this case, I will adopt an interpretivist paradigm as this methodology "centres on the way in which human beings make sense of their subjective reality and attach meaning to it" (Taylor *et al*, 2015, p.7). My study centres on how specialist professionals translate given sets of data and use it for their own learner progression.

QUALITATIVE APPROACHES

Denscombe (2003, p.3) outlined eight different strategies, "approaches that are selected because they are *appropriate* for specific aspects of the investigation". Of the nine strategies, I linked this study most closely to a case study; narrowly having an advantage over phenomenology as the study "focuses on how life is experienced and is not primarily concerned with explaining the cause" Denscombe (2003, p.97). However, it is not "raw in the sense that is has not (yet) been subjected to processes of analysis and theorising". Alternatively, Bell (1999, p.7) outlined five conventional

qualitative approaches to research including conducting action research, case studies ethnographic fieldwork, surveys and narrative inquiry. Narrative inquiry is an approach that could be utilised for this study with Gray (1998: 1) cited in Bell (1999, p.18) likening the approach to "a collection and development of stories ... involving an analysis of development of themes, dependent on a researcher's perspective". Narrative inquiry is heavily linked to interview and Gray (1998: 2) cited in Bell (1999, p.19) further commented, "the narrative inquiry may not emerge in the first interview as the researcher is required to let the storytellers recount the experience in their own way". In line with the scope of this research study, I have selected to use interviews as my tool for collating research, with the intent of gaining specific information from the respondents within a limited timeframe.

INTERVIEWS

Lowe (2007, p.78) described,

the purpose of the interview can be to gather information related to the research question. It can be used to test a hypothesis or it can be used to follow up unexpected results or to triangulate with other methods, such as observation.

Interviews can be a useful research tool largely due to their adaptability. Bell (1999, p.135) stated "a skilful interviewer can follow up ideas, probe responses and investigate motives and feelings". Whilst this may be true, limitations include time taken to conduct transcribe and analyse, loss of spoken word, interpretation and meaning through transcribing, interviewer bias, reliability, congruence and generalisability.

RELIABILITY

All referenced studies cited bias as an assured element of interviewing. Lowe (2007, p.80) observed that interviewers "have biases, emotions, overt and subconscious needs which the researcher needs to try and overcome through careful design and execution". Durant (3/200) cited in Powney and Watts (1987, p.36) simply stated that "interviewer bias is more difficult to eradicate than cheating" and Bell (1999 p.139) commented "it is easier to acknowledge the fact that bias can creep into *[an interview]* than to eliminate it altogether".

It may be argued that all interviews should have an element of structure and focus. Both Bell (1999, p.135) and Lowe (2007, p.80) made reference to Grebenik and Moser's (1962) *continuum of formality* whereby they identify all interviews as taking place on a continuum between formal and informal. Lowe (2007, p.81) identified interviews as being structured, semi-structured or unstructured in relation to questions, or as being conducted as a focus group or as group interviews. Additionally, Powney and Watts (1987, p.17) identified interviews as being un/focused, limited/in-depth and types of interviewers as being either "respondent... the interviewer retains control throughout the whole process... informant... the goal is to gain some insight into the perceptions of a particular person(s) within a situation". The interview may also have other variables such as interviewing:

- One-to-one where it is easier to manage conversations and maintain confidentiality.
- 2) Within a group where discussions can be developed.
- 3) In a focus group where the researcher is a facilitator.
- Over the telephone where it may be more difficult to establish a relationship but it can offer more logistical flexibility.

Specifically, referring to the structure of interview questions, Kerlinger (1970) cited by Lowe (2007, p.91) identified three distinct types of interview question; fixed alternative requiring an either/or response, open ended allowing a free response, or a scale question where the response is ranked according to a statement. Lowe concluded that "the golden rule for questions is to make them clear and easy to understand... a mixture of question types can add variety to interview".

In order to conduct interviews with the minimum of bias and the optimum reliability and validity, I will be conducting semi-structured interviews as an informant interviewer, on a one-to-one basis with focused questions. In order to maintain respondent interest, two questions will be fixed, two open ended (opinion) and one scaled.

ANAYLSIS OF RESULTS

With reference to analysing interviews, Powney and Watts (1987, p.162) stated, "that analysis is a combination of forming hypotheses, testing them and then interpreting the outcomes... the responses must then be interpreted". Powney and Watts (1987, p.145) also observed that is was "possible to collect both too much and too little data. Not all data is relevant to the task in hand". Watts (1983 b) cited in Powney and Watts (1987, p.161) described a "seven-plus-or-minus-two rule of thumb" indication for analysing data into categories. Using this theory, Watts believed that having less that four analysis themes or categories would raise questions as to how "close to the data the categories are" and that having more than ten categories "analysis is becoming cumbersome". To analyse my interview results, I will be following recommendations made by Lowe (2007, p.134):

record responses (record then transcribe post interview)

• group answers (in a grid) identifying similarities/reoccurring themes (4-

9)

- write a narrative that tells the story of each theme, including quotes
- interpret the data using the literature review to inform the discussion

Bell (1999, p.172) cautioned that, "care has to be taken not to claim more for results than is warranted and care has to be taken not to attempt generalisations based on insufficient data". Bassey (1981, 85) cited in Bell (1999, p.172) also warned against generalising from insufficient data confirming that "reliability is more important that generalisability". In order to maintain reliability of results, I will be interviewing representatives from the five schools that participated in the 2012 pilot study conducted by Maguire and Newton (2013). Whilst all schools have continued to be provided with the RONI data since the study, I acknowledge limitations that the selected respondents may be different to the original data controllers and that they may have different levels of expertise and experience. The sample size will not allow for any results to be generalised.

To maintain ethical values, all respondent information will be confidentially coded with no traceability. No personal or sensitive data will be either collated or recorded.

DATA

RESPONDENTS

Of the five schools approached that were part of the original local LA RONI trial, only one school refused to participate. A randomly selected school, within the same LA, replaced this school. Within all of the schools, the interviews were conducted with a staff member assuming responsibility for co-ordinating and leading careers programmes within their school. One of these five interviewees; one staff member was part of the senior leadership team, one highly reputed and experienced within their industry and by their head teacher, one returning to work after a period of leave and two demonstrated little experience and/or understanding of RONIs and their potential implications.

The original local LA RONI trials were however, co-ordinated in each school by a deputy head teacher with responsibilities for behaviour/progression/inclusion. The responses received in the conducted interviews may therefore not reflect a true picture of each school's RONI data utilisation.

RESPONSES

Following the recommendations of Lowe (2007, p.134) for analysing results, responses have been grouped into four re-occurring themes:

Table 1	Utilisation of RONIs
Frequency	Response
3/5	Manually review the given red and amber RONI list, manipulate and select 'the real reds'
3/5	Had no one person identified in their school in 'control of RONI data'
4/5	Described RONI data as 'complementary' to one or more internal systems used within school that were in place to identify and provide proactive interventions for potential NEETs
0/5	Felt that the RONI data particularly assisted in their NEET provision

Table 2	Perceived Accuracy and Timings of RONI Data	
Frequency	Response	
5/5	Felt that the red/amber/green outcomes were generally accurate	
4/5	Felt that the data remained similar between Y9 and Y10	
3/5	Used the Y7 RONI data, one thought it was pointless to receive	
2/5	Specifically used the Y10 RONI data for careers advice interventions	

Table 3	Categories of RONIs
Frequency	Response
4/5	Felt that they should be able to manipulate their own RONI categories
2/5	Further thought that the LA should recognise their own categories/ internal system

Table 4	Formal Incorporation of RONI Data	
Frequency	Response	
2/5	Felt that RONI data should only be formally included in published data if it did not over-complicate systems, or 'punish' schools	
5/5	Felt that RONI data should be included as a 'Pupil Premium' category	

ANALYSIS

Responses indicated that all respondents believed RONI data is generally accurate and table 1 captured that four respondents believed that RONI data was complementary to one or more internal systems that were already in-place at school. Three of the respondents recorded that they manually reviewed their red and amber RONI list and manipulated the data for their own internal use. Four felt that they should be able to formally manipulate their school RONI categories. Four of the respondents believed the data remained similar from Y9-Y10, one respondent adding that numerous factors could have changed by Y11. Three of the respondents were extremely positive about receiving RONI data for Y7 learners; one commented that receiving this data was pointless. This view may have been isolated to using the data to plan careers, independent advice and progression interventions.

These findings suggest that schools believe that RONI data is a valuable tool that contributes to other school systems that identify and track learners who may be at a higher risk of becoming NEET upon leaving school. RONI data should therefore not, Research Methods MT/PB720

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be a stand-alone category when publishing data and delivering interventions to progress learners. Furthermore, as reflected by Filmer-Sankey and McCrone (2012, p.v), the majority of schools would seek to have flexibility to add their own RONI categories, which better reflect their local learner demographics. Two respondents further commented that these amended RONI data sets should be recognised within published statistics at either a local or national level.

Opposingly, two respondents felt that it would not be very beneficial for RONI data to be formally included in published data, one thought it might be beneficial and two thought it would be very beneficial; both further stipulating that this should only be if it did not over-complicate systems or 'punish' schools. However, all respondents indicated they felt there would be a vast benefit for RONI data to be included in existing "Pupil Premium" data, with red RONIs added as an additional category. This suggests that schools understand the benefits of using RONI data, however, they feel there are already systems in place that adding RONI data to could enhance, rather than forming an additional reporting system.

None of the respondents felt that the RONI data particularly contributed to the planning and implementation of academic offers for their potential NEETs (red and amber RONIs), other than to provide them with access to additional independent careers and advice interviews as and when those learners required them. In contrast to the responses given, a majority of respondents described a school offer of different academic routes (including alternative provision placements) to learners who specifically featured on the red and amber RONI lists. Responses to the same question may have varied if they have been directed to a member of staff responsible

for the curriculum, behaviour, or inclusion. This may have also altered the response that three respondents believed that there was no one-person identified within their school with a responsibility for 'owning' the RONI data.

CONCLUSION

5 of 25 secondary schools from one LA were interviewed for this study, there are 152 LAs in England (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Local_education_authority). The selected sample was, therefore, extremely small and no significant conclusions can be taken from this study. In addition, all respondents were deployed by their school to provide independent advice and careers services to learners. Only one respondent held a senior responsibility within the school for data, retention, progression, behaviour or inclusion (and they were returning from a nine-month maternity leave). Responses given may therefore not reflect an accurate picture of how RONI data was collated, interpreted and utilised by schools to prevent NEET outcomes.

This study highlights two areas for further research:

- (1) The standardisation of a national set of RONI indicators with a recommendation for schools to:
 - a. select EIGHT of the most relevant RONIs from a given list of ten
 - add TWO of their own RONIs which reflect their local learner demographics/challenges

- (2) The inclusion of red RONI learners within nationally recognised Pupil Premium data:
 - a. for Y7 learners to receive additional funding to be used for interventions where they would not have received funding previously, the information being revised in Y9 by the refreshed data
 - b. to recognise and celebrate interventions when comparing red RONI data to actual destination information and record in 'closing the gap' analysis

I believe red RONI learners should be added as a category to the existing Pupil Premium data, which is mandatory and nationally recognised. To enable this to meet quality assurance standards of being valid, accountable, reliable, consistent, objective, sufficient and inclusive, the RONI data would be required to be standardised and acutely manipulated for individually schools.

Subsequently, schools would be able to direct additional funding for red RONIs who would not have qualified on the previous Pupil Premium criteria, to additional intervention strategies and/or alternative academic offers that ultimately aid them to progress successfully in Post 16. By featuring in the 'closing the gap' Ofsted reporting statistics, schools would be required to maintain and use their RONI data and also be recognised for their proactive interventions.

APPENDICES

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

- 1. From the LA provided RONI data:
 - a) what data do you use/disregard/collect extra
 - b) when is that data used
 - c) how is that data used (e.g. for consequential interventions)
- 2. How you measure your system's effectiveness: do you have a comparison between (not) using your system or a system not linked to the LA data?
- 3. Do you feel that RONIs are effective in accurately predicting learners who have a significant risk of becoming NEET?
 - a) do you feel identifying NEETs 'statistically' through RONIs enables a/your setting to design and provide an academic offer that significantly reduces NEET outcomes
 - b) do you have any supporting data
- 4. In your professional judgement do you feel that a nationally published RONI reporting system would be beneficial:
 - a) in accurately identifying potential Y11 NEETS
 - b) in assisting you with your potential NEET provision
 - c) how is that data used
- 5. How beneficial do you feel it would be for Ofsted to require collection of, and publish, Y7 RONI data and match it to Y11 outcomes to include in 'Closing the Gap' data? (4 = very beneficial, 1 = not beneficial)

INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTS

https://www.dropbox.com/s/u9zo7o62przokz1/Interview%20Transcripts.xlsx?dl=0

SPECIFIC NTERVIEW QUOTES

Table 1	Utilisation of RONIs
	<i>"I have taken the Y10 RONI data and used it as a planning mechanism for the following years interventions with Y11"</i>
Quotes:	<i>"My spread sheet is my bible – at any one stage I know what Y11 are up to"</i>
	"The RONI list is useful, but what is really useful is someone who really knows these pupils and the school demographic"

Table 2	Perceived Accuracy and Timings of RONI Data
	"The reds are reds, but we recently had a green that was red"
	"Not a lot is really going to change between Y7 and Y9"
	"Only really need Y9 data as it doesn't really change that much, Y10 is almost too late?"
Quotes:	"Y7 is useful s there may be information that we have missed Between Y9 and Y10 they are probably not going to move out of the red list"
	"X sees the red ones in Y9, the amber in Y10 and all in Y11 anyway"
	"Any students highlighted by the RONI or any other interventions get as may careers interviews as they need through the year"

Table 3	Categories of RONIs
Quotes:	"Upon knowing the learner we may move them" "Transport is generally a problem for all our students it is such a limitation it is virtually a flag to every child in our school" "About half the students were highlighted as red because they were EAL but these were some of the most organised and effective
	students" "Yes, it would be nice to tell them we (dis)agree because then if we had a larger number of reds they would recognise this we move them around the categories anyway" "Yes then they should acknowledge the new list"

Table 4Formal Incorporation of RONI Data

Scores	4 – it would be very beneficial 3 2 1 – it would not be	be beneficial
Quotes:	 "1. Not really, because it would be more advantageous to h Pupil Premium category as you don't really want to over content of the second state of the second	ave it as a mplicate it" ould be better RONIs would Premium. As the number cognition so is not always

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А	RPA Briefing Document	(Nov 2011)
В	Report on roll out of the RONI	(Dec 2012)
С	RONI Update	(June 2013)
D	Year 11 2013/14 RONI Leaver Destinations	(Nov 2013)
Е	Overview of RONI	(Feb 2014)
F	RONI Update	(June 2014)
G	16-19 NEET Performance Update 5	(Sept 2014)
Н	NEETs 2013/14 Statistics Update	(Feb 2015)

I Year 7 and 11 2013/14 Performance Dat

J	Secondary school 'x' trial, Year 7	(Sept 2012)
Κ	Secondary school 'y' trial, Year 7 and 10	(May 2014)
L	Secondary school 'y' trial, Year 10	(Sept 2012)
Μ	Swindon RONI Model	(2011)
Ν	Ealing RONI & Early Intervention Report	(Nov 2012)