

[Home](#) ▾ [Work](#) ▾ [Working, jobs and pensions](#)
▾ [Employer views on hiring young people survey report](#)



Department
for Work &
Pensions

Research and analysis

Employer views on hiring young people survey report

Published 27 August 2026

Contents

[Key findings](#)

[Introduction and methodology](#)

[Hiring practices of employers and their views of young people](#)

[Employer engagement and views on the current education system](#)

[Recruitment challenges and support needs](#)

[Annex 1](#)

Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) ad hoc research report no. 139.

A report of research carried out by IFF Research on behalf of DWP.

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 the [Open Government Licence](#) or write to:

Information Policy Team

The National Archives
Kew
London TW9 4DU

or email psi@nationalarchives.gov.uk.

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

First published August 2026.

ISBN 978-1-80786-043-1.

Views expressed in this report are not necessarily those of DWP or any other government department.

Key findings

Hiring practices of employers and their views of young people

The key findings are:

- medium sized employers (with 50 to 249 employees) were the most likely to employ 16 to 24 year-olds, with 89% versus 42% overall employing them - this means typically employing around 1 to 5 individuals in this age group
- the most common reason employers chose to hire young people was wanting to build a pipeline for future talent (29%), followed by bringing in new ideas and fresh perspectives (24%)
- nearly 1 in 3 employers (32%) reported that they were less likely to hire under 25 year-olds compared to those over the age of 25:
 - however, 50% of employers did say there was about the same likelihood to hire people aged under 25 than people older than this
- employers often felt that young people's priorities when looking for work was pay above industry standards (40%) and roles that are interesting and fulfilling (29%)

- the most important skill and characteristic for employers was for them to be motivated (95%), closely followed by having good time management (93%)

Employer engagement with education and employment support

The key findings are:

- there was a broadly equal split of employers engaging with education and employment support providers, with 55% having engaged with them and 42% having not:
 - the most common providers were colleges (38%), schools (26%) and universities (20%)
- the engagement was normally in the form of unpaid work experience (49%), apprenticeships (44%) and paid work experience (36%)
- the most common challenge when engaging with providers was finding the time for staff to manage it (41%)
- the majority of employers felt that the education system should offer more vocational pathways to young people (91%), while just under 9 in 10 agreed that schools, colleges and sixth forms should provide career guidance (89%)

Recruitment challenges and support needs

The key findings are:

- the main challenge employers found when hiring young people was the perceived lack of soft skills and work readiness (41%)
- employers were asked about what government incentives that they knew about and had used:
 - just under 9 in 10 knew about apprenticeships (88%)
 - just under half knew about employer National Insurance contributions (49%)
 - 3 in 10 knew about wage subsidy programmes (30%)
- of those that knew about government incentive programmes, 36% had used

apprenticeships, 12% had used employer National Insurance contributions and 5% had used a wage subsidy programme

- those that had used incentive programmes said that it had a positive impact on their workforce (60%) but despite this, the incentives did not impact or influence their decision to hire more or fewer young people (72%)
- to create more opportunities for young people, around 7 in 10 employers felt that financial support or subsidies would be the most beneficial form of assistance (72%)

Introduction and methodology

Background and context

IFF Research were commissioned by DWP to conduct a survey exploring employers' views on hiring young people aged 16 to 24. This research forms part of the Milburn Review, which seeks to understand the causes of unemployment and economic inactivity among young people.

The aim of the survey was to gather evidence for the review and look at what changes can be made to inform policy. The survey looked at the views and experiences of employers when employing young people, barriers to employing them, and how they view the education system in getting them ready for work.

These findings aim to improve insight into employers' perspectives on hiring young people, helping to enhance support services aimed at increasing youth employment and opportunities for skills development and career advancement.

Research Approach

The sample was sourced from Market Research Location, which provided contact details for employers across a range of sectors and organisation sizes throughout the United Kingdom.

Fieldwork was carried out by IFF Research from 4 to 18 March 2026, resulting in

500 completed telephone interviews. The sample comprised employers from a broad range of organisation sizes, sectors and regions, with sole traders excluded to ensure insights were drawn from businesses with experience of recruiting young people.

When interviewing, interviewers aimed to speak to the owner or director of the company or any senior decision maker that would be able to speak to us about their experiences.

Larger businesses were typically harder to establish contact with, with most refusals being from businesses between the sizes of 50 to 250 and over. This was usually due to time constraints, with employers unable to complete the survey within the allotted timeframe or identify an appropriate person to speak to. Despite this, the research was still able to achieve a representative amount for this business size.

For fieldwork, quotas were put in place for size and sector of employers. Weighting was also applied once fieldwork was complete. A breakdown of this can be seen in Annex 1.

Hiring practices of employers and their views of young people

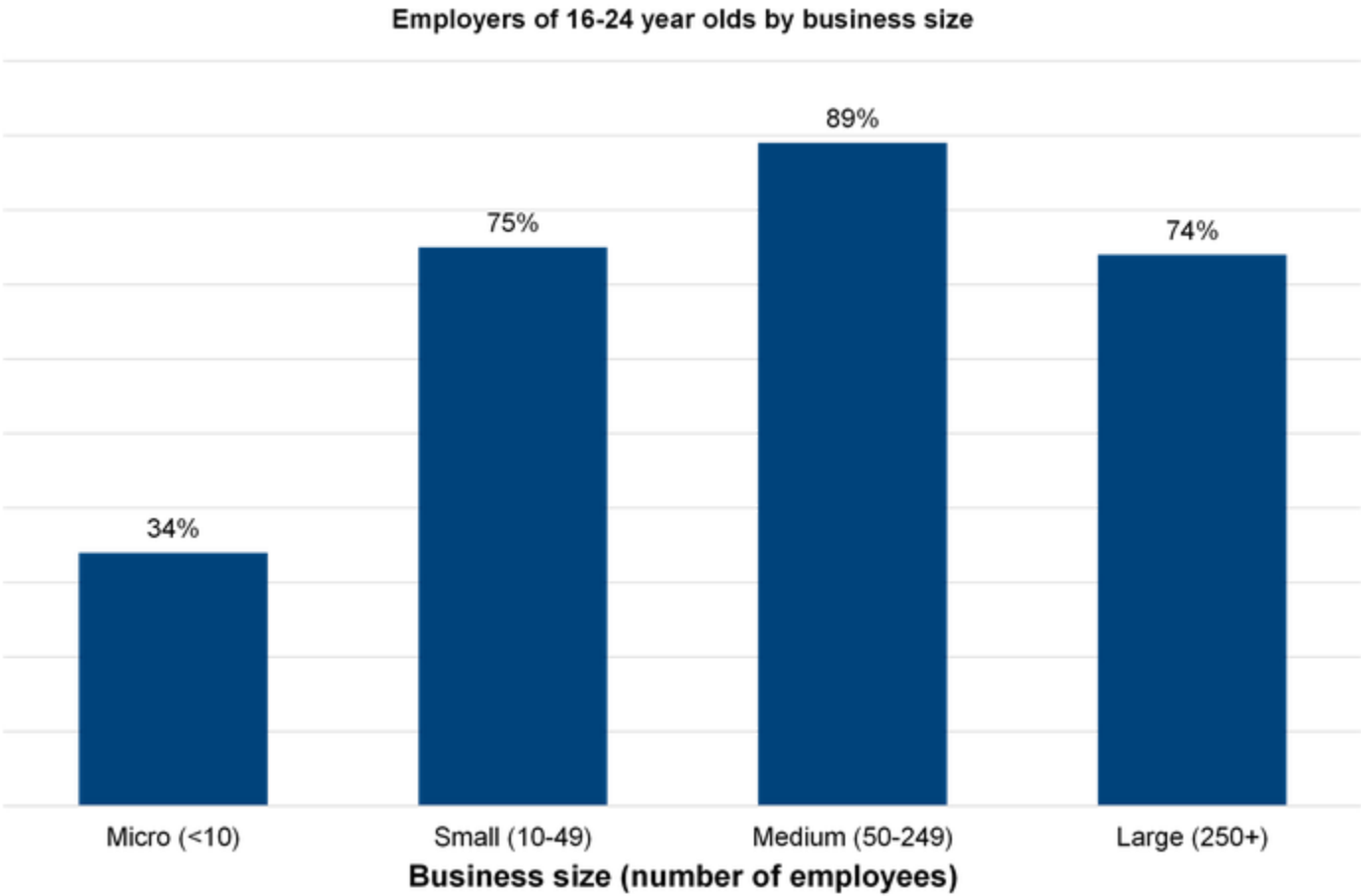
This chapter explores the extent to which employers hire young people aged 16 to 24, their perceptions of young people's work readiness, and the characteristics they prioritise when recruiting. It also examines perceived barriers that may affect young people's employment opportunities.

In this chapter we find that 32% of employers are less likely to hire those aged under 25 compared with older workers. This reluctance is most pronounced in the transport and storage sector, where nearly half of employers (47% versus 32% overall) report being less likely to recruit younger people. In contrast, employers in the hotel and catering sector are most likely to hire under 25s rather than those over 25 (36% versus 17% overall).

Hiring 16 to 24 year-olds

To understand the extent to which employers hire young people, employers were asked how many 16 to 24 year-olds their organisations employ which can be seen in Figure 1.1. Medium sized employers (50 to 249 employees) were the most likely to hire young people, with 89% versus 42% overall employing them: typically employing between 1 to 5 individuals (27%).

Figure 1.1: Employers of 16 to 24 year olds by business size



A bar chart showing the percentage of businesses that employ young people aged 16 to 24, by business size. The percentage rises from 34% of micro businesses to 75% of small businesses and peaks at 89% of medium businesses, before falling to 74% of large businesses.

Employers in the hotel and catering sector were more likely to employ 16 to 24 year-olds (74% versus 42% overall), typically taking on between 1 to 5 younger employees (56% versus 36% overall). In contrast, those in the transport and storage sector were the least likely to hire young people (25%).

When asked why they choose to hire young people, the most common reason given by employers was to build a pipeline of future talent (29%), followed by bringing in new ideas and fresh perspectives (24%).

Large employers (250 or more employees) most commonly selected building talent

for the future as their main reason for hiring young people, whereas micro employers were most likely to choose accessing new ideas and perspectives (44% and 25%).

When looking at the specific characteristics of the young people they employ, over a quarter (27%) reported commonly hiring young people with children or dependents – a pattern driven largely by large employers, where this rises to 63%.

A breakdown of the top 5 characteristics employers were most likely to hire can be seen below in Figure 1.2.

Figure 1.2: How often organisations hire young people (aged 16 to 24) with the following characteristics

Group	Often	Sometimes	Never	Don't know/prefer not to say
With children or dependents	27%	37%	30%	6%
Highest qualifications are GCSE or equivalent	21%	41%	32%	7%
Highest qualifications are A level or equivalent	19%	44%	31%	5%
Little to no work experience	19%	48%	30%	3%
University graduates	12%	40%	44%	4%

Educational attainment also plays an important role in shaping employment opportunities. Research shows 1 in 5 employers (21%) said they often hired young people whose highest qualification was GCSEs or equivalent, with this being particularly common among large employers (56%).

In contrast, very few employers reported hiring young people with a mental health condition or cognitive impairment (3%). While this remains uncommon overall, the figure is notably higher among large employers (21%), again possibly pointing to differences in organisational capacity to provide support or make reasonable adjustments and being able to recruit more people.

Similarly to this, very few employers reported hiring young people with a physical health condition or impairment (4%). This is notably higher amongst large employers (15%) though is not as often as those hiring with a mental health condition.

To better understand employers' perceptions of young people's priorities and work readiness, we asked them what they believe young people look for in a job. The most common responses were pay above industry standards (40%) and roles that feel interesting and fulfilling (29%). Perceptions were similar among employers who hire 16 to 24 year-olds and those who do not.

Figure 1.3: Young people's priorities when looking for work

Priority for young people when looking for work	Percentage
Pay above industry standards	40%
A job that feels interesting and/or fulfilling	29%
Enjoyable work environment	27%
Flexibility (when/how/where they work)	26%
Learning and development opportunities	25%
Work-life balance	23%
Opportunities to progress	23%
Security and stability (guaranteed hours, stable contract, sick pay)	21%
A job that makes best use of their skills	18%
Feeling valued and supported (through line management, peer support, representation)	11%
Autonomy and creativity in performing tasks and solving problems	8%
Don't know	4%
None of these	2%

Large employers were the most likely to believe that pay above industry standards is a top priority for young people when looking for work (49% versus 40% overall), followed closely by opportunities for progression (42% versus 23% overall). Employers in the hotel and catering sector were significantly more likely to feel that young people prioritise flexibility (45% versus 26% overall), whereas those in the agriculture, mining, and energy sectors viewed higher pay as the most important factor (58% versus 40% overall).

Characteristics employers look for and the extent to which they see these in young people

The most important skills and characteristics to employers when hiring new staff was for them to be motivated (95%), closely followed by having good time management (93%).

Employers who identified these skills as important were then asked whether they associate them more with workers aged under 25 or those over 25. For motivation, 42% of employers associated this more with those over 25, while 6% associated it more with those under 25. For time management, 47% of employers were more likely to associate them with older workers, while 50% saw little difference by age and only 1% associated it more with those under 25.

Resilience and technical skills were the top characteristics that employers associated with those over 25 (57% and 47% respectively associating these skills with those over 25 versus 2% and 9% respectively associating these skills with those under 25).

In contrast, digital ability was the only skill more strongly associated with workers aged under 25, with 39% of employers linking this to younger workers compared with just 5% for those over 25, but this is considered of lesser importance to employers as when asked how important each skill was to employers, digital skills was reported the least important skill compared to other skills such as teamwork, time management and being motivated.

Employers were also asked how much they think young people are ready to excel at work compared to other generations. Research shows 6 in 10 employers felt that young people were less ready to excel at work (62%). Small employers were more likely to say this (72% versus 62% overall). Employers who currently employ 16 to 24 year-olds were more likely to say young people are slightly less ready to excel at work compared to being ready to excel at work (40% versus 31% among employers who employ none versus 35% overall). The feeling that 16 to 24 year-olds were slightly less ready to excel at work was particularly common among employers who employ around 41 to 50 young people aged 16 to 24 (71%). Overall, this may indicate that employers' perceptions of work readiness vary with their level of exposure to young workers, though the survey does not identify the reasons for these views.

Employer’s views on barriers to work for young people

Employers were asked what they felt were the main barriers to young people’s employment opportunities as seen in Figure 1.4 below. The most commonly cited barriers were a lack of previous work experience and low levels of motivation (both 27%). This suggests that perceptions around motivation form part of employers’ views on the barriers young people face, though it is one of several factors identified.

Figure 1.4: Barriers to young people’s employment opportunities

Main barriers to employment	Percentage
Previous work experience	27%
Their level of motivation	27%
Work-readiness skills (organisation, time management, team work)	14%
Youth-friendly employers and recruitment processes	12%
Availability of jobs in the area	12%
Skills relevant to the job	11%
Don’t know	5%
Other	3%

Large employers were significantly more likely to think previous work experience was a barrier to young people’s employment opportunities (51% versus 27% overall). There were no differences between those that hire young people and those that don’t, suggesting that exposure to hiring young people doesn’t necessarily influence their view on young people’s work experience being a barrier to their employment opportunities.

Employer engagement and views on the

current education system

In this chapter, we will look at how employers engage with education and employment support providers, and the challenges they have faced in doing so. It then examines employer views on the current education system.

Engagement with education and employment support

Employers were asked which education and employment support providers their organisation engaged with. There was a fairly even split with 55% having some form of engagement with at least one support organisation and 42% not engaging with any. The most common education and employment support provider that employers had engaged with was colleges (38%), followed by schools (26%) and then universities (20%).

Micro-sized employers were less likely to have engaged with support organisations (51% versus 55% overall), while large employers were the most likely to have engaged with them (92% versus 55% overall). Those operating in the transportation and storage sectors (38%), and those based in England (53%) were all less likely to have engaged with support organisations.

Those that hired 16 to 24 year-olds were significantly more likely than those that don't, to engage with education or employment support providers, specifically colleges (55% compared with 25% of employers that did not hire 16 to 24-year-olds, and 38% overall), suggesting that increased engagement and increased hiring of young people are correlated.

Employers who engaged with education and employment support providers were then asked what their engagement looked like. The provision of unpaid work experience (49%), apprenticeships (44%) and paid work experience (36%) were the most common responses. Providing apprenticeships was the most common way employers who hire 16 to 24 year-olds engaged with education or employment support providers (58%) compared to those that do not hire them (28%).

The most common challenge that employers encountered when engaging with providers was finding the staff time to manage it (41%). This was followed by employers not having the resources to manage it (34%) and the benefits not being worth the cost (33%). Small and large-sized firms were especially likely to struggle

with having the staff to manage it (54% and 59% respectively). Over a third (36%) of all employers said that they had not been approached by any providers to engage with.

Views on the current education system

Employers were asked the extent to which they agreed with several statements concerning the current education system. The results can be seen in Figure 1.5 below.

Over 9 in 10 (91%) agreed that the education system should offer more vocational pathways for young people. Agreement was lower among medium-size employers (82%).

Just under 9 in 10 employers agreed that schools, colleges, and sixth forms should provide careers guidance. Large employers were more likely to agree (98% versus 89% overall).

More than 8 in 10 thought that there should be greater focus on teaching young people soft skills needed for employment. However, large employers and those in the public sector were less likely to agree with this (73% and 71% respectively versus 85% overall).

Around three quarters (76%) agreed that the current curriculum does not adequately prepare young people for work.

Finally, just over two thirds (68%) agreed that the current curriculum was too focused on ensuring children and young people passed exams. Large employers were less likely to say this (54%). Those that hire young people were significantly more likely to agree with this statement (73%).

Figure 1.5a: Views on the current education system

Statement	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Neither	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
The education system should offer more vocational pathways for young	61%	30%	3%	2%	1%	3%

people

Schools, colleges, and sixth forms should provide careers guidance	63%	26%	5%	2%	1%	3%
There should be more focus on teaching young people soft skills for employment	44%	41%	7%	1%	2%	5%
The current curriculum does not prepare young people for work	42%	34%	9%	7%	2%	7%
The current curriculum is too focused on children and young people passing exams	35%	33%	16%	6%	2%	9%

Figure 1.5b: Net agreement with statements about the current education system

Statement	Net agree
The education system should offer more vocational pathways for young people	91%
Schools, colleges, and sixth forms should provide careers guidance	89%
There should be more focus on teaching young people soft skills for employment	85%
The current curriculum does not prepare young people for work	76%
The current curriculum is too focused on children and young people passing exams	68%

Recruitment challenges and support needs

This chapter explores the challenges employers face when hiring young people aged 16 to 24, the steps they take in response, their awareness and use of government incentives, and what types of support they believe would help them create more opportunities for young people.

Challenges to hiring young people

The main challenge employers reported when hiring young people was a perceived lack of soft skills and work readiness (41%). Additional concerns included their resilience and level of work experience (32% and 40%). Small employers were significantly more likely than micro employers to feel that young people lacked soft skills and work readiness (50% versus 39%).

Figure 1.6: Challenges faced when employing young people

Factor	Challenging	Not challenging
Their health	23%	43%
Their level of technical skills	31%	27%
Their resilience	32%	19%
Their level of work experience	40%	25%
Their level of soft skills or work readiness	41%	22%

Employers who had encountered at least one challenge when hiring young people were asked how they had responded. The most common actions taken were improving progression opportunities (16%) and enhancing training and onboarding processes (15%). Medium-sized employers were particularly likely to focus on progression (26% versus 15% overall).

Employers were also asked about the potential impact of falling net migration on

their workforce in the coming years. The majority (62%) felt this would have no impact on their workforce, while 27% believed it would have an impact but would not influence their decision to hire young people.

Government incentives used

The most common government incentive that employers knew about was apprenticeships (88%), followed by employer National Insurance contributions (49%) and a wage subsidy programme (30%). Of these, the most used by those that knew about them was an apprenticeship (36%), while 61% had used multiple government incentives, mostly used apprenticeships. Small employers were more likely to mostly use apprenticeships (76% versus 61% overall).

Employers who had used any form of government incentive programme reported that it had a positive impact on their workforce (60%), with this rising to 86% among large employers. However, despite these positive impacts, 72% of employers said that the incentives did not influence or increase the number of young people employers chose to hire.

The most common reasons employers had not used incentive programmes were a lack of awareness (22%) and having not recruited any young people (21%).

Response to challenges and support needed

Employers reported that, if they were to create more opportunities for young people, financial support or subsidies would be the most beneficial form of assistance for their organisation (72%). This was followed by sector-based business support (53%) and youth-specific business support (52%).

Financial support or subsidies were considered particularly helpful within the agriculture, mining, and energy sectors, where almost all employers (98% versus 72% overall) identified this as their top need. In contrast, small employers and those in the hotel and catering sector were more likely to value sector-based business support (63% and 76%, versus 53% overall).

However, despite employers saying that subsidies would be the most beneficial form of support, when asked how a wage subsidy would affect their decision to hire

young people, 47% said it would make no difference, and only 17% reported that it would lead them to hire more young people than they otherwise would. Employers in the finance sector were significantly more likely to say a subsidy would have no effect (62% versus 47% overall). Among those who would consider hiring young people, the most common answer was a 50% subsidy would be the minimum level needed for it to be viable for their business: a view most common among small businesses (37% versus 29% overall) and private-sector organisations (31% versus 29% overall).

Annex 1

For fieldwork the following quotas were put in place:

Figure 1.7: Fieldwork quotas

	1 to 9 employees	10 to 49 employees	50 to 249 employees	250 or more emplo
Agriculture/Mining/Energy	23	7	5	5
Manufacturing	21	11	7	6
Construction	36	11	8	8
Retail /Distrib.	38	14	10	9
Hotel/Catering	27	14	7	7
Transport and Storage	20	8	6	5
Finance	19	7	5	5
Property/Management/Business Services/Administration	56	56	20	19
Total	240	127	69	64

Surveys were then weighted to the profile of Business Population Estimates (BPE) 2025 by size and sector to ensure the results were representative. Weighted and unweighted counts by size and sector are shown below.

Note: Quota targets were calculated using unrounded values but are presented as whole numbers. Consequently, some rows and columns may not sum exactly to the displayed totals because of rounding.

Figure 1.8: Unweighted completes by sector and size

Sector X Size	1 to 9 employees	10 to 49 employees	50 to 249 employees	250 or more emplo
Agriculture/Mining/Energy	16	12	6	6
Manufacturing	27	12	5	9
Construction	31	13	11	6
Retail /Distrib.	35	14	11	10
Hotel/Catering	18	16	12	8
Transport and Storage	18	8	8	4
Finance	27	10	2	2
Property/Management/Business Services/Administration	62	50	19	12
Total	234	135	74	57

Figure 1.9: Weighted completes by sector and size

Sector X Size	1 to 9	10 to 49	50 to 249	250 or
---------------	--------	----------	-----------	--------

	employees	employees	employees	more emplo
Agriculture/Mining/Energy	21	2	0	0
Manufacturing	23	8	2	1
Construction	70	7	1	0
Retail/Distrib.	81	15	2	0
Hotel/Catering	43	14	1	0
Transport and Storage	15	3	1	0
Finance	27	3	1	0
Property/Management/Business Services/Administration	129	22	5	1

[↑ 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 \(opens in a new tab\)](#).



Services and information

**Government
activity**

[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](#)

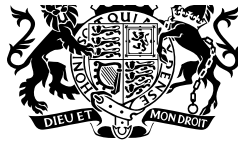
[Terms and conditions](#) [Rhestr o Wasanaethau Cymraeg](#)

[Government Digital Service](#)

OGL

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





[© Crown copyright](#)