



# Research Insights Bulletin

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Second Edition, May 2026

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# Introduction:

## Welcome to Seetec's second quarterly Research Insights Bulletin!

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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, 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 engaging young people who are economically inactive or unemployed. You'll also find insights from our synthesis of current or latest national NEET programmes and what we can learn from practice. This comes on the back of the highly anticipated Milburn Review but does not delve into those findings, it pulls on existing data from across the UK

demonstrating clear triangulation of evidence that paints a similar picture: accessing the labour market is becoming more difficult for a cohort of young people with increasingly complex needs.

We are passionate about using our combined education, justice and employment experience to support young people and that is why we are lead patrons for Youth Employment UK's national commission on the local funding gap, you can find more information about responding to their call for evidence in this issue.

By sharing these insights, we aim to spark thought, inspire dialogue, and drive meaningful change.

Enjoy reading!

**Holly Dono,**  
**Research Manager at Seetec**

# Emerging Trends and Data Analysis



## Latest NEET Data:

Latest UK NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training) data show a notable increase among young people. The latest figures, covering January to March 2026 and released on the 28th of May 2026 indicate that there were **1,012,000 16-24 year-olds classified as NEET**, an **increase of 55,000** compared to the previous quarter (ONS, 2026). This suggests an upward trend at the beginning of 2026. The composition of the NEET group continues to be weighted towards inactivity with **61% economically inactive** (not employed and not actively looking for work), while the remaining **39% are unemployed and actively seeking employment** (ONS, 2026). Noteworthy is the slight decrease in unemployed NEETs in the last quarter, down 11,000, whilst the number of economically inactive has significantly increased by 66,000.

## NEET Economic Inactivity:

Economic inactivity among NEET young people in the UK is increasingly driven by health-related and structural factors rather than short-term labour market detachment. Work-limiting health conditions are now the dominant driver with **44% of NEET young people reporting a health condition that**

**restricts their ability to work**, a sharp increase from 26% in 2015 (The Health Foundation, 2026). Mental health conditions and autism were the first and second main drivers of work-limiting health conditions in NEET young people respectively according to the 2025 Labour Force Survey. These findings are in line with the Keep Britain Working Review (DWP, 2025) report that showed **young people with mental health conditions are 4.7 times more likely to be economically inactive than their peers**. Similarly, a Department for Work and Pensions 2025 report found that **24.4% of NEETs cite depression or anxiety as a primary reason for becoming NEET** whilst **22.4% of inactive NEETs report having autism** (DWP, 2025).

Although health has been identified as one of the main drivers behind increasing NEET numbers, the greatest challenge remains system disengagement. **44% of NEETs do not claim benefits**, meaning they have little or no contact with Jobcentres and are not reached by mainstream employment or skills support programmes (Resolution Foundation, 2025). This limits opportunities for re-engagement and indicates that the NEET numbers could be higher than those reported by the ONS.

## NEET Unemployment:

According to the latest labour market data, unemployment among NEET young people in the UK is being driven by a combination of economic uncertainty and rising entry barriers. A weakened labour market with fewer vacancies, particularly in retail and hospitality roles that traditionally absorb young workers, has reduced opportunities for first jobs. This heightened competition has been further intensified by a sharp contraction in graduate entry routes, data from Indeed shows that **graduate schemes have fallen by around 33% in the last year (2025)**, pushing more young people into unemployment or prolonged job searching.

A persistent experience and skills gap also plays a major role. Many so called entry level roles now require prior work experience, effectively excluding young people without employment histories. This disadvantage is compounded by a **qualification gap**: young people without **Level 2 English and Maths are three times more likely to remain NEET**, limiting access to apprenticeships, traineeships and most permanent roles. At the same time, **economic pressures on employers** have reduced demand for young workers. According to analysis by the Centre for Policy Studies in 2025, the estimated annual **cost of hiring a full-time 18–20 year old rose from £15.6k in 2024 to £19.7k by 2026 demonstrating a 26% increase**, driven by a combination of tax rises and minimum wage rises making employers more cautious about taking on inexperienced staff.

Structural changes in the economy are further tightening opportunities. **Automation and AI adoption** are disproportionately affecting entry level and routine roles reducing the number of jobs that traditionally acted as stepping stones into employment for young people. According to Great Place to Work UK, **entry level roles have dropped by almost a third since 2022 (2026)**.

Although automation does not eliminate work overall, it raises skill thresholds for remaining roles, disadvantaging those without strong digital or transferable skills. Finally, there has been a long term **erosion of apprenticeship opportunities for young people**. According to the Department for Education (2025) the number of starts taken by **19-24 year-olds has declined by 15% since 2017 whilst starts by under-19s fell by 26%**, reflecting a shift towards older, upskilled workers. Together, these factors create a labour market that is harder to enter and more expensive for employers resulting in higher unemployment within the NEET population despite continued willingness to work.



# Feature Research Spotlight



Our Research Spotlight will share with you the latest outputs from Seetec's Research Unit. This Quarter, we focus on synthesising existing evidence on national NEET intervention schemes and consider the question of 'what works to engage young people in NEET programmes?'

## Synthesis of latest national NEET intervention schemes:

### Kickstart Scheme (2020–2022) (DWP, 2023)

The Kickstart Scheme demonstrated that fully subsidised jobs can generate short term employment gains, but with mixed longer term impact and delivery challenges. Quantitatively, the scheme had a modest but measurable effect: **for every 100 participants, 11 additional young people were in unsubsidised employment two years later** compared with similar non participants.

Early outcomes were stronger around **75% of participants were in education, employment or training (EET) 3–4 months after completion**, suggesting Kickstart was effective at rapid labour market entry. However, sustainability was weaker: only 31% of leavers were still employed with their Kickstart employer at seven months, indicating limited retention. Delivery fell short of ambition, with **163,000 starts versus a projected 250,000**, **60% of employers reported too few applications** and **40% found vacancies harder to fill than expected**. Despite this, satisfaction remained high among both participants (70%) and employers (73%), implying that where matches occurred, the model worked well, but scale and targeting constrained overall impact.



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## Welsh Young Person's Guarantee (2021– ) (Gov Wales, 2025)

The Welsh Young Person's Guarantee (YPG) exemplifies a preventative, system wide approach rather than a single intervention. Between 2021 and early 2025, **48,500 young people accessed employability and skills programmes, with 40–60% achieving a positive EET outcome.** A key strength is user experience and confidence: **89% of young people reported that support met or exceeded expectations,** suggesting strong engagement and trust.

Importantly, Wales did not experience the predicted post pandemic surge in youth unemployment, implying that the Guarantee may have acted as an effective labour market buffer or that the challenge presented was easier to tackle than the Guarantee expected. Continued political and financial commitment shown by **an additional £10m investment to establish 12 new Youth Hubs** has helped sustain delivery. While outcomes are less immediately attributable than a job subsidy, the YPG's value lies in early intervention, breadth of offer and integration across services.

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## Scottish Developing the Young Workforce (DYW) Strategy (2015– ) (Scottish Government, 2023)

Scotland's DYW strategy stands out for its **long term, structural impact.** Its original goal - to reduce youth unemployment by 40% - was achieved **four years early in 2017,** and progress has been sustained, with youth unemployment falling from **18.8% in 2014 to 10% in 2024.** A major success has been apprenticeship expansion, particularly at foundation and graduate levels (foundation apprenticeships rising from **346 to 1,535,** graduate apprenticeships from **277 to 2,017**), diversifying high quality work based routes.

Scale and reach are notable, with **over 400,000 young people engaged in FY24.** Crucially, delivery infrastructure matters: the introduction of a **DYW Coordinator in every state school by 2020** proved critical in rebuilding employer education links after the pandemic. DYW demonstrates how embedding employer engagement and vocational pathways within the education system can produce durable reductions in youth unemployment.

## Youth Guarantee Proposal (2026– ) (Youth Employment UK, 2025)

The proposed Youth Guarantee represents the most expansive and resource intensive model, backed by **£820 million** and combining immediate job creation with intensive support. Its **Jobs Guarantee** element offers **six months of fully subsidised employment** for long term unemployed 18–21 year olds, covering **25 hours per week at minimum wage** and supplemented by wraparound support and a **£250 onboarding grant**, directly tackling employer risk and youth cost barriers.

The **Youth Guarantee Gateway** strengthens frontline support through **four weeks of intensive work coach engagement**, while **360 expanded Youth Hubs** aim to address mental health, careers and community barriers. On the demand side, the programme is ambitious, proposing **350,000 training and workplace opportunities** and a **£3,000 Youth Jobs Grant** to incentivise hiring. The proposal synthesises lessons from earlier schemes but remains untested; its success will hinge on employer take up, quality of placements and coordination between benefits, health and skills systems.

## What Works

**Early, integrated and preventive systems** (Wales and Scotland) appear more effective at stabilising youth labour market outcomes than short term schemes alone. **Strong delivery infrastructure**, particularly links between schools and employers (DYW Coordinators), underpins sustainability.

Programmes perform best when they **combine employment with wraparound support**, addressing health, confidence and practical barriers. Finally, scale without simplicity risks under delivery: successful models align incentives for young people, employers and providers while remaining easy to access. The most effective approach is therefore not a single intervention, but a **coherent pipeline** from early support, through skills and experience, into sustained employment with sufficient funding and local delivery capacity to reach those most at risk of becoming NEET.



## Driving greater engagement with NEET programmes:

Recent research indicates that engaging young people who are Not in Education, Employment, or Training (NEET) requires a departure from traditional, “employment-first” models toward a **holistic, person-centred approach**. With 2026 data from the Health Foundation highlighting that 44% of NEETs now report work-limiting health conditions, primarily mental health issues and neurodiversity, effective programmes are increasingly embedding **psychosocial support** directly into their frameworks. Rather than treating health and employability as separate issues, successful interventions provide integrated coaching and resilience training as the foundation for vocational progress.

The role of **consistent, relational support** remains a cornerstone of engagement. Studies from Cedefop and the Shaw Trust underscore that a single, trusted point of contact, such as a dedicated mentor or coach, is vital for maintaining participation among those who have felt alienated by institutional systems. Furthermore, the use of **peer ambassadors** with shared lived experience has proven more effective at building trust than standard outreach. By situating services in “one-stop hubs” that simplify access to transport, childcare, and training, providers can reduce the administrative and logistical friction that often leads to early dropout.

Reaching the “hidden” NEET population, those not registered with statutory services, requires **innovative digital outreach**. Meeting young people in their own digital and physical spaces, such as via social media platforms or community sports clubs, is essential for initial contact. Moving forward, the focus is shifting toward **early identification** at the secondary school level.

Early identification of young people at risk of becoming NEET is essential because it allows for proactive intervention before the compounding barriers of long-term disengagement such as loss of confidence, social isolation, and deteriorating mental health become entrenched. By utilizing data-driven tools like the **Risk of NEET Indicator (RONI)** cited in Cedefop’s successful pilot (2025) within formal education settings, local authorities can provide targeted, “wraparound” support that addresses the specific causes of disengagement, whether they are academic, personal, or socio-economic. This preventative approach preserves a young person’s sense of “connected belonging” to their community, significantly increasing the likelihood of a successful transition into sustainable employment or training.



# 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.

**Patricia Drake** Wellbeing and Retention Coach, Pluss – part of the Seetec Group.

else is much more qualified or experienced and means that sometimes they don't consider applying for roles they could be suitable for. Reframing mindset towards job descriptions and development opportunities is important.

“ If you are supporting a young person, I would recommend you focus on their transferable skills and encourage them to see every job role as a learning and development opportunity. ”

**Q1.** What do you feel are the biggest barriers facing young people entering work today?

In my opinion, imposter syndrome is one of the greatest barriers. Imposter syndrome creates additional pressure that young people need to be better than everyone else, they feel not good enough for the role and fear making mistakes due to that. It can cause young people to downgrade themselves, convincing themselves that someone



**Q2.** Mental health is cited as one of the main driving factors behind rising NEET numbers. Do you have any advice for supporting young people with mental health barriers?

Open communication is the most important tool to support any individual, particularly those with a mental health barrier to work. Communicating regularly and sharing reviews that support constructive feedback and praise is key. Younger people need encouragement and motivation from their mentors to help reframe negative thoughts into positive action. Open communication builds rapport and establishes confidence over time. Signposting young people to mental health support is always a great thing to do, but on an individual basis focus on building rapport and creating a supportive environment.

**Q3.** Do you have any advice for employers who are hiring young people who are neurodivergent into their workplace?

“ Like all individuals, every neurodivergent person has different requirements and needs to be considered an individual basis, there isn't a one-size fits all. ”

One thing that can help to welcome applications from neurodivergent individuals is stating that you are willing to implement reasonable adjustments in job adverts and establishing neurodivergent friendly hiring practices in your business. Some people with a neurodiversity or disability will not feel comfortable applying for your role if they feel as though the advert or application process is not accessible.

One way to achieve this is through the Disability Confident employer accreditation.

“ Disability confident employers have more robust hiring practices and receive a broader application portfolio. ”

Be considerate of your job adverts. It is important to clearly state what requirements are non-negotiables and which are desirable. Be open about your willingness to develop people in the role to ensure you receive applications from a range of young people.

 **disability**  
confident

# Research and Contact

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](mailto:holly.dono@seetec.co.uk)

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

Find out more about Youth Employment UK's National Commission that Seetec is lead patron for here:

<https://www.youthemployment.org.uk/youth-employment-uk-launches-national-commission-on-the-local-funding-gap/>



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