

[Home](#) ▾ [Work](#) ▾ [Working, jobs and pensions](#)
▾ [Survey of young people not in education, employment or training](#)



Department
for Work &
Pensions

Research and analysis

Survey of young people not in education, employment or training (NEET): Young people and work report

Published 27 August 2026

Contents

[Executive Summary](#)

[Findings](#)

[Conclusions](#)

DWP ad hoc research report no. 137

A report of research carried out by YouGov on behalf of the Department for Work and Pensions. Views expressed in this report are not necessarily those of the Department for Work and Pensions or any other government department.

Crown copyright 2026.

You may re-use this information (not including logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence,

visit [Open Government Licence for public sector information](#) or write to:

Information Policy Team
The National Archives
Kew
London
TW9 4DU

Or email psi@nationalarchives.gov.uk

This document/publication is also available on our website at: [Research at DWP](#).

If you would like to know more about DWP research, email
socialresearch@dwp.gov.uk.

First published 27 August 2026

ISBN 978-1-80786-041-7

Executive Summary

Background

This report presents findings from a survey of 417 young people aged 16-24 who were not in education, employment or training (NEET). Fieldwork was conducted by YouGov between March and April 2026. The research explored current circumstances, aspirations, barriers, support needs and young people's views on employment, education and training.

This report has been written by DWP analysts, using the YouGov survey findings.

Methodology

This survey has been conducted using an online interview administered to members of the YouGov Plc UK panel of 2.5 million+ individuals who have agreed to take part

in surveys. Emails are sent to panellists selected at random from the base sample.

The e-mail invites them to take part in a survey and provides a generic survey link. Once a panel member clicks on the link they are sent to the survey that they are most required for, according to the sample definition and quotas. (The sample definition could be “GB adult population” or a subset such as “GB adult females”).

Invitations to surveys don't expire and respondents can be sent to any available survey. The responding sample is weighted to the profile of the sample definition to provide a representative reporting sample. The profile is normally derived from census data or, if not available from the census, from industry accepted data.

Key findings

The key findings are:

- 84% of respondents wanted to be in employment, education or training
- employment was the most common aspiration among NEET young people, with 54% wanting to move into employment, including 38% seeking full-time work
- most respondents (69%) believed that getting a job was worthwhile, indicating generally positive attitudes towards work despite significant barriers
- employment aspirations varied by age and gender
 - interest in full-time work increased with age, while men were more likely to prefer full-time work and women were more likely to prefer part-time work
- around 1 in 10 respondents (11%) did not believe they would ever enter employment, education or training
- health was a major barrier to participation
 - mental health conditions, disability and neurodevelopmental conditions frequently affected young people's confidence, engagement with opportunities and ability to sustain employment
- many respondents were dissatisfied with the education system
 - 4 in 5 (81%) felt there was too much focus on exams, while 67% felt education does not adequately prepare young people for work
- qualifications alone did not guarantee positive outcomes

- many respondents, including graduates, reported difficulties securing employment due to competition, limited vacancies and employer demands for prior experience
- long periods out of education and employment were associated with greater disengagement, while lack of work experience remained a barrier to progression (10%)
- caring responsibilities and financial pressures prevented some young people from pursuing opportunities in employment, education and training
- respondents consistently called for more personalised support, improved health and wellbeing services, and greater access to entry-level jobs, apprenticeships and work experience opportunities

Findings

Age and gender

Aspirations become more employment-focused with age

Employment aspirations increased with age, and older respondents were more likely to want a full-time job. As young people get older, their interest in full-time work increases as well. Of all responses, 11% of 16 to 17-year-olds reported wanting a full-time job, compared with 47% of 23 to 24-year-olds.

Conversely, younger respondents were more likely to be considering education routes (23% of 16 to 18-year-olds, as opposed to 11% of respondents aged 19 and over), which may suggest that aspirations become increasingly focused on employment as young people move further away from compulsory education.

Differences in employment preferences by gender

Women were more likely than men to report that they wanted a part-time job (24% compared to 10%), while men were more likely than women to say they wanted a full-time job (43% compared to 31%). Among respondents who were not currently taking any steps towards their chosen opportunity, 13% cited caring responsibilities as a reason.

Disability and health

Disability as a barrier to participation

Having a disability was a strong barrier among respondents who felt they would never enter work, education or training. Nearly a quarter (23%) of respondents whose activities were limited a lot by a disability or health condition said they did not think they would ever move into work, education or training, compared with just 6% of non-disabled respondents.

Health-related barriers and support needs

Among respondents who were not currently taking any steps towards their chosen employment, education or training opportunity, 55% cited health as the reason.

In open-ended responses, young people frequently reported difficulties accessing suitable employment, lack of workplace adjustments, mental health challenges, and challenges navigating support systems.

Lower confidence in achieving employment outcomes

Open-ended responses suggested that disabled respondents were generally less optimistic about progressing into employment and reported higher levels of support needs. Many felt that employment was difficult to achieve without more tailored support and greater understanding from employers.

Mental health conditions

High prevalence of mental health and neurodevelopmental conditions

Almost half (46%) of young people reported having a diagnosed mental health or neurodevelopmental condition. The most reported conditions included anxiety disorders, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), autism, depression, Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD) related conditions.

Mental health as a barrier to employment, education and training

Mental health emerged as a key factor influencing young people's participation in employment, education and training. Among respondents who did not think they would ever move into employment, education or training, 45% cited health as the main reason. Separately, 7% of respondents pursuing an employment, education or training opportunity identified mental health as their main barrier to achieving their goals.

Challenges accessing appropriate support

In open-ended responses, several expressed that existing support services did not adequately understand their needs, particularly where multiple health conditions interacted with employment barriers.

Impact on confidence and employment participation

Mental health conditions were frequently linked to reduced confidence, difficulties attending interviews, burnout, decreased motivation following repeated rejection and challenges remaining in work. Respondents often described managing severe mental health conditions alongside difficulties accessing appropriate support from mental health services, which they viewed as a barrier to entering and sustaining employment.

Educational background

Recent participation in education

In terms of recent participation in education, young people aged 18-20 were more likely to have been in education in the previous year (58%), compared to 23 to 24-year-olds (31%).

Dissatisfaction with the education system

Respondents expressed substantial dissatisfaction with the current education system. The research shows 4 in 5 (81%) agreed that the curriculum focuses too heavily on exams, while only 13% agreed that the education system prepares young people for work and 67% disagreed. More than half (55%) felt that the education system does not suit people like them.

These findings suggest that many NEET young people perceived a disconnect between formal education and preparation for employment.

Qualifications do not guarantee employment

Educational attainment did not appear to protect respondents from employment challenges. Respondents often cited a lack of available jobs, limited entry-level opportunities and high levels of competition as barriers to employment.

Graduate respondents highlighted a shortage of graduate vacancies, demanding recruitment processes and employer expectations for prior experience as barriers to finding employment. These findings suggest that qualifications alone were not viewed as sufficient to secure labour market progression.

Employment

Employment remains the most common aspiration

Employment was the most common aspiration among respondents (54%), with 38% wanting a full-time job and 16% wanting a part-time job.

Overall, 84% of respondents wanted to pursue employment, education or training, including 9% who wanted to enter higher education, 8% who wanted to undertake an apprenticeship and 7% who wanted to begin vocational training. Despite these aspirations, around 1 in 10 respondents (11%) did not believe they would ever enter employment, education or training. Health-related issues were particularly prominent among this group.

Distance from education and employment

Respondents reported varied experiences of engagement with education and employment. More than a third (35%) had last participated in education over 2 years ago, 62% had never undertaken training and 38% had never undertaken paid work.

These findings suggest that many respondents were relatively distant from both education and labour market activity and may require significant support to re-engage.

Longer periods out of education are associated with greater disengagement

Respondents who had been out of education for more than 2 years were more likely to report barriers to participation and uncertainty about their future. Among this group, 22% believed they would never move into employment, education or training, while 56% cited health-related barriers.

The findings suggest that prolonged periods of disengagement may be associated with declining confidence and a perception of increasing distance from employment and education.

Lack of work experience as a barrier

A recurring theme was the challenge of gaining employment without prior experience. 1 in 10 respondents (10%) identified a lack of work experience as their main barrier to achieving their goals.

Open-ended responses highlighted a perceived cycle in which employers require experience, while young people need employment opportunities in order to gain that experience. This was particularly evident among graduates and those seeking entry-level roles.

Challenging labour market conditions

Many young people perceived current labour market conditions as difficult. A lack of job opportunities was the most cited barrier to achieving goals (15%), followed by lack of work experience (10%).

Respondents frequently described high levels of competition for jobs and reported applying for large numbers of vacancies without success. Limited entry-level and graduate opportunities were commonly mentioned.

Job quality matters alongside pay

Most believed both soft skills (64%) and technical skills or qualifications (60%) improve employment prospects.

When considering employment, respondents placed particular importance on interesting and fulfilling work (41%), work-life balance (36%), job security (35%) and a positive working environment (33%). Although financial stability remained an important motivation for working, respondents often prioritised wider aspects of job quality over pay above industry standards (14%).

Family and caring responsibilities

Family support plays an important role

Family support was an important influence on respondents' ability to engage with education, employment and training. Over half (52%) reported relying on family support, alongside savings (35%) and benefits (38%).

Responses indicated considerable variation in financial circumstances, ranging from dependence on family members to experiences of significant financial hardship.

Caring responsibilities can restrict participation

Some described caring responsibilities as a barrier to education, employment and training (11%). These included caring for children, supporting relatives with disabilities or serious illnesses, and undertaking unpaid caring responsibilities within the household.

Barriers to claiming benefits

38% of respondents were using benefits to support themselves financially. Among respondents not claiming benefits, common reasons included not being eligible (15%) or not needing them (14%).

A small number (3%) also expressed feelings of guilt or shame associated with claiming benefits, believing that support should be reserved for those in greater need.

Support required

Demand for practical employment support

When asked what would help them achieve their goals, young people most often identified careers guidance, interview support and training advice (15%). Financial support (9%) and access to additional job opportunities (6%) were also frequently mentioned.

Need for personalised support

Open-ended responses highlighted a desire for tailored support, including careers advice, application support, interview preparation and guidance on navigating employment opportunities.

Respondents also identified the importance of health-related support, disability adjustments and financial assistance with training, transport and education costs. Many expressed a desire for someone they could turn to for personalised advice and support.

Access to opportunities remains a priority

Alongside practical guidance, respondents frequently called for greater access to entry-level jobs, apprenticeships and work experience opportunities.

These findings suggest that many young people require a combination of personalised support, improved access to opportunities and assistance with health and financial barriers to achieve their goals.

Conclusions

The survey findings show that most NEET young people aspire to participate in employment, education or training. However, many face substantial barriers that limit progress, including poor mental and physical health, disability, lack of work experience, caring responsibilities and challenging labour market conditions.

Health emerged as a particularly significant theme. Mental health conditions and neurodevelopmental disorders were commonly reported, with many respondents describing how health-related challenges affected their confidence, ability to engage with opportunities and capacity to sustain employment. Longer periods out of education and employment were also associated with greater disengagement and more complex support needs.

The findings suggest that educational attainment alone is not sufficient to secure positive outcomes. Many respondents, including graduates, reported difficulties accessing suitable opportunities due to competition for jobs, limited entry-level vacancies and employer expectations around previous experience. At the same time, many felt that the education system does not adequately prepare young people for employment.

Overall, respondents consistently called for more personalised support, better access to work experience and entry-level opportunities, and improved health and wellbeing services. The findings suggest that helping more young people move into employment, education and training will require a combination of practical support, accessible opportunities and tailored interventions that reflect the diverse circumstances of the NEET population.

[↑ Back to top](#)

Help us improve GOV.UK

To help us improve GOV.UK, we'd like to know more about your visit today. [Please fill in this survey \(opens in a new tab\)](#).



[Benefits](#)[Births, death, marriages and care](#)[Business and self-employed](#)[Childcare and parenting](#)[Citizenship and living in the UK](#)[Crime, justice and the law](#)[Disabled people](#)[Driving and transport](#)[Education and learning](#)[Employing people](#)[Environment and countryside](#)[Housing and local services](#)[Money and tax](#)[Passports, travel and living abroad](#)[Visas and immigration](#)[Working, jobs and pensions](#)

[Departments](#)[News](#)[Guidance and regulation](#)[Research and statistics](#)[Policy papers and
consultations](#)[Transparency](#)[How government works](#)[Get involved](#)

[Help](#) [Privacy](#) [Cookies](#) [Accessibility statement](#) [Contact](#)[Terms and conditions](#) [Rhestr o Wasanaethau Cymraeg](#)[Government Digital Service](#)**OGL**

All content is available under the [Open Government Licence v3.0](#), except where otherwise stated



[© Crown copyright](#)