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Guidance

Using a risk of NEET indicator (RONI) approach: a practical guide for education providers

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Applies to England

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Overview

This practical guide builds on information in [Identify and support young people at risk of being NEET](#).

It provides a summary for education providers.

Who this guide is for

This practical guide is for leaders and staff in education providers, including those responsible for careers education and supporting students to transition into post-16 learning and sustain participation beyond entry.

‘Education providers’ refers to all school-age settings and further education (FE) providers that deliver education and training to young people from the age of 11 to 18. This includes:

- mainstream schools (maintained schools, academies, free schools and independent schools)
- maintained and independent special schools
- pupil referral units
- alternative provision (AP)
- specialist social, emotional and mental health provision
- AP academies
- hospital schools
- school sixth-forms
- sixth-form colleges
- FE colleges
- independent training providers
- apprenticeship providers

As part of their provision, education providers should consider what they can do to develop or contribute to a risk of NEET indicator (RONI) approach.

What RONI approaches are and why they are important

Young people who spend time not in employment, education or training (NEET) are at greater risk of poorer long-term outcomes.

RONI approaches are structured, data-informed processes that identify young people at risk of becoming NEET.

They combine data on attendance, attainment, behaviour, special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) and other NEET risk factors with professional judgement and local insight, requiring close collaboration between schools, FE providers, local authorities and other partners.

RONI approaches capture those who, for example:

- are disengaging from education before the end of compulsory schooling
- might struggle to secure or take up an appropriate post-16 place
- will likely find it more difficult to stay on in education and training until at least the age of 18

When designed and delivered well, they support sustained participation and progression, providing the basis for early, targeted support tailored to a young person's needs.

How you should implement a RONI approach

The following 5 steps set out how education providers can:

- identify learners at risk of becoming NEET
- target support effectively
- work with partners to improve participation and transition outcomes

Step 1: design your RONI approach

Schools, FE providers and local authorities should work together to design their RONI approach.

Local authorities often conduct a RONI assessment ahead of young people preparing to transition into post-16 education – in year 10 or 11, for example. Sharing their assessment with schools provides an important opportunity to refine their approach using data and insights they do not hold themselves. This supports schools and local authorities to reach agreement on who is most at risk by considering the full range of relevant data and professional expertise. Determining which characteristics and NEET risk factors your school is well placed to assess is a crucial early step.

Schools will be in the strongest possible position to contribute to a shared RONI assessment with local authorities by year 10 or 11 if they have been conducting their own RONI assessments regularly from the start of key stage 3 into key stage 4 (from year 7 onwards). Similarly, FE providers can also conduct their own RONI assessments for young people who are enrolled with them.

Effective data-sharing between local partners is a crucial part of a RONI approach. You should agree at the outset what this should look like and put the necessary agreements and systems in place. This includes:

- what information is shared and when
- how information is transferred securely

You should ensure that all parties comply with data protection requirements.

Step 2: run the RONI analysis

Data tools can help make RONI assessments more efficient, avoiding the need to create systems for combining different data manually.

The Department for Education has made a RONI tool available to all local authorities, with other tools available for use by education providers, such as the OnTrack+ RONI tool for schools (within Compass+). These enable the chosen risk factors and characteristics to be assessed, generating a risk score for each young person.

Education providers should overlay the results of the analysis of NEET risks with staff's own professional judgement and knowledge of individual young people's needs and circumstances. A range of staff will have relevant expertise to contribute at this stage, including pastoral, SEND, careers and inclusion teams.

Assessment of NEET risk should be robust. It should combine data with professional judgement to provide a sound basis to identify the kind of support needed, focused most on those at greatest risk.

Case study: Huntcliff School

Huntcliff School works with the North East Combined Authority Careers Hub, combining pupil-level data gathered via the OnTrack+ RONI tool with insights from across a broad range of pastoral, SEND and inclusion teams.

This approach contributes to the early identification of those at risk of more difficult transition into post-16 education. It enables staff to design careers activity and other forms of support in a timely and structured way.

Targeted activity agreed through these reviews includes:

- tailored work-experience planning
- employer engagement
- personalised careers guidance in years 10 and 11

This consistent, early and collaborative approach has supported sustained zero or near-zero NEET outcomes over 4 consecutive years, with careers planning and transition readiness embedded within routine practice.

Information about identified learners is shared with the careers hub and local authority through established processes, supporting co-ordinated post-16 transition conversations and continuity of support for learners who may require it.

Step 3: plan and deliver targeted support for young people at greatest risk

Education providers should plan and deliver a set of targeted interventions focused on those at greatest risk of disengagement. This should reflect individual needs and avoid a 'one-size-fits-all' approach. It could include, for example:

- careers guidance

- pastoral or wellbeing support
- mentoring
- enrichment activity
- small-group provision
- work with employers
- structured transition support
- a referral to specialist services

Put targeted support in place early to help reduce a young person's risk of becoming NEET as they approach the transition into post-16 education and training. For those still at risk of becoming NEET, ensure they are supported to navigate the transition smoothly so they do not fall behind.

Schools and local authorities should have early conversations with FE providers and local authorities about the young people who need extra support to transition smoothly. This could be through transition panels or multi-agency meetings.

Put clear data-sharing processes in place to share information about a young person's NEET risk, needs and support in a timely and structured way. Ensure that support follows the young person through the transition and includes practical steps to help them stay engaged once they are enrolled in FE.

Case study: Southwark College

Southwark College has partnered with Ark Globe Academy to deliver a targeted 10-week taster programme for 20 young people identified by the school as being at risk of NEET. It supported them to transition smoothly into post-16 education by helping to build confidence, raise aspirations, improve engagement, and develop awareness of progression pathways.

Delivered on-site at the college, the programme included:

- weekly sessions focused on personal development, resilience and communication skills
- careers education and vocational taster experiences
- employer engagement and enrichment activities, including trips
- an end-of-programme project, culminating in a final presentation
- delivery in a small-group setting, enabling personalised support

The strong collaboration between school and college staff helped ensure continuity of support for participants ahead of their transition into post-16.

Step 4: monitor changes to NEET risks closely and adjust support accordingly

Carry out RONI assessments regularly to ensure young people's NEET risk status is up to date. In this way, changes can be spotted early and support plans amended accordingly. Schedule RONI assessments so they are in line with key decision or transition points to help identify and support young people when it matters most.

Transition points might be:

- after entry to secondary school, in year 7
- before GCSE options are chosen, in year 9
- before post-16 destinations and courses are chosen, in year 11
- shortly after the transition into post-16 education and training

Once you have assessed young people's NEET risk and put targeted support in place for those who need it, you should continue to monitor young people closely. This helps staff assess how well a young person is responding to targeted support and adjust their approach if needed. It also helps them respond quickly to new issues or changes in a young person's circumstances between formal RONI assessments.

Case study: Co-op Academy Leeds

Co-op Academy Leeds uses a RONI approach that starts in key stage 3 and continues into key stage 4. RONI assessments from year 7 onwards – using indicators on attendance, behaviour, academic progress and wider vulnerability – result in pupils being given a score. This helps determine the level and type of support they require, which can include:

- personalised careers guidance
- mentoring
- employer encounters

- aspiration-raising activities
- regular pastoral reviews

Importantly, pupils' career aspirations are also recorded and reviewed twice each academic year. This allows staff to monitor changes in ambition, identify emerging interests, and ensure guidance and support remains relevant to their goals. Information is shared across year groups and key stages to ensure continuity of support as pupils progress.

Step 5: evaluate outcomes and refine approach

You should regularly evaluate the effectiveness of your RONI approach, working with local authorities and other partners as appropriate. This helps to identify what is working well and where improvements are needed. Your evaluation could identify, for example:

- whether the data and assessment points being used are identifying young people before disengagement hardens
- whether the support being put in place is effective in improving engagement and contributing to sustained onward destinations, where data is available

Use robust evaluation techniques to continuously improve your RONI approach. This could lead to, for example:

- adapting support strategies
- improving targeting
- strengthening transition planning

Summary

Key stage 3

Schools should identify emerging NEET risks early and put in place targeted, preventative support.

Key stage 4

School-led RONI assessments continue. When designing targeted support, schools should increasingly focus on helping pupils explore post-16 pathways and prepare for a smooth post-16 transition.

End of year 10 or early year 11

Schools and local authorities should share RONI assessments and reach agreement on which pupils are most at risk and what support is needed.

Year 11

Schools and local authorities should confirm pupils' post-16 destinations, with continued or extra support for those who need it, including those at risk of leaving without a confirmed destination. They should share information with FE providers on NEET risk and support needs.

Further education

FE providers should ensure continued transition support, and monitor engagement – for example, through attendance – as part of their own RONI assessments, so they can intervene quickly and amend support plans where needed. They should then support young people to progress into sustained education, training or employment, building on earlier planning and support.

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