



Research Insights Bulletin

First Edition, February 2026

Introduction:

Welcome to Seetec's first quarterly Research Insights Bulletin!



At Seetec, we believe that robust research plays a vital role in shaping policies, guiding organisations, and empowering individuals to make informed decisions. Our commitment to high-quality research stems from a shared goal: **improving support for those who need it most.**

This bulletin brings you fresh perspectives from our own research projects, alongside analysis of emerging trends across the education, employment, and justice sectors. We'll explore cross-cutting themes at the heart of today's societal conversations, including NEET, SEND and health.

In this edition, we focus on young people, particularly those not in education, employment, or training. You'll also find insights from our recent study on career advice and employment opportunities for young people with SEND in Buckinghamshire.

By sharing these findings, we aim to spark thought, inspire dialogue, and drive meaningful change. Enjoy reading!

Holly Dono,
Research Manager at Seetec

Emerging Trends and Data Analysis

Feature Research Spotlight

Voices from the Field: Practitioner Insight

Forthcoming Research and Contact

References and Further Reading



Emerging Trends and Data Analysis



NEET in the UK: A Persistent Challenge

Nearly **946,000 young people** in the UK are currently NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training), according to the latest Office for National Statistics data (2025). **That's 15.1% of 18–24-year-olds - almost one in eight** (Youth Employment UK, 2025). While numbers dipped slightly from last quarter, the issue remains stubbornly high.

Behind the headline figures:

366,000 are unemployed, and 580,000 are economically inactive (ONS, 2025).



Men make up 54% of NEETs, women 46% (ONS, 2025).



One in five NEETs have no qualifications, and 26% of unemployed NEETs have been job-seeking for over a year (Youth Futures Foundation, 2025).



The consequences are long-term and costly. Being NEET at 18-19 makes someone **20% more likely to be unemployed a decade later**, and the post-pandemic surge could cost the UK economy **£20 billion in lost GDP** (Impetus, 2025).

The greatest concern for those tracking the UK NEET population is that there is a surge in young people experiencing some of the factors that contribute to somebody's potential to become NEET, namely mental health challenges or a requirement for SEND support at school.

Mental health and disability are major drivers of economic inactivity for NEETs. SEND youth face even greater barriers: **only 4.8% of people with a learning disability known to adult social care are in paid work**, and employment rates for young people with autism or learning disabilities are the lowest of any group (ThinkForward. 2025).

The number of SEND youth is growing year-on-year with latest data showing that the number of young people who have an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) has more than doubled since 2015 (240,000 to 483,000), while SEND prevalence has grown from 15% of the school population to almost 20% in 2025 (Department for Education, 2025). This increase is significant as 16–17-year-olds identified as having a SEND need are twice as likely to be NEET and those with an EHCP are thrice as likely to be NEET (Gov UK, 2025). Failure to address the barriers that SEND youth face will ultimately lead to an increase in NEET numbers, compounding the impact for young people.

The risks also extend beyond employment. NEET individuals are twice as likely to enter the youth justice system, and over 70% of prolific young offenders (PYOs) had periods of NEET status before 18 (Youth Justice Legal Centre, 2025).

Tackling NEET requires coordinated action across education, employment, health, and justice systems with targeted support for vulnerable groups.



Feature Research Spotlight

Our Research Spotlight will share with you the latest outputs from Seetec's Research Unit including a summary of the research questions, methodology, key findings and implications for our sector. As always, the full report and executive summary are available on our research website.

What's next after Level 3? An Exploration of Employment Opportunities for Young People on Level 3 Courses with Education, Health and Care Plans. (Seetec, 2025).

The research

This study explores employment opportunities for young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) who have Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) and are enrolled on Level 3 courses in Buckinghamshire. The research responds to the UK Government's commitment to increase employment among disabled and neurodiverse individuals. Despite initiatives like Supported Internships and the Disability Confident scheme, less than 1% of employers in Buckinghamshire are Disability Confident, and many young people



lack awareness of available opportunities. The study seeks to understand aspirations, barriers, and employer practices to inform policy and practice.

Methodology

The research used a mixed-method approach combining quantitative and qualitative data. Data gathering included multiple stages including surveys with 89 young people and 13 employers, focus groups with young people and interviews with employers, careers leads, SENDCos and parents. A thematic analysis was applied to the qualitative data.

Key findings

Employment Opportunities: Apprenticeships and vacancies exist locally, however, supported internships are rare and apprenticeships are highly competitive.

Employer Awareness: While 58% of employers in this research identified as Disability Confident, 33% were unsure. Many lacked an understanding of the benefits of employing disabled or neurodivergent people.

Student Aspirations: Young people were motivated to work and gain skills. Creative industries, health and social care, and trades were popular career choices – aligning with local skills shortages.

Barriers:

Limited careers advice and guidance in schools.



Misconceptions about application timelines.



Anxiety about disclosure and masking disabilities.



Perceived lack of opportunities and employer reluctance.



Positive Practices: Some employers demonstrated inclusive recruitment, reasonable adjustments, and proactive engagement.

Support Needs: Students identified job mentors, clearer information on vacancies, and employers who understand their needs as having a positive impact.

Practice and Policy Implications

Early Careers Guidance: Consistent, professional advice from an early stage is essential.

Employer Engagement: Businesses should adopt inclusive recruitment practices and build long-term relationships with schools.

Information Access: Clear pathways into sectors with skill shortages should be communicated to SEND students. **Workplace Adjustments:** Employers need training and resources to understand neurodiversity and mental health needs.

Systemic Support: Expansion of supported internships and alternative routes beyond academic progression is critical.



What does this mean for commissioners, providers and practitioners?

Commissioners:

Invest in early and sustained careers guidance for SEND students



Fund diverse supported internship models, including Level 3 pathways.



Providers:

Embed employer encounters and work experience in curricula.



Use Employment Passports to communicate student needs effectively.



Practitioners:

Offer practical support - CV writing, interview practice, and job mentoring.



Promote awareness of inclusive employers and local labour market information.



Voices from the Field: Practitioner Insight



In this section, we bring forward the perspectives of those working at the heart of our service delivery. Their experiences provide invaluable context to our research findings, highlighting the practical realities behind the data. By sharing these insights, we aim to bridge the gap between evidence and practice ensuring that the voices of practitioners inform and shape the way we understand challenges and opportunities.

Neil Cattle

Operations Manager, Pluss

Q1. In your experience of working with young people with SEND, what is the greatest barrier to them entering employment, further education or training?

The greatest barrier isn't the young person's disability or additional needs - it's attitudes and assumptions. Too often, young people with SEND face low expectations from the outset. Families, educators, and employers sometimes focus on what they perceive someone can't do rather than their potential. This creates a self-fulfilling

prophecy where opportunities are limited before the young person even gets a chance to try.

Employer perceptions remain a significant hurdle. Many employers lack confidence in recruiting someone with SEND, worry about getting it wrong, or make assumptions about capability based on a diagnosis rather than the individual. Additionally, many young people with SEND leave education without having had meaningful work experience, so they lack the opportunity to develop employability skills and workplace confidence that their peers take for granted.

“ Addressing these barriers requires shifting mindsets, building employer confidence, creating genuine opportunities for work experience, and ensuring young people have appropriate, sustained support as they transition into adult life. ”

Q2. How do supported internships help young people with SEND to progress?

Supported internships are transformative because they provide what many young people with SEND have been denied - a genuine chance to prove themselves in a real workplace. Unlike classroom-based learning or simulated work environments, supported internships place young people in actual jobs where they're doing meaningful work alongside other employees. This is invaluable for building both skills and confidence and we have witnessed this first hand in Pluss through our fifteen years of delivery in supported internships.

“ The structured support makes the crucial difference. Job coaches work alongside interns, breaking down tasks, teaching skills in context, and helping them navigate workplace culture and expectations. This is about enabling independence through tailored teaching and gradually fading support as confidence grows. ”

Supported internships also change employer perceptions. When businesses see firsthand what young people with SEND can achieve with the right support, it breaks down assumptions and builds confidence in recruiting more inclusively in future. Pluss have been very successful in supporting young people with SEND into employment with 73% of interns moving into long term jobs either with their host employer or in their local community.



Q3. Can you tell me more about your experience of the Supported Employment Quality Framework and what that means for working with young people?

The Supported Employment Quality Framework provides a valuable structure for ensuring Pluss are delivering high-quality, person-centred support. It sets clear standards across all aspects of supported employment - from initial engagement and assessment through job development, in-work support, and measuring outcomes. In practical terms, it means every young person we work with receives a consistent standard of support, regardless of which team member they're working with. The framework emphasises person-centred planning - really taking time to understand the individual's aspirations, strengths, interests, and support needs rather than making assumptions based on their diagnosis or educational history.

Working within this framework ultimately means young people receive professional, ethical, high-quality support that respects their rights, maximizes their potential, and focuses on sustainable employment outcomes. It raises the standard across the Supported Employment sector and gives young people and families confidence that they're receiving evidence-based support rather than a postcode lottery of quality. For us as practitioners in Pluss, it provides clear guidance while still allowing flexibility to tailor support to individual circumstances - which is exactly what person-centered practice should look like.

To find out more about supported internships and the work that Pluss do with individuals who have additional needs, have a look on our website:

<https://seetec.co.uk/how-we-can-help/specialist-support-with-pluss/pluss-programmes/>



Forthcoming Research and Contact

Upcoming Research Launch: An evaluation of how age and gender impacts participants' experiences of the Restart Scheme with examples of barriers to the labour market and insights into effective support for people aged 25 and under or 50 and over.

To get in touch with us about our research, contact our research manager or take a look at our website.

Email:
holly.dono@seetec.co.uk

Research website:
<https://seetec.co.uk/partners/research/>



References and Further Reading

Department for Education (2025) Special educational needs in England: Academic year 2024/25. Available at: <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/special-educational-needs-in-england/2024-25> [Accessed 2 Dec. 2025].

GOV UK (2025) NEET by characteristics dataset. Available at: <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/data-catalogue/data-set/8162db7a-a24d-4b8e-bdfc-8da52819c1a8> [Accessed 2 Dec. 2025].

House of Commons Library (2025) Research briefing SN06705. Available at: <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/SN06705/> [Accessed 2 Dec. 2025].

Impetus (2025) NEET stats November 2025. Available at: <https://www.impetus.org.uk/news-and-views/neet-stats-nov-2025> [Accessed 2 Dec. 2025].

Office for National Statistics (ONS) (2025) Young people not in education, employment or training (NEET): November 2025. Available at: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peoplenotinwork/unemployment/bulletins/youngpeoplenotineducationemploymentortrainingneet/november2025> [Accessed 2 Dec. 2025].

Seetec (2025) What's next after Level 3? Available at: <https://seetec.co.uk/businesses/careers-information-advice-and-guidance-for-schools/whats-next-after-level-3/> [Accessed 2 Dec. 2025].

ThinkForward (2025) Addressing employment inequity for young people with learning disabilities and autism. [pdf] Available at: <https://thinkforward.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/ThinkForward-Addressing-employment-inequity-for-young-people-with-learning-disabilities-and-autism.pdf> [Accessed 2 Dec. 2025].

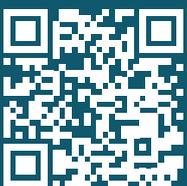
Youth Employment UK (2025) August 2025 quarterly NEET data. Available at: <https://www.youthemployment.org.uk/august-2025-quarterly-neet-data/> [Accessed 2 Dec. 2025].

Youth Futures Foundation (2025) NEETs trends analysis Q2 2025. [pdf] Available at: <https://youthfuturesfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/NEETS-TRENDS-ANALYSIS-Q2-2025.pdf> [Accessed 2 Dec. 2025].

Youth Justice Legal Centre (YJLC) (2025) New MOJ report examines needs and characteristics of prolific youth offenders. Available at: <https://yjlc.uk/resources/legal-updates/new-moj-report-examines-needs-and-characteristics-prolific-youth-offenders> [Accessed 2 Dec. 2025].



seetec.co.uk



seetec.co.uk/partners/research/