

# Young people who are not in education, employment, or training – what does the data tell us?

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## Summary

Thirteen per cent of all 16–24-year-olds in the UK are not in education, employment or training (NEET). This equates to nearly one million young people who are not currently learning or earning. The rate is even higher among some age groups, with 17% of 22-year-olds in the UK being out of work or training, the highest proportion of any age group. The long-term scarring impact of being NEET for a sustained period of time on young people, society, and the economy, is well known. It is therefore of particular concern that 48% of young people in the UK are still not in education, employment or training a year after they first become NEET, equating to more than 360,000 young people likely to experience the long-term impacts of being out of work or education. A young person's previous experience of employment matters; 58% of NEET young people in the UK have never had a paid job.

The majority of NEET young people in the UK are economically inactive (59%) – this means they are currently unavailable for work or not looking for work primarily because of a long-term health condition or disability (27% of NEETs), looking after their family or home (13%), or for other reasons (19%). Work limiting health conditions are a rapidly increasing issue; the percentage of young people in England who are not currently seeking employment or are unable to work because of health reasons has more than doubled in the past decade. Many young people are juggling multiple disadvantages with health conditions being just one barrier to employment and training; 48% of NEET young people in the UK who have a health condition or disability do not report their health as the main reason they are NEET.

L&W's recently updated [Youth Opportunity Index](#) highlights that there are substantial disparities in the education and employment opportunities available to young people across England. The best-ranking local authorities are mostly in London, with Sutton coming out on top, while young people in Knowsley have the worst access to opportunities in the country. Poverty and worse opportunities for young people generally go hand in hand but some areas don't follow this trend; Hackney is ranked among the most deprived places in England but ranks 17<sup>th</sup> for youth opportunity.

Since the Index was first published in 2018, the employment and education opportunities available to young people in most local authorities in England have improved, and the gap between the best and worst local authorities has narrowed. This is because the lowest scoring

local authorities have seen improvements, rather than because the best scoring local authorities have deteriorated. However, there are still substantial differences in education and employment opportunities both within and between regions of England which need to be addressed.

These findings show that young people in England are in need of support to access the right opportunities to help them on the path to high-quality, sustainable employment in the long term. The Government's introduction of a Youth Guarantee in England is a fantastic step in the right direction. However, for the Guarantee to truly work to support all NEET young people to improve their long-term education and employment outcomes, its design and implementation must reflect the diversity of the young people who are not currently participating in the labour market, and the differing opportunities available to them locally.

## Introduction

Learning and Work Institute (L&W) has been calling for the government to introduce a Youth Guarantee – a commitment to provide young people who are not in education or work a job, training or education place or apprenticeship – since 2020.<sup>1</sup> In 2024, the Government committed to introducing a Youth Guarantee in England and announced eight trailblazer areas which will lead the way on implementing the Guarantee. The Government's Youth Guarantee commits to providing support for 18- to 21-year-olds to find a job or access training.

L&W would like to see this widened in line with our proposal in 2020, which called for a wider age range of 16 to 24 years and for young people to be guaranteed a job, education place, or apprenticeship, rather than support to access one. The Youth Guarantee is part of the Government's wider strategy to 'Get Britain Working' and to meet their long-term target of an 80% employment rate, an ambition which L&W also argued for.<sup>2</sup>

L&W are carrying out research to reiterate the need for the Youth Guarantee and make recommendations for how it could be implemented, including in partnership with Youth Futures Foundation. This briefing is part of this work and draws together published statistics (where available) and additional analysis of the Labour Force Survey (LFS) and the Annual Population Survey to highlight the scale of how many young people are not in education, employment, or training (NEET) and who these young people are. It also explores other factors associated with being NEET including educational attainment, employment history, and health. Our analysis pools eight quarters of LFS data from October-December 2022 to July-September 2024 to increase the sample size. This allows us to conduct analysis of sub-groups within the data and mitigates some of the issues with low response rates to the LFS. However, exact figures drawn from the LFS should still be treated with caution.

The analysis also draws on L&W's recently updated Youth Opportunity Index to explore the differences in employment and education opportunities available to young people in different areas of England. For the purpose of this analysis, young people are defined as those aged 16-24. More details on the data sources and methods can be found in the Technical Note.

## Young people who are not in education, employment-or training

The latest estimates show that 13% of all 16–24-year-olds in the UK were NEET from October to December 2024.<sup>3</sup> This equates to nearly one million young people who are not currently

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<sup>1</sup> Learning and Work Institute, Unleashing Talent: Levelling up opportunity for young people: youth commission final report, December 2020.

<sup>2</sup> UK Government, Get Britain Working White Paper, November 2024.  
Learning and Work Institute, Towards full employment, September 2022.

<sup>3</sup> Office for National Statistics, Young people not in education, employment or training (NEET), UK: February 2025, February 2025.

learning, earning, or completing training. Without the right support, there is a risk that many of these young people will never start or return to work, impacting their life prospects as well as the long-term growth of the UK economy. To place this in the international context, the percentage of young people in the UK who are NEET is lower than the OECD average for both the 15-19 and 20-24 age groups according to latest estimates. However, for much of the past decade the proportion of 15-19-year-olds who are NEET has been higher than the OECD average, and the proportion of 20-24-year-olds who are NEET has not been substantially lower than the OECD average (see Appendix 1 for figures illustrating these trends). The UK also still has a long way to go to catch up with the countries with the lowest NEET rates, like the Netherlands.

Young people being out of employment, education or training is not a new issue, but it is a growing one. In England, the percentage of young people who are NEET has been rising steadily in the last three years, increasing from 10.5% in 2021 to 13.6% in 2024.<sup>4</sup> Figure 1 shows that the rate of young people who were NEET in England gradually increased from 2000, reaching a peak in 2010 following the global financial crisis. After that point, the percentage of young people who were neither working nor studying decreased slowly as the economy recovered until 2021, the lowest point since the turn of the century, from which point it has been increasing again. While there are fewer young people who are not working, learning or training today than there were in the early 2010s, if young people are not supported to find work or training opportunities, the number of NEET young people is likely to continue to increase.

Many young people will experience a period of time out of education, employment or training. For some, this will be short lived; one in three young people move back into education, employment or training within the first six months of becoming NEET. Being out of education, employment or training for a short period of time is unlikely to have a significant impact on a young person's life. However, many young people are NEET for a sustained period of time. In fact, in the UK nearly half (48%) of young people are still not in education, employment or training a year after becoming NEET, equating to more than 360,000 young people. There is strong evidence that being NEET for a sustained period of time has a long-term scarring effect on young people's future employment and earnings. In the context of the Covid pandemic, L&W previously modelled that, based on projected increases in youth unemployment, the long-term scarring cost for young people entering the labour market in 2021 would be £14.4 billion over seven years.<sup>5</sup> Other estimates suggest that being NEET is associated with between 8-15% lower income by the time a young person reaches mid-career.<sup>6</sup> It is therefore important

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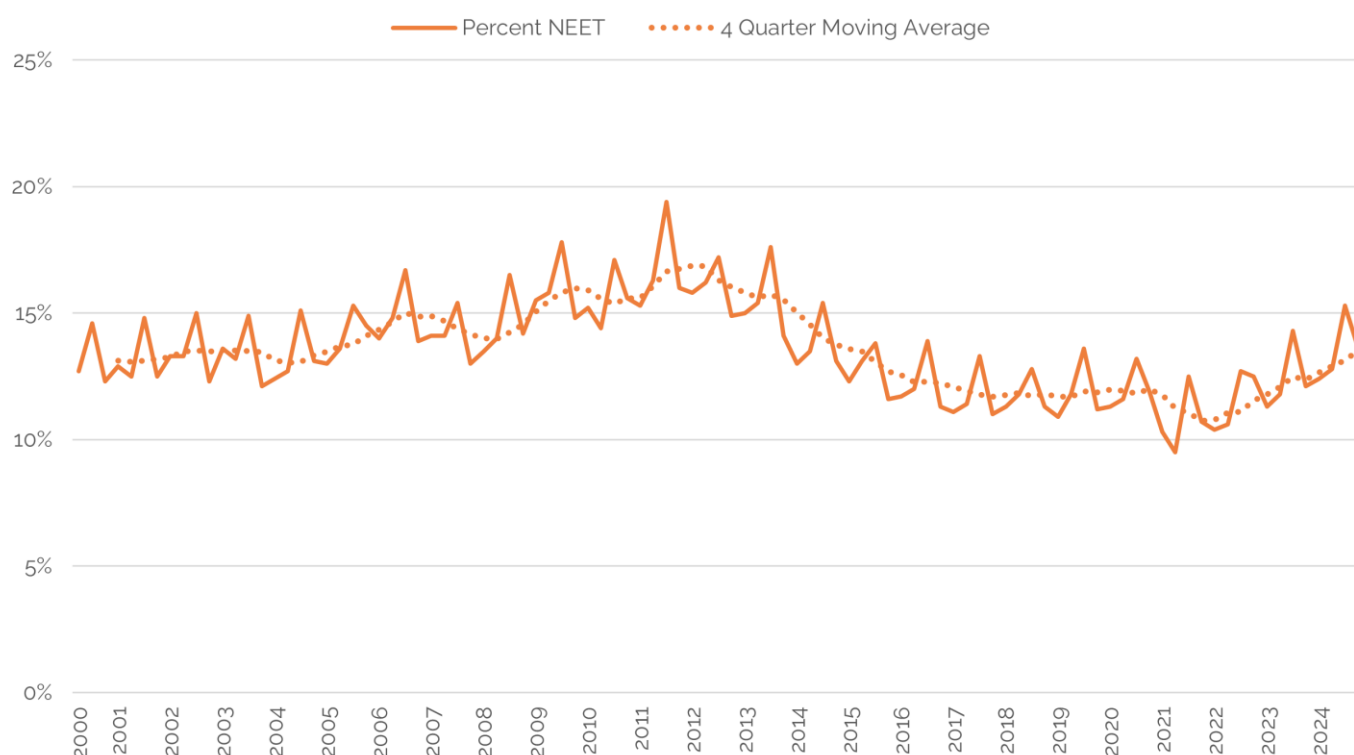
<sup>4</sup> Department for Education, [NEET age 16 to 24](#), March 2025.

<sup>5</sup> Learning and Work Institute, [Facing the future - employment prospects for young people after Coronavirus](#), March 2021.

<sup>6</sup> Scottish Government, [Consequences, risk factors, and geography of young people not in education, employment or training \(NEET\)](#), October 2015.

that the Youth Guarantee is able to reach and support young people who have been out of work or education for a long time and are furthest away from the labour market as well as preventing young people from becoming long-term NEET.

**Figure 1. Percentage of 16–24-year-olds who are NEET in England from 2000-2023**



Source: Labour Force Survey, ONS. ONS. 4 quarter moving average, L&W. Year-on-year comparisons should be used with caution due to small sample sizes and the reweighting of the LFS that was conducted from July-September 2022 onwards plus further reweighting announced 4 December 2024.

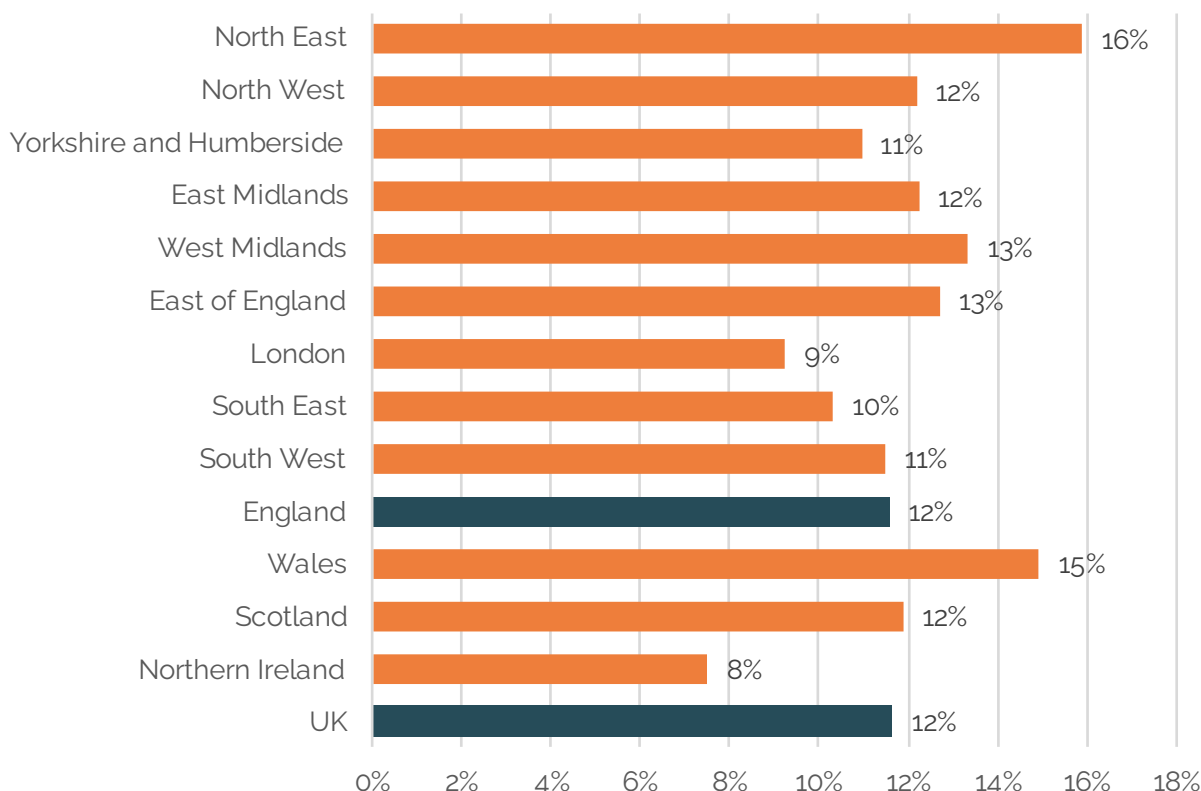
The reasons why young people report being NEET vary. The majority of NEET young people in the UK are economically inactive (59%) – this means they are currently not available for work or are not looking for work, primarily because of a long-term health condition or disability (27% of NEETs), looking after their family or home (13%), or for other reasons (19%).<sup>7</sup> However, some young people who are not currently in education, employment or training are unemployed (41%). This means that they are currently looking for and available to start work. Those who are not currently able to work or who are not looking for a job might also be able to access work or training in the future with the right support and accommodations, or might do so if they were aware of good opportunities that would suit them.

Where young people live matters; there are disparities in the proportion of young people who are NEET in different areas of the UK. This will be influenced by a number of different factors

<sup>7</sup> Other reasons include young people who do not believe any jobs are available, are awaiting the results of a job application, have not yet started looking for work, do not need or want employment, have given a reason for being economically inactive that does not fit into any of the given categories, or have not given a reason for being economically inactive.

including the education and employment opportunities available to young people locally. Although exact figures should be treated with caution, our analysis shows a high level of regional variation in NEET rates. For example, Figure 2 shows that a much larger share of young people in Wales (15%) are not in education, employment or training than in England (12%). Within England there is also substantial variation between regions; 16% of all young people in the North East are NEET compared to 9% of young people in London and 10% in the South East.

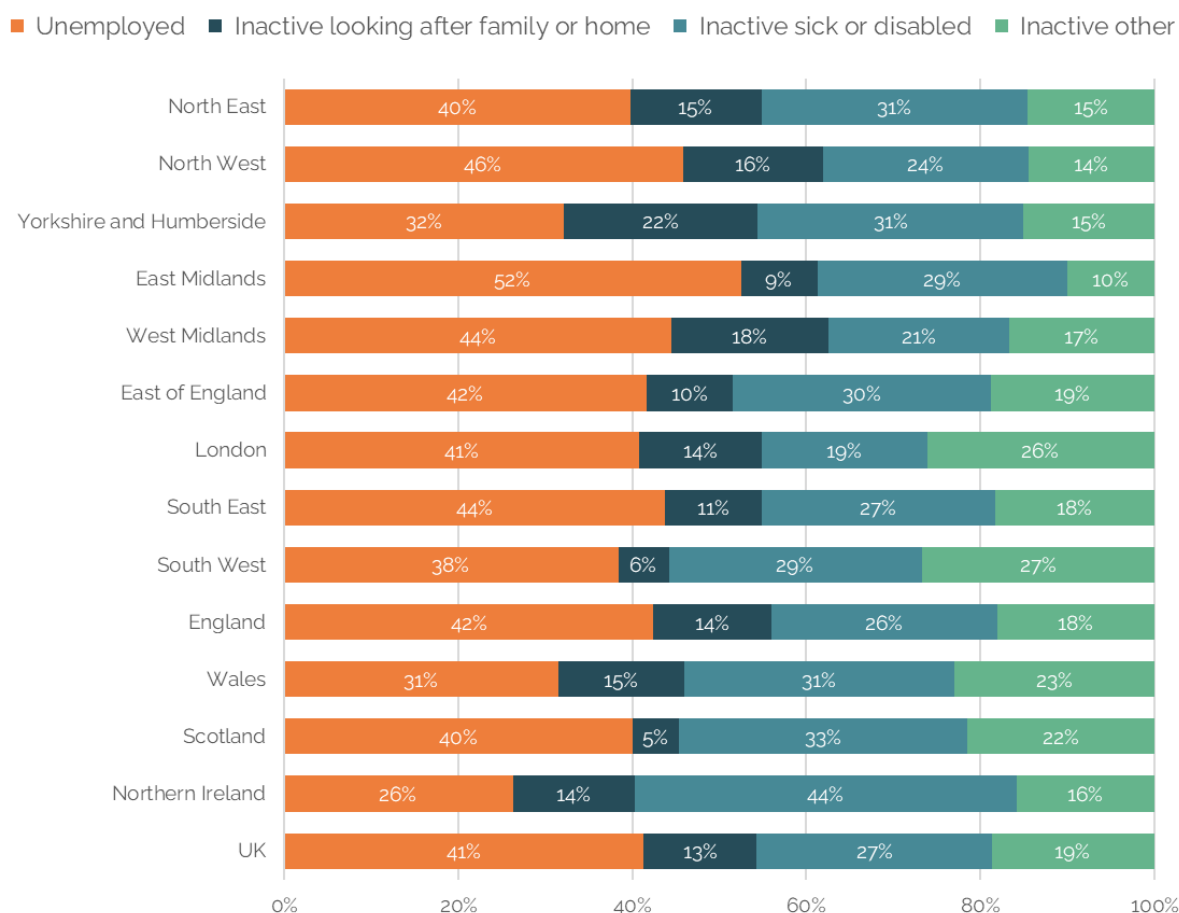
**Figure 2. NEET rates for 16–24-year-olds by regions of England and countries of the UK**



Source: Labour Force Survey, 8 quarters pooled, Oct-Dec 2022 to Jul-Sep 2024.

The overall NEET rates in Figure 2 only tell part of the story. Despite a larger proportion of young people in Wales being NEET than in England, Figure 3 shows that 69% of young people in Wales are economically inactive (and therefore not looking for work) compared to 31% who are unemployed (and therefore actively looking for work). In England, the figures are 58% and 42% respectively. This suggests that economic inactivity needs to be an even bigger focus for reducing NEET rates in Wales than in England. There are also substantial differences in the main reasons young people report being NEET between regions within England. For example, just over two thirds of NEET young people are economically inactive (and therefore not looking for work) in Yorkshire and the Humber compared to just under one half of NEET young people in the East Midlands.

**Figure 3. Reasons for being NEET by regions of England and countries of the UK for 16-24-year-olds**



Source: Labour Force Survey, 8 quarters pooled, Oct-Dec 2022 to Jul-Sep 2024. "Inactive other" includes a small number of unknowns.

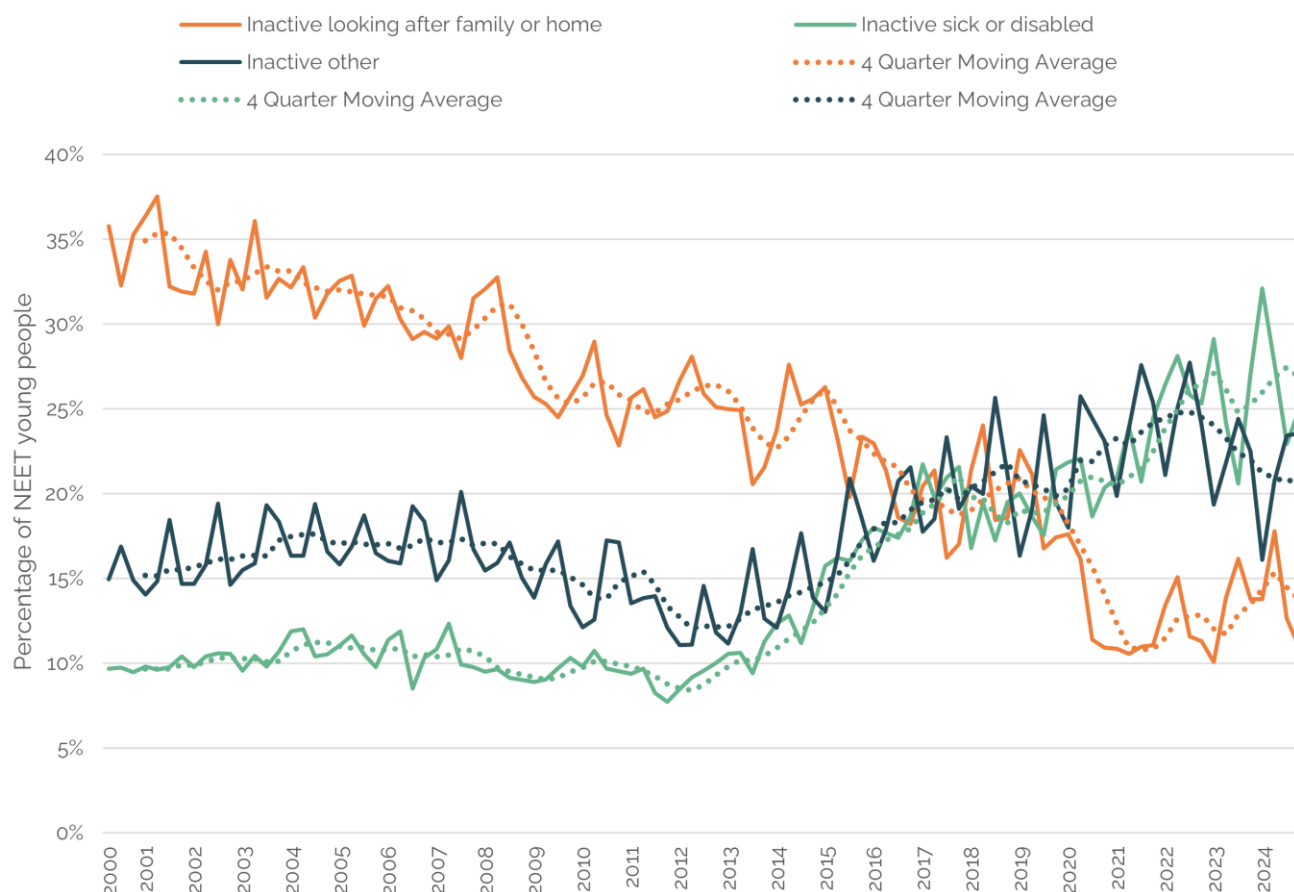
The reasons why young people who are NEET report they are not looking for work also vary. Figure 3 shows that sickness or disability is reported as the primary reason for not working by three in ten NEET young people in Wales, Scotland, and some regions of England (the North East, Yorkshire and the Humber, the East of England, and the South West). Yorkshire and the Humber also has a larger proportion of NEET young people who are not working because of looking after their family or home (22%) than other regions. More than one in four NEET young people are reported as being economically inactive for 'other' reasons in London and the South West, suggesting their barriers to work are likely to be varied and complex and require holistic, person-centred support. Variation between the nations of the UK and regions of England will mean that support offered through the Youth Guarantee needs to be tailored to the local context to make sure young people are receiving the support that is right for them.

Across the UK, many young people who are not currently in education, employment or training have a health condition or disability. Having a health condition makes it more likely that a young person will be NEET; 22% of 16-24-year-olds with a health condition are NEET compared to only 8% of 16-24-year-olds without a health condition. This trend is even more



pronounced in Wales where nearly one third of young people who say they have a health condition are NEET. In recent years, ill-health has become an increasingly concerning reason why young people report not being able to work. Figure 4 shows that up until the early 2010s the percentage of young people in England who said they were not looking for work because of health reasons remained fairly stable. However, in the past decade, the percentage of young people reporting ill-health as the primary reason for being economically inactive has more than doubled (from around 10% in 2013 to around 27% in 2024).

**Figure 4. Proportion of 16–24-year-olds who are NEET who are economically inactive by reason in England from 2000–2023**



Source: Labour Force Survey, ONS. ONS. 4 quarter moving average, L&W. Year-on-year comparisons should be used with caution due to small sample sizes and the reweighting of the LFS that was conducted from July-September 2022 onwards plus further reweighting announced 4 December 2024.

Mental health is an important factor in determining whether a young person is in work or education; 30% of young people in the UK who report mental health conditions as their main health condition are NEET. This is compared to 20% of young people who report musculoskeletal problems and 11% of young people who report cardiovascular and digestive health problems. This is only slightly higher than the proportion of young people who do not report any health problems (8%), suggesting that cardiovascular and digestive health problems may not limit a young person from working or studying to the same extent as



mental health conditions and musculoskeletal problems. It is also worth noting that some young people will experience multiple health conditions at once and therefore might face more significant barriers to participating in the labour market.

Not all NEET young people with health conditions say they are NEET primarily because of their health condition; 48% of NEET young people in the UK who have a health condition or disability do not report their health as the main reason they are NEET. Even so, ill health may still be a contributing factor in why NEET young people are not currently working or studying. NEET young people facing multiple barriers that impact their ability to access employment or training will require holistic support to assess and address their specific needs. The Youth Guarantee will need to bring together a range of different support to ensure that young people with health conditions are given the right help to find and sustain employment or training.

## Characteristics of NEET young people

Any young person can become NEET, but some types of young people are more likely than others to not be working or studying.

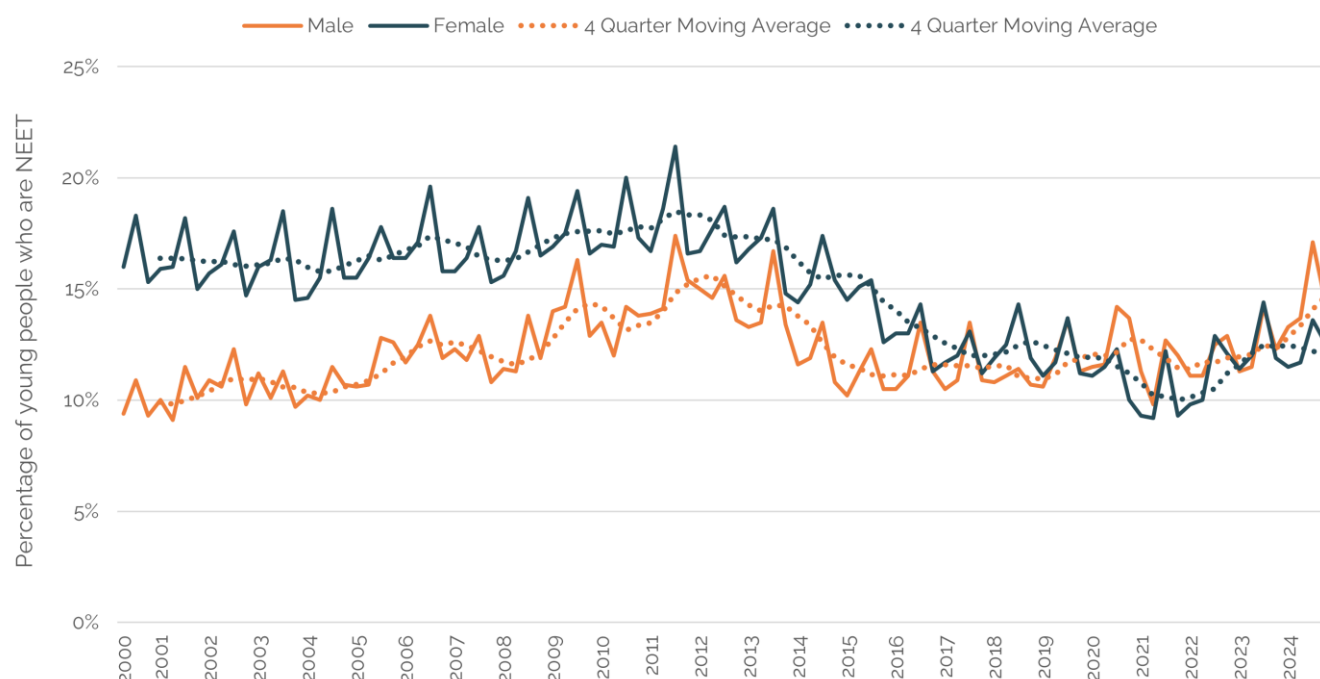
### Gender

Our analysis shows that, in England from October 2022 to September 2024, only slightly more young men were NEET (12%) than young women (11%). The trend of more young men being out of the labour market can be seen across the four nations of the UK. However, the difference between men and women was more marked in Wales (where there is an 8 percentage point difference between young men and young women) and Scotland (5 pp) than it was in England (1 pp). However, looking at longer term trends across the nations of the UK uncovers a more nuanced picture. In Wales, the proportion of young men and women who were NEET was broadly similar until 2022, when the NEET rate for young women dropped by more than it did for young men. While the percentage point gap between NEET rates for young men and young women in Scotland is smaller than in Wales, a higher proportion of young men than young women have been out of work or training for the past eight years.

In England, the proportion of young women who are NEET has declined in the past 10 years while the proportion of young men who are NEET remained relatively stable until recently, where there has been a steep increase (Figure 5). Up until 2018, a higher proportion of young women than young men were NEET, however from this time onwards this trend reversed, although the proportion of young women who are NEET has risen again in the past few years. The most recent estimates suggest that NEET rates for both young men and young women are rising; in October to December 2024 14% of young men were NEET, a figure that has increased by 1.2 percentage points from the previous year, while 12% of young women were

NEET, an increase of 1.3 percentage points on the previous year. This equates to 56,000 more young men and 53,000 more young women being NEET than a year ago.<sup>8</sup>

**Figure 5. Proportion of 16–24-year-olds who were NEET from 2000-2023 in England by gender**



Source: Labour Force Survey, ONS. ONS. 4 quarter moving average, L&W. Year-on-year comparisons should be used with caution due to small sample sizes and the reweighting of the LFS that was conducted from July-September 2022 onwards plus further reweighting announced 4 December 2024

The reason young people are not in education, employment or training differs between men and women. Young men are more likely to be unemployed (and therefore actively looking for work) than young women; half of NEET young men are unemployed compared to around a third of NEET young women (31%), despite unemployment being the most common reason for being NEET for both men and women. While exact figures should be treated with caution, the percentage of NEET young men who are unemployed is particularly high in the East Midlands (60%), West Midlands (58%), North West (57%), and South East (56%). On the other hand, one in four young women (25%) are NEET primarily because they are looking after their family or are homemakers, compared to only 3% of NEET young men. In Yorkshire and the Humber, as many as 42% of NEET young women state looking after their family as their main reason for not working or learning, with 37% of NEET young women reporting the same in the West Midlands.

<sup>8</sup> Office for National Statistics, Young people not in education, employment or training (NEET), UK: February 2025, February 2025.

## Ethnicity

In the UK, a slightly higher proportion of young White people are NEET (12%) than young people from all other ethnic groups combined (11%). In Wales, however, the difference between NEET rates for young White people and young people from all other ethnic groups combined is wider (16% and 8% respectively).<sup>9</sup> In most regions of England, there are a higher proportion of White young people who are NEET. However, the difference between the proportion of young people from different ethnic backgrounds who are not working or studying varies by region. In fact, there are some regions of England where a higher proportion of young people from all other ethnic groups combined are NEET than young White people, although the percentage point difference is small. These are the West Midlands (where 14% of young people from all other ethnic groups combined are NEET compared to 13% of White young people), the East of England (14% and 12%), and the South West (14% and 11%).

Although sample sizes for individual ethnic groups are small and therefore findings should be treated with caution, our analysis also found that the proportion of young people in the UK who are NEET varies based on ethnic background. NEET rates are higher among young people from Pakistani (11%), Bangladeshi (12%) and mixed (13%) ethnic background than they are for young people from Indian (7%) and Chinese (8%) ethnic background.

The primary reason young people report not being in education, employment or training differs for young people from different ethnic backgrounds. A higher proportion of NEET White young people (61%) are economically inactive than young people from all other ethnic groups combined (48%). NEET White young people also report comparatively high rates of economic inactivity due to health conditions or disability (30%) compared to young people from all other ethnic groups combined (17%). This may partially be due to differences in reporting between young people from different ethnic backgrounds.

## Age

The proportion of under 18s that are NEET in England is fairly low – between 3-5% of 16- and 17-year-olds are not working or learning in some capacity.<sup>10</sup> However, given that since 2015 young people in England have been required to remain in education, training, or work-based learning until the age of 18, this figure is still concerning. Among 16- and 17-year-olds in England, slightly more boys than girls are NEET (6% and 5% respectively). There is a much starker difference in NEET rates between 16- and 17-year-olds with special educational needs

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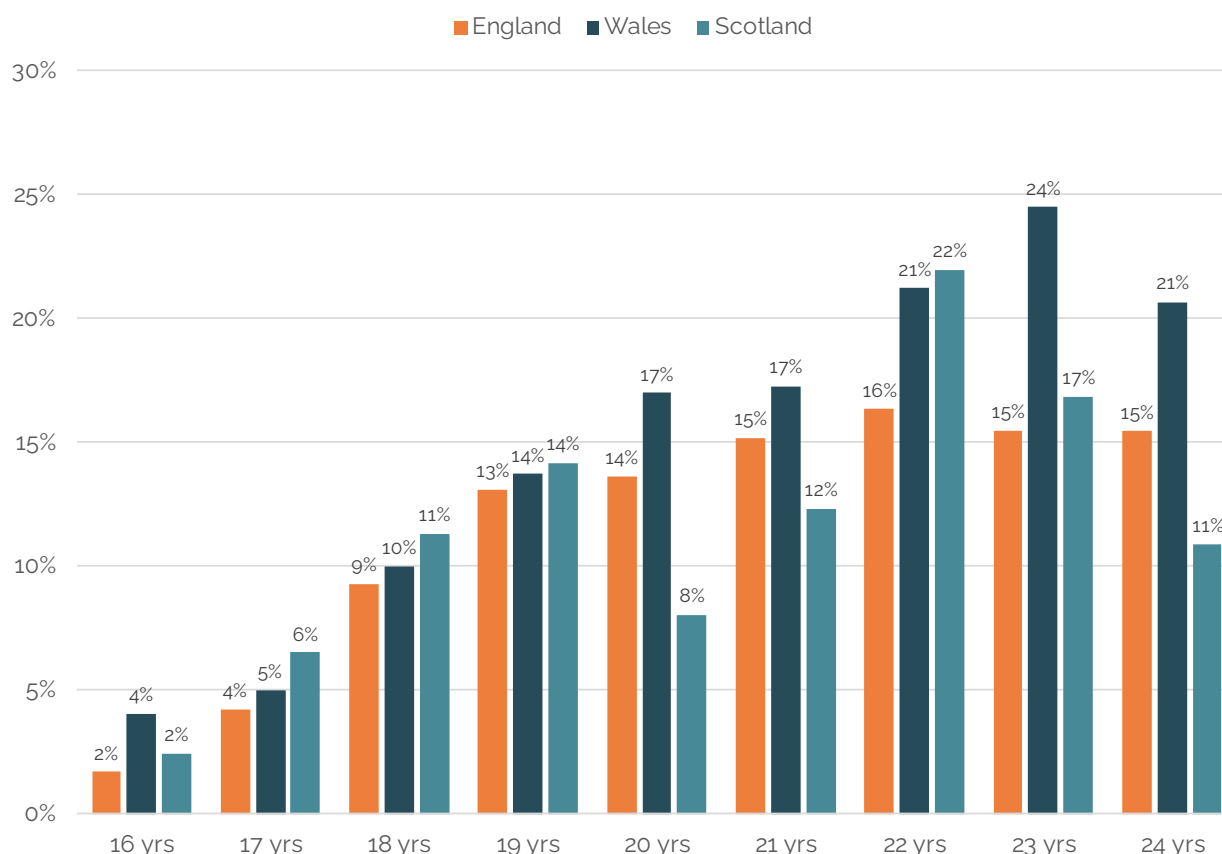
<sup>9</sup> These estimates were generated by pooling eight quarters of the LFS from October-December 2022 to July-September 2024. Estimates from Welsh Government analysis of the Annual Population Survey 2020-2024 are more conservative (13% of White young people are NEET and 9% of young people from all other ethnic groups combined).

<sup>10</sup> Variation in estimated proportion is due to different data sources.

(SEN) and those without; 10% of 16- and 17-year-olds with a SEN statement or support compared to 5% of those who do not report SEN.

In Wales and Scotland, where the education participation age is 16, the NEET rate for under 18s is higher than in England. However, across the UK the proportion of young people who are not working or learning increases significantly once young people reach the age of 18, and peaks when young people are 22 years old; 9% of 18-year-olds in the UK are NEET, rising to 17% of 22-year-olds. This trend differs across the nations of the UK, with NEET rates in England and Scotland both peaking at 22 years of age, while in Wales the peak is at 23 years of age. The peak in Wales is also higher than in England and Scotland; 24% of 23-year-olds in Wales are NEET compared to 22% of 22-year-olds in Scotland and 15% of 22-year-olds in England. It is also of note that in England, the proportion of young people who are NEET remains relatively stable (and therefore high) after the peak at 22 years old, while in Scotland and Wales there is a decrease in the proportion of young people who are NEET after the peak at 22 or 23 years old (see Figure 6).

**Figure 6. Percentage of NEET young people by single year of age in England, Scotland, and Wales.**

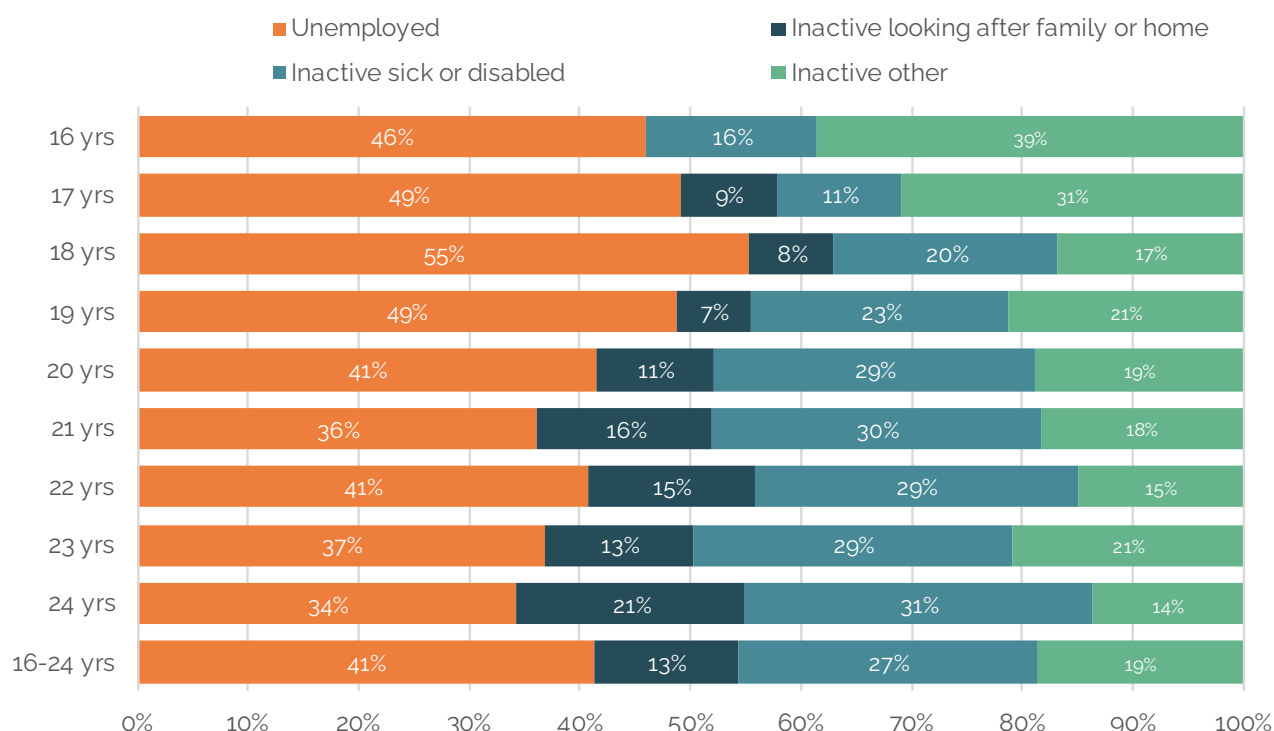


Source: Labour Force Survey, 8 quarters pooled, Oct-Dec 2022 to Jul-Sep 2024. "Inactive other" includes a small number of unknowns.

The reasons NEET young people are not working or learning differ based on their age. A larger proportion of NEET people who are under the age of 20 are unemployed, while the balance

shifts towards more young people being economically inactive as young people enter their 20s. This is driven by increases in the percentage of young people who report that they are looking after their family or home, particularly after the age of 20, and in those who have a health condition or disability. For example, Figure 7 shows that the percentage of NEET young people who say they are not working or learning primarily because of a health condition increases from 20% for 18-year-olds to 31% for 24-year-olds. Similarly, the percentage of NEET young people who are not in employment or education because of responsibilities looking after their family or home increases from 8% for 18-year-olds to 21% for 24-year-olds.

**Figure 7. Reasons for being NEET by age for 16-24-year-olds in the UK**



Source: Labour Force Survey, 8 quarters pooled, Oct-Dec 2022 to Jul-Sep 2024. "Inactive other" includes a small number of unknowns.

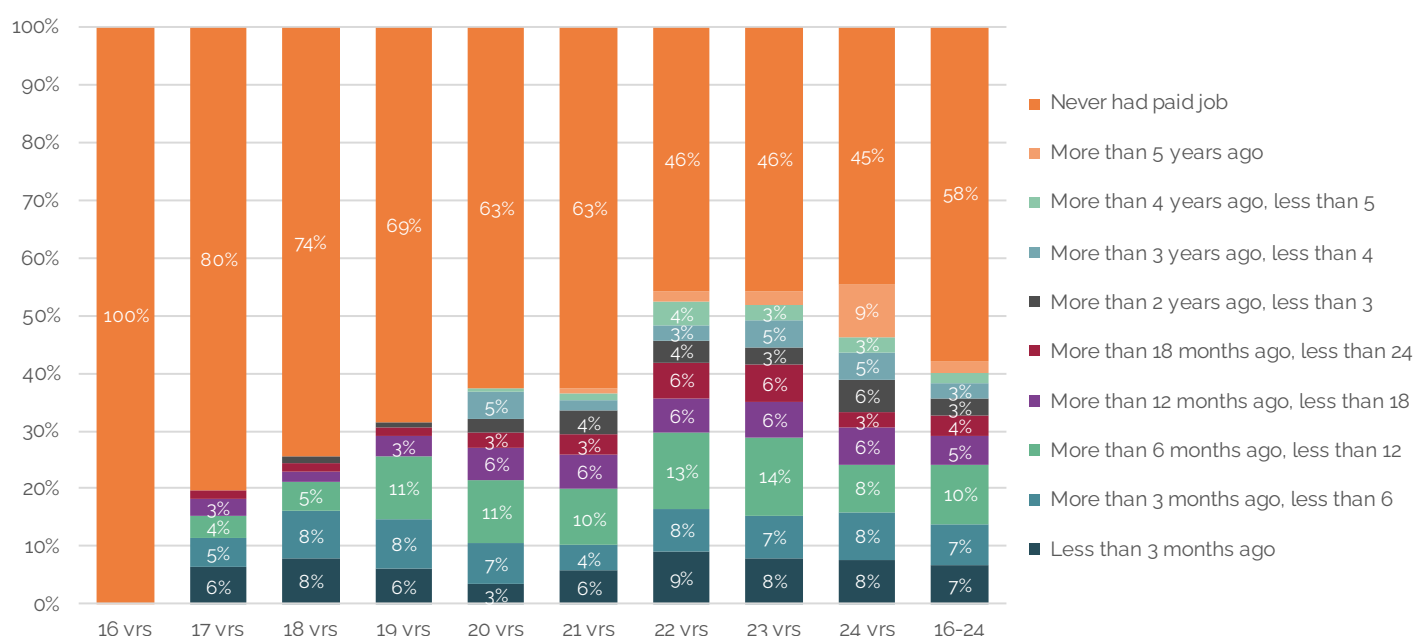
## Employment history and qualifications

A young person's educational attainment and work history affect whether or not they are currently in education, employment, or training. Nearly three quarters of NEET young people in the UK finished their education before the age of 19, meaning they did not continue in education long enough to gain higher level qualifications. It is therefore unsurprising that 21% of young people with no qualifications are NEET compared to 11% of young people who have a Level 2 qualification or higher (i.e. GCSE grades A\*-C/9-4 or equivalent). A much higher percentage of NEET young people with no qualifications say they are NEET primarily because of a health condition or disability (51%) than those with a Level 2 qualification (29%). These compounding factors of low educational attainment and ill-health are likely to mean these NEET young people will need more support to be able to participate in the labour market.

It is of note that only 5% of NEET young people with a degree level qualification report being NEET because of a health condition or disability. This may be because young people with more severe, and therefore work-limiting, health conditions are likely to have lower qualifications due to having left education earlier because of their health condition. It may also reflect that the jobs available to someone with a degree level qualification are often easier to balance for someone with a health condition. While our analysis does not allow us to draw conclusions on why a lower proportion of young people with higher levels of qualifications report being economically inactive due to a health condition, these findings suggest that young people with health conditions can successfully find and sustain employment.

Previous experiences of employment also matter; 58% of NEET young people in the UK have never had a paid job. While this is, in part, driven by high proportions of under 18s who have not started working yet, Figure 8 shows that even for NEET young people over the age of 18, a substantial proportion have never had a paid job.

**Figure 8. When NEET 16-24-year-olds left their last job in the UK by age**



Source: Labour Force Survey, 8 quarters pooled, Oct-Dec 2022 to Jul-Sep 2024.

Whether a NEET young person has ever had a paid job or not and the age at which they finished full-time education are compounding factors; 39% of NEET young people have never had a paid job and left full time education before the age of 19.

## Youth Opportunity Index

Not being in education, employment, or training is also impacted by the opportunities available to young people locally. L&W's recently updated [Youth Opportunity Index](#) highlights that there are substantial disparities in the opportunities available to young people across England. The Index gives a relative measure of education and employment opportunities for



young people across England's 151 local authorities.<sup>11</sup> The score for each area reflects how its performance compares with the best-performing area in the country; the higher the score, the better the performance. Results are presented as a heatmap in Figure 9, with darker shades representing higher scores. An interactive version of this map, along with maps for each of the different measures used in the Index, can be found on the [L&W website](#).

Since the Youth Opportunity Index was first published in 2018, the employment and education opportunities available to young people in most local authorities in England have improved. This difference was driven by local authorities with the lowest overall scores improving, rather than there being significant change in the local authorities where young people had the best opportunities in 2018. For example, the lowest scoring local authority in 2018 was Nottingham which scored 13 out of a possible 100, however, by 2025 the lowest scoring local authority, Knowsley, scored 23. At the other end of the spectrum, Sutton retained its spot as the top ranked local authority, but its overall index score dropped by two points, from 78 to 76.

Changes in the opportunities available to young people have not just been in the best and worst scoring local authorities; two thirds of local authorities scored higher in 2025 than they did in 2018. These improvements are spread across local authorities which scored highly, in the middle, and poorly on the previous Index. For example, Barnet improved its score by 7, changing its rank from 10<sup>th</sup> in 2018 to 2<sup>nd</sup> in 2025, Milton Keynes improved its score by 10, changing its rank from 113<sup>th</sup> to 80<sup>th</sup>, and Kingston upon Hull improved its score by 12, changing its rank from 149<sup>th</sup> to 145<sup>th</sup>. Most local authorities which scored lower than they did in 2018 did so only marginally, with only 10 local authorities seeing their overall opportunity score dropping by more than 5 points.<sup>12</sup>

## Local authorities

### Overall opportunities: the best places to be young

The local authorities where young people have the best opportunities are mostly concentrated in and around London. Sixteen London boroughs rank in the top 20 local authorities overall, and the five local authorities where young people have access to the most opportunities are all in London. When we first published the Youth Opportunity Index in 2018, ten London boroughs ranked in the top 20 overall, suggesting young people in London have seen improvement in the already top-ranking opportunities available to them. The other local authorities where young people have the best education and employment opportunities in England are dotted across the country; Trafford in the North West ranks 7<sup>th</sup>, North Yorkshire in Yorkshire and the Humber ranks 8<sup>th</sup>, and Buckinghamshire and Slough in the South East rank 11<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> respectively.

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<sup>11</sup> The Isles of Scilly and City of London were excluded from the Index because of having small sample sizes and high levels of missing data.

<sup>12</sup> These were, in order from smallest decrease to largest, Suffolk, Devon, Lincolnshire, Luton, North Tyneside, Liverpool, Blackpool, Bury, Wirral, and Cornwall.



**Figure 9. Youth Opportunity Index 2025 map showing overall opportunity scores**

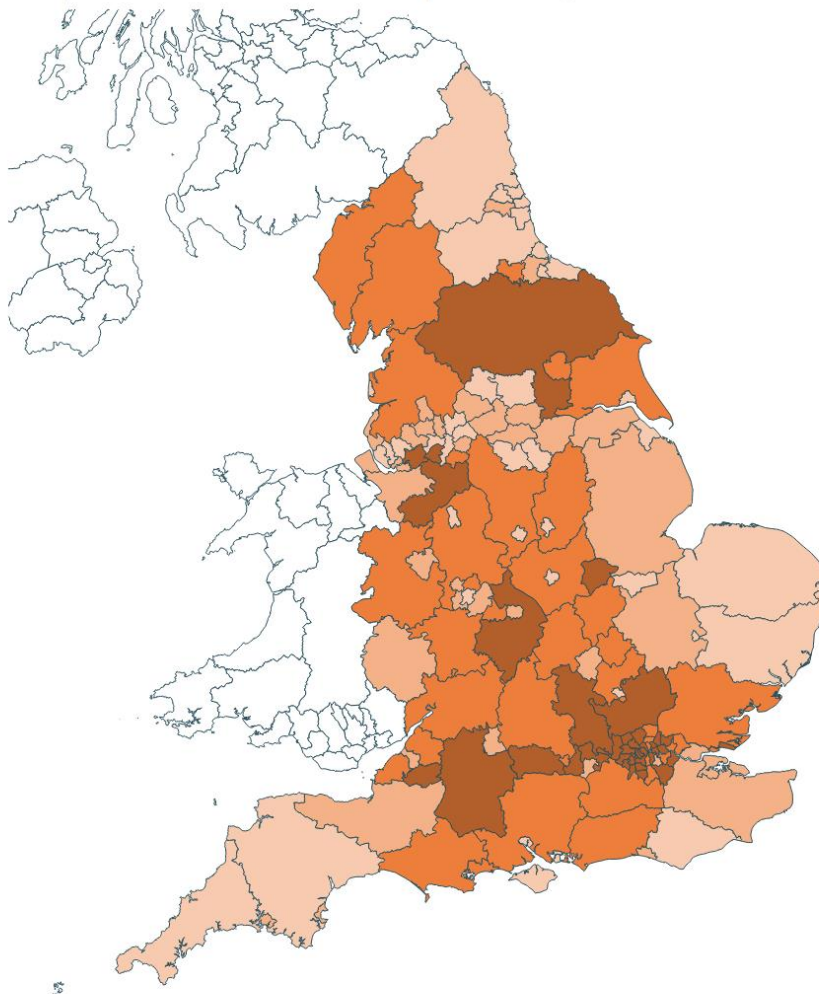
An interactive version of this map is available on the [L&W website](#).

## Youth Opportunity Index 2025: Overall Score

Quartiles indicate the quartile each local authority falls into, from worst to best.

### Quartile Values

- 23 to 47
- 47 to 54
- 54 to 61
- 61 to 76



Source: Learning and Work Institute, 2025.

Beyond the prominence of London, the picture is mixed. There is no clear north-south divide, with young people in certain local authorities in the South West, South East, East of England, East Midlands, West Midlands, Yorkshire and the Humber, North East, and North West all falling into the lowest 20 ranked local authorities (the lowest ranking local authorities can be explored further in Appendix 2). Many of these local authorities also ranked among the areas with the least opportunities for young people in our previous Index in 2018, however some local authorities rank substantially lower than they did seven years ago. For example, in 2018 Cornwall ranked 66<sup>th</sup> with a score of 52 but it now ranks 141<sup>st</sup> and scores 39 and the Wirral previously ranked 26<sup>th</sup> with a score of 60 but now ranks 111<sup>th</sup> and scores 47. On the other hand, some local authorities are ranked higher than they were in 2018; Telford and Wrekin ranked 144<sup>th</sup> with a score of 33 in 2018 but now ranks 100<sup>th</sup> and scores 49 and Barking and Dagenham

ranked 114<sup>th</sup> with a score 42 previously but now ranks 50<sup>th</sup> with a score of 59. These changes in rank are not driven by improvement or decline in any particular measure of the Index.

The differences in opportunities within regions in some places are more marked than the differences between them. This is particularly the case in the North West where three local authorities score in the top quartile nationally, and 10 score in the lowest quartile. Young people in Knowsley and Blackpool in the North West have the worst opportunities in England, scoring 23 and 29 out of 100 respectively in their overall Index score while Trafford, Warrington, and Cheshire East all rank highly (scoring 70, 64, and 64 respectively). This disparity within regions is not confined to the North West, even the local authorities in the region with the smallest disparity between highest and lowest ranking (the North East) have substantially different rankings; Middlesbrough ranks 148<sup>th</sup> with an overall score of 31 and Darlington ranks 49<sup>th</sup> with a score of 59. As has already been explored, many London boroughs rank among the best in the country, but there is still disparity between local areas. For example, Lewisham and Lambeth rank 98<sup>th</sup> and 68<sup>th</sup> respectively (scoring 49 and 55 out of 100).

As was the case in 2018, the Youth Opportunity Index does not show a clear urban-rural divide. As noted above, London boroughs account for more than three quarters of the top 20 places in the rankings. However, beyond this the picture is less clear. A number of other urban areas feature both at the top (such as Trafford, Slough and Warrington) and bottom (such as Nottingham, Middlesbrough and Liverpool). Similarly, a number of more rural areas, such as North Yorkshire, feature toward the top of the rankings. The bottom of the rankings contains more urban than rural areas (particularly more deprived urban areas), but some rural areas such as Cornwall, Suffolk, and County Durham feature here too.

### **Qualifications and apprenticeships**

Local authorities that rank highly in the index overall often also rank highly for GCSE-level attainment, Level 3 attainment, and progression to higher education. For example, Ealing ranks 10<sup>th</sup> overall, 15<sup>th</sup> for GCSE-level attainment and 6<sup>th</sup> for both Level 3 attainment and progression to higher education. Similarly, the local authorities that rank lowest on the index overall also often perform poorly in these key education metrics. This suggests that qualifications are important and that the Youth Guarantee should be a mechanism to ensure that young people across England are not held back by low educational attainment.

Qualifications are not all that matter; when comparing overall Index scores with apprenticeship starts we see a very different picture (Figure 10). While overall scores are highest in and around London, local authorities in these areas rank among the lowest in the country for apprenticeship starts. Instead, many of the local authorities that rank medium to low on the Index overall come out on top for apprenticeships. This may be because apprenticeships are often seen as an option for young people who have lower attainment at school or have not gone to higher education. For example, North Tyneside ranks 118<sup>th</sup> overall but 9<sup>th</sup> for apprenticeships while Northumberland ranks 125<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> in the same measures. This highlights the importance of apprenticeships in areas where young people do not have access

to other opportunities, but also the value of ensuring apprenticeships are a widely used and recognised route in all parts of the country (even when other opportunities are more widely available).

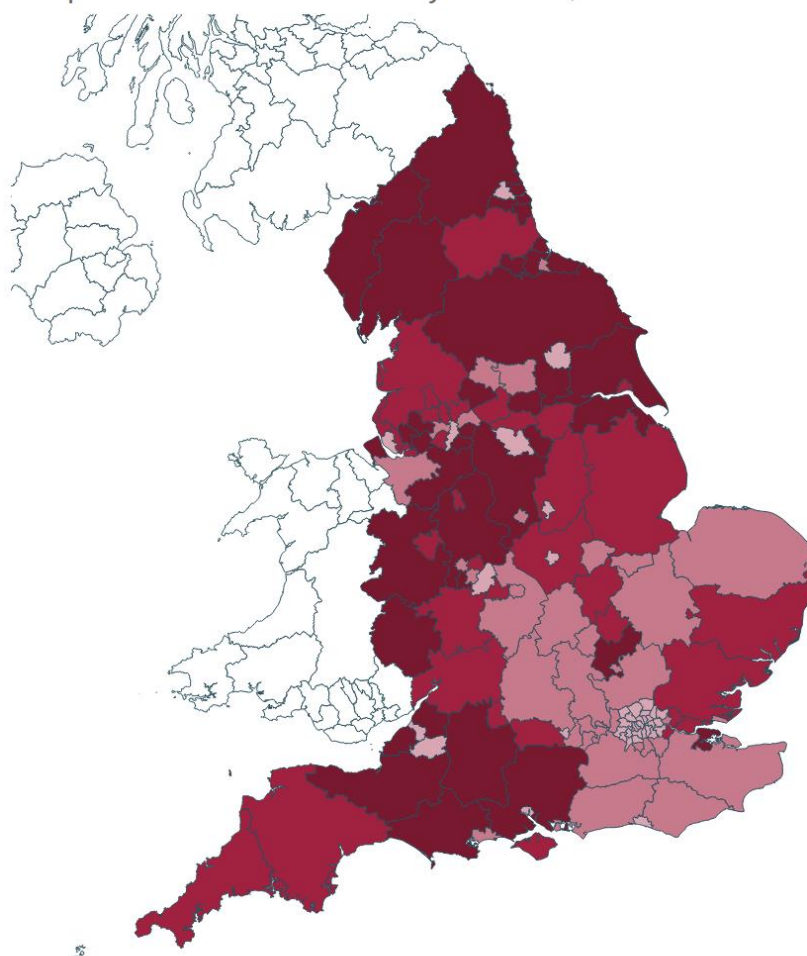
**Figure 10. Youth Opportunity Index 2025 map showing scores for apprenticeship starts**  
An interactive version of this map is available on the [L&W website](#).

## Youth Opportunity Index 2025: Apprenticeship Starts Score

Quartiles indicate the quartile each local authority falls into, from worst to best.

### Quartile Values

- 0 to 21
- 21 to 39
- 39 to 50
- 50 to 100



Source: Learning and Work Institute, 2025.

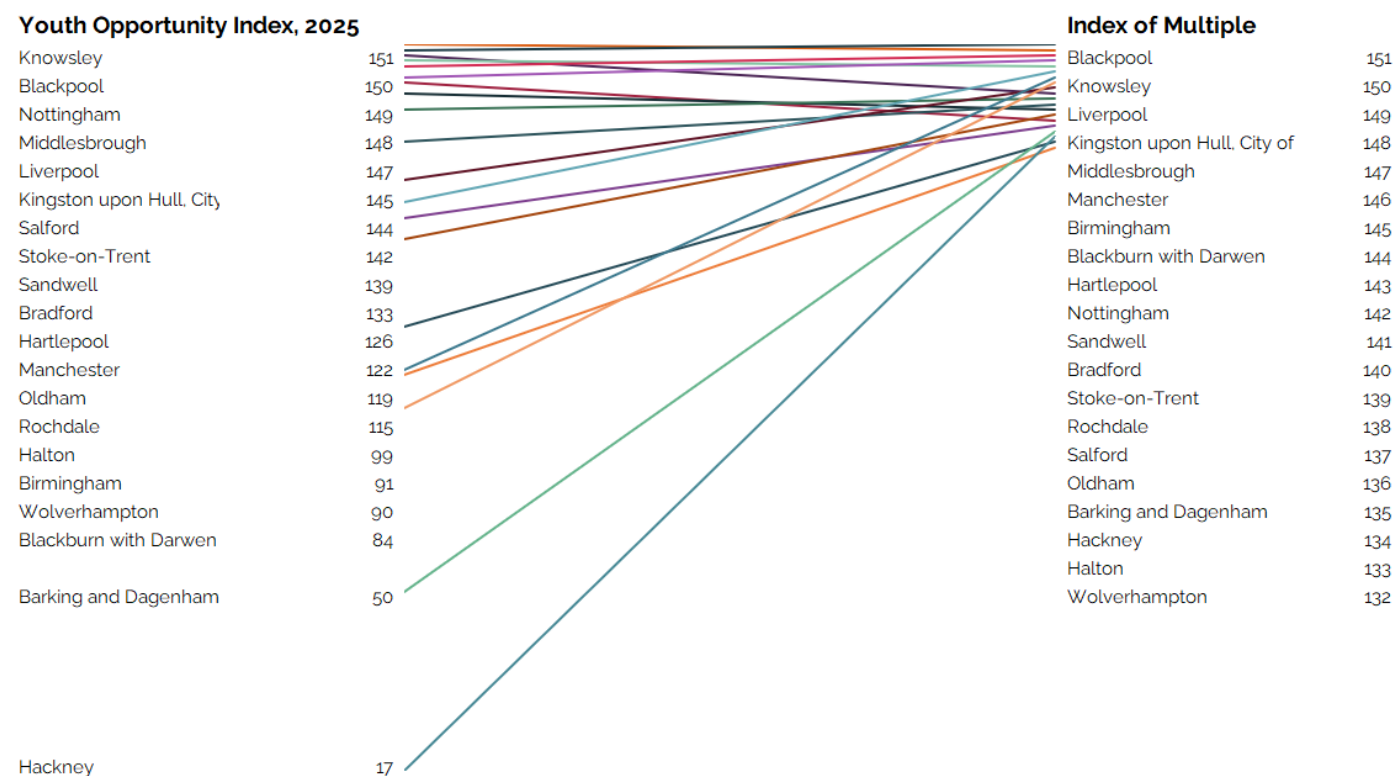
## Poverty

Poverty is, for the most part, a strong indicator of the opportunities available to young people.<sup>13</sup> This is particularly the case in the most deprived parts of the country; Figure 11 shows that the twenty most deprived local authorities tend to score less well on the Youth Opportunity Index. Blackpool, Knowsley and Liverpool are examples of this. Similarly, the least deprived local

<sup>13</sup> Poverty is measured using the Index of Multiple Deprivation, 2019.

authorities generally score higher on the Index, with Buckinghamshire, Kingston upon Thames, and Richmond upon Thames being prime examples of affluent areas with good opportunities for young people (Figure 12).

**Figure 11. Youth Opportunity Index overall ranking for the 20 most deprived local authorities**

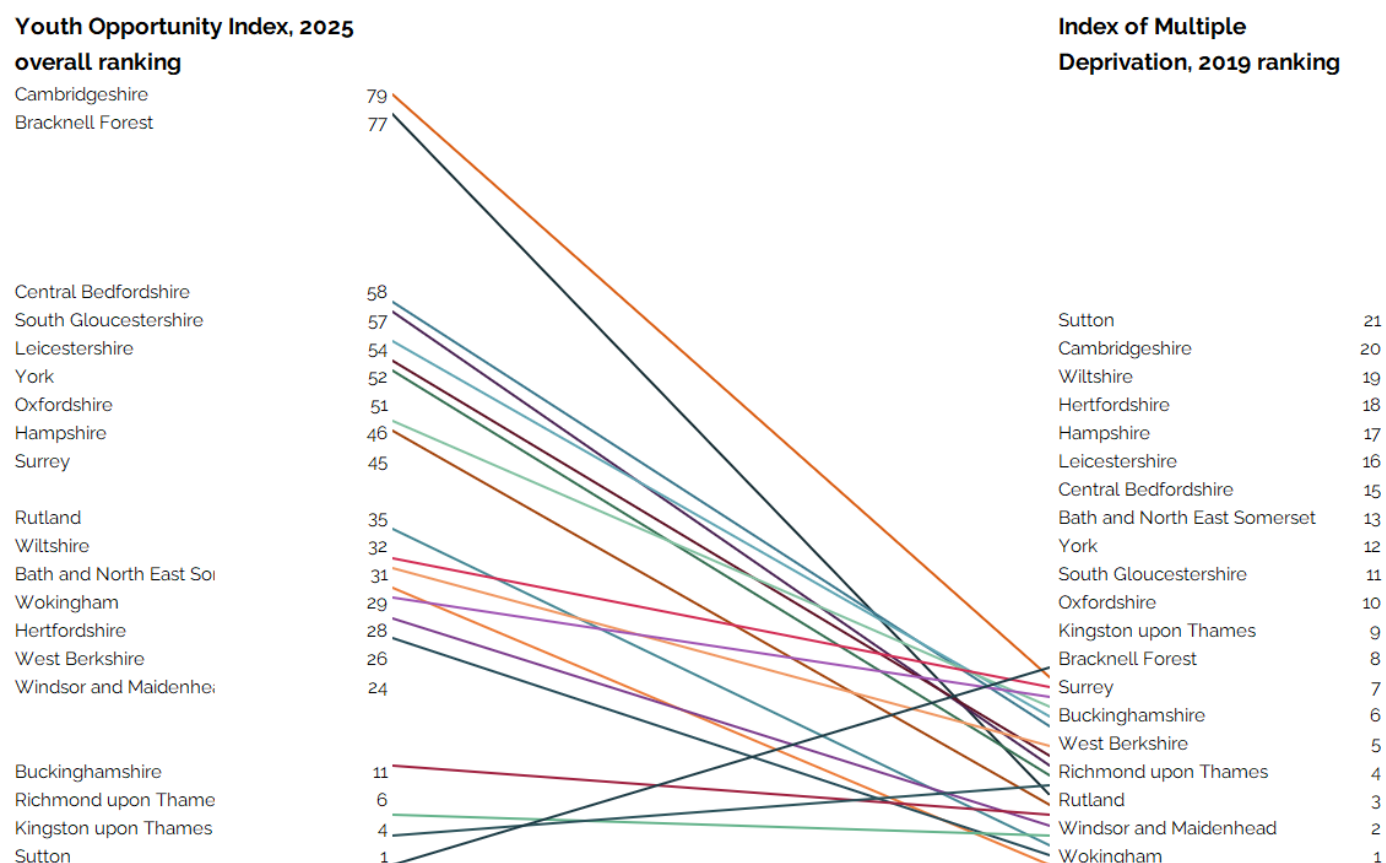


Source: English indices of deprivation 2019, Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government, 2019. Learning and Work Institute, 2025.

However, it is not inevitable that more deprived areas will score worse on the Youth Opportunity Index and that less deprived areas will score better. Hackney is one of the most deprived places in England but ranks 17<sup>th</sup> on the Youth Opportunity Index. Similarly, the high rates of poverty in Barking and Dagenham do not correspond to particularly poor opportunities for young people, with the area ranking 50<sup>th</sup>. There are also areas that rank among the least deprived areas in England, but do not score very highly on the Index. Figure 12 shows that Cambridgeshire and Bracknell Forest rank 79<sup>th</sup> and 77<sup>th</sup> out of 151 local authorities for youth opportunities, despite having relatively low levels of poverty. These areas suggest that poverty does not have to limit the opportunities available to young people and that, conversely, affluence does not automatically result in better opportunities. A universal Youth Guarantee, available to all young people, could help make sure that young people across England had more equal access to opportunities, meaning that those living in both more and less deprived areas have the ability to succeed.



**Figure 12. Youth Opportunity Index overall ranking for the 20 least deprived local authorities**



Source: English indices of deprivation 2019, Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government, 2019. Learning and Work Institute, 2025. Note that the Isles of Scilly were excluded from the chart due to missing data from the Youth Opportunity Index.

## Combined authorities

Increased devolution within England means that mayoral combined authorities and other parts of local government have an important role to play in ensuring young people locally have access to quality education opportunities and that regional development creates high-quality jobs. Some combined authorities have also been chosen by the Government to act as trailblazer areas for the Youth Guarantee, with implementation starting from Spring 2025. These areas are Cambridgeshire and Peterborough, Tees Valley, Liverpool City Region, West Midlands, East Midlands, West of England, and two areas in London.<sup>14</sup> The updated Youth Opportunity Index includes index scores and rankings for combined authority areas exploring the current differences in opportunities for young people in these areas.

Despite London's success at the regional level, York and North Yorkshire is the combined authority ranked as having the best opportunities for young people. This is driven by York and North Yorkshire ranking highly for apprenticeship starts, while London ranks the lowest for this

<sup>14</sup> Department for Work and Pensions, [Biggest employment reforms in a generation unveiled to Get Britain Working again](#), November 2024.

metric, suggesting that apprenticeships are not as widely available for young people in London, despite (or perhaps because of) scoring highly for all other education opportunities. It may also reflect the disparities within London, where young people in some boroughs have access to better education and employment opportunities than others. Tees Valley and Liverpool City Region are the combined authorities that rank the lowest, with overall Index scores of 29 and 14 out of 100 respectively. Opportunities for young people in these areas fall a long way behind those in the combined authorities which rank the highest. Table 1 shows the full list of overall score and ranking for each combined authority in England.

**Table 1. Youth Opportunity Index score and rank for all mayoral combined authorities in England**

Full, interactive tables are available on the [L&W website](#).

Combined Authority	Overall Rank	Overall Score out of 100
York and North Yorkshire	1	76
London	2	72
West of England	3	52
Cambridgeshire and Peterborough	4	44
West Midlands	5	40
South Yorkshire	6	39
Greater Manchester	7	38
East Midlands	8	34
North East	9	30
West Yorkshire	10	30
Tees Valley	11	29
Liverpool City Region	12	14

Source: Learning and Work Institute, 2025. Trailblazer areas are highlighted.

As is the case at the regional level, young people within combined authority areas face substantial differences in the opportunities available.<sup>15</sup> For example, in the West of England combined authority, Bath and North East Somerset rank 31<sup>st</sup> nationally (scoring 62 out of 100), while Bristol ranks 112<sup>th</sup> (scoring 47 out of 100). In the East Midlands combined authority, young people in Nottingham have some of the worst opportunities nationally (ranking 149<sup>th</sup>), while in Nottinghamshire more widely, young people fare a lot better (ranked 62<sup>nd</sup>). This is because of young people having lower qualifications, fewer progressing into higher education or starting apprenticeships, fewer being in work, and more young people being under-employed in the city compared to the wider area.

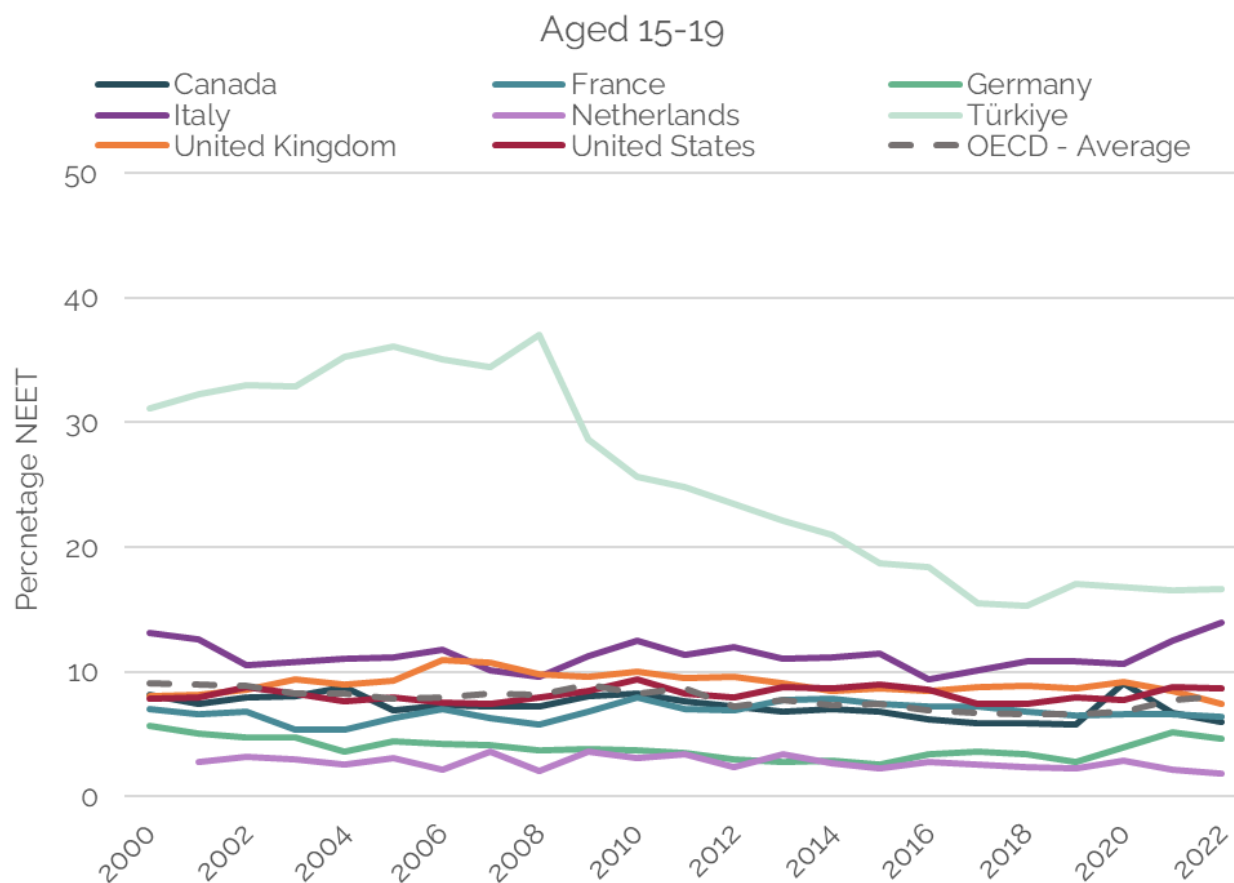
Two thirds of combined authorities have an overall index score of 40 or less. When comparing these scores with those of individual local authorities, this places them among the lowest quartile. With some of these areas being part of the Government's trailblazer programme, the

<sup>15</sup> Explore how local authorities within combined authority areas rank and score in more detail using the interactive table on our [website](#).

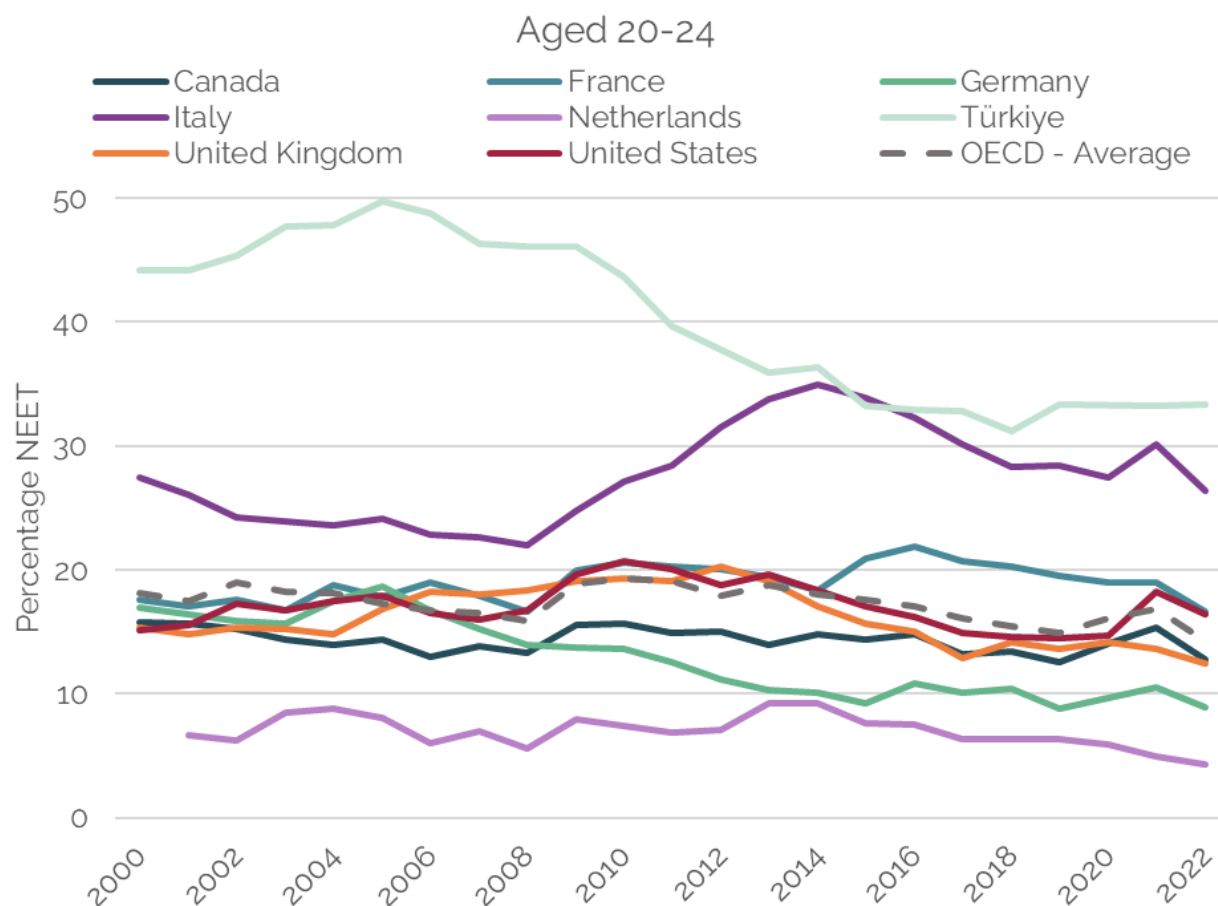
Youth Guarantee offers these combined authority areas an opportunity to ensure young people have access to high quality and appropriate education and employment opportunities.



## Appendix 1. International comparisons in NEET rates from 2000-2022



Source: OECD Data Explorer.



Source: OECD Data Explorer.

## Appendix 2. Youth Opportunity Index top 20 and bottom 20 ranking local authorities in England by overall index score

Region	Local Authority	Overall Rank	Overall Score (out of 100)
London	Sutton	1	76
London	Barnet	2	73
London	Redbridge	3	73
London	Kingston upon Thames	4	72
London	Harrow	5	71
London	Richmond upon Thames	6	70
North West	Trafford	7	70
Yorkshire and The Humber	North Yorkshire	8	69
London	Merton	9	69
London	Ealing	10	68
South East	Buckinghamshire	11	68
London	Hammersmith and Fulham	12	67
South East	Slough	13	66
London	Hounslow	14	65
London	Newham	15	65
London	Brent	16	65
London	Hackney	17	65
London	Southwark	18	64
London	Kensington and Chelsea	19	64
London	Westminster	20	64
North West	St. Helens	132	43
Yorkshire and The Humber	Bradford	133	43
East Midlands	Leicester	134	42
East Midlands	Derby	135	42
South East	Southampton	136	42
East of England	Peterborough	137	41
East of England	Suffolk	138	41
West Midlands	Sandwell	139	40
North East	Newcastle upon Tyne	140	40
South West	Cornwall	141	39
West Midlands	Stoke-on-Trent	142	39
South East	Portsmouth	143	38
North West	Salford	144	37
Yorkshire and The Humber	Kingston upon Hull, City of	145	36
Yorkshire and The Humber	North East Lincolnshire	146	33
North West	Liverpool	147	32
North East	Middlesbrough	148	31
East Midlands	Nottingham	149	31
North West	Blackpool	150	29
North West	Knowsley	151	23

Source: Learning and Work Institute, 2025.

# Technical note

## Analysis of NEET data

This briefing uses statistics published by the:

- Office for National Statistics (ONS)
- Department for Education (DfE)
- Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)
- Welsh Government Lifelong Learning Wales Record (LLWR)
- Pupil Level Annual School Census (PLASC)
- Annual Participation Measure for 16–19-year-olds in Scotland
- Skills Development Scotland customer support system (CSS)
- National Client Caseload Information System (NCCIS)

Additional descriptive analysis was also carried out using the Labour Force Survey (LFS) and the Annual Population Survey (APS). LFS analysis is based on pooling 8 quarters of the data from October–December 2022 to July–September 2024. Due to reweighting of the LFS in 2022, it was deemed not appropriate to use data from earlier than this quarter. The LFS is a study of the employment circumstances of the UK population. It is the largest household study in the UK and provides the official measures of employment and unemployment.<sup>16</sup> The APS is a continuous household survey, covering the UK looking at employment and unemployment, as well as housing, ethnicity, religion, health and education.<sup>17</sup> It uses data from the LFS.

NEET young people were identified in the data as those who are unemployed or economically inactive (aside from those who are inactive due to being a student). Young people were defined as being aged 16–24.

### Issues with the LFS

The LFS analysis used the reweighted data that was announced in February 2024.<sup>18</sup> The ONS reweighted the LFS to be consistent with population estimates published in November 2023, along with forward population projections based on the latest estimates at that time.<sup>19</sup> Only periods from July to September 2022 onwards were reweighted, with earlier periods, back to 2011, modelled for headline measures by age and sex only.

Since then (announced on 3 December 2024), new population estimates and projections have been released, based on updated assumptions incorporating higher levels of net migration,

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<sup>16</sup> Office for National Statistics, [Labour Force Survey](#), no date.

<sup>17</sup> Office for National Statistics, [Annual population survey \(APS\) QMI](#), September 2012.

<sup>18</sup> Office for National Statistics, [Impact of reweighting on Labour Force Survey key indicators: December 2024](#), December 2024.

<sup>19</sup> Office for National Statistics, [Impact of reweighting on Labour Force Survey key indicators: December 2024](#), December 2024.

along with the results of Scotland's 2022 Census. The population estimates used do not consider the most recent estimates of migration published by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) in November 2024.

The ONS have now reweighted the LFS using this more recent population information, updating the population weights used for periods from January to March 2019 onwards. This reweighting increased the number of people who are employed, unemployed, and economically inactive across the working age population in the UK, but had minimal impact on the rates/percentages.

There are also ongoing challenges with the response rate to the LFS which were exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic and the switch to phone interviews rather than face to face.<sup>20</sup> For example, in July-September 2019 the LFS had a response rate of 38.6%, while in the same period in 2023 the response rate was 12.7%. Response rates have increased slightly, with 19.5% of households responding to the survey in the same period in 2024.<sup>21</sup> However, given the smaller sample size, estimates based on LFS data should still be treated with caution.

## Youth Opportunity Index

The Youth Opportunity Index gives a detailed portrait of the opportunities and challenges for every young person broken down by local education authority. It was first launched in 2018 and recently updated with the latest data. Measures included in the Index are:

- Overall Index. The average score across all indices. It gives an overall comparative measure of the education and employment opportunities for young people living in each local area.
- Attainment 8 index. Attainment of GCSE-level qualifications by young people resident in a local area.
- Level 3 index. The proportion of young people resident in a local area qualified to Level 3 by age 19.
- Apprenticeships index. Apprenticeship starts as a proportion of 16-24s in a local area.
- Higher Education index. The proportion of 15-year-olds in a local area entering higher education by age 19.
- Employment index. Employment rates for 23-33-year-olds.
- Net underemployment index. This measure is the balance between the numbers of young people wanting to work more hours and the numbers wanting to work fewer hours.

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<sup>20</sup> House of Commons Library, [Has labour market data become less reliable?](#), October 2023.

<sup>21</sup> Office for National Statistics, [Labour Force Survey performance and quality monitoring report: July to September 2024](#), December 2024.

- NEET index. The proportion of 16–17-year-olds not in education, employment or training.

For comparison between Youth Opportunity Index scores and poverty, the Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) 2019 was used. The rank of the average IMD score for each upper tier local authority were used.<sup>22</sup>

The updated Index also includes combined authority areas. Scores for these areas were calculated by taking a weighted average of the values for each local authority based on the proportion of young people in the combined authority population that lives in each local authority.

Urban/rural classification was based on the 2011 Rural Urban classification provided by the Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs.<sup>23</sup> While these are somewhat outdated, there is unlikely to have been significant change to the urban makeup of areas since 2011.

More details on how the index was constructed can be found in our [previous report for the Youth Commission](#).

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<sup>22</sup> Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government, [English indices of deprivation 2019](#), September 2019.

<sup>23</sup> Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs, [2011 Rural Urban Classification lookup tables for all geographies](#), October 2023.