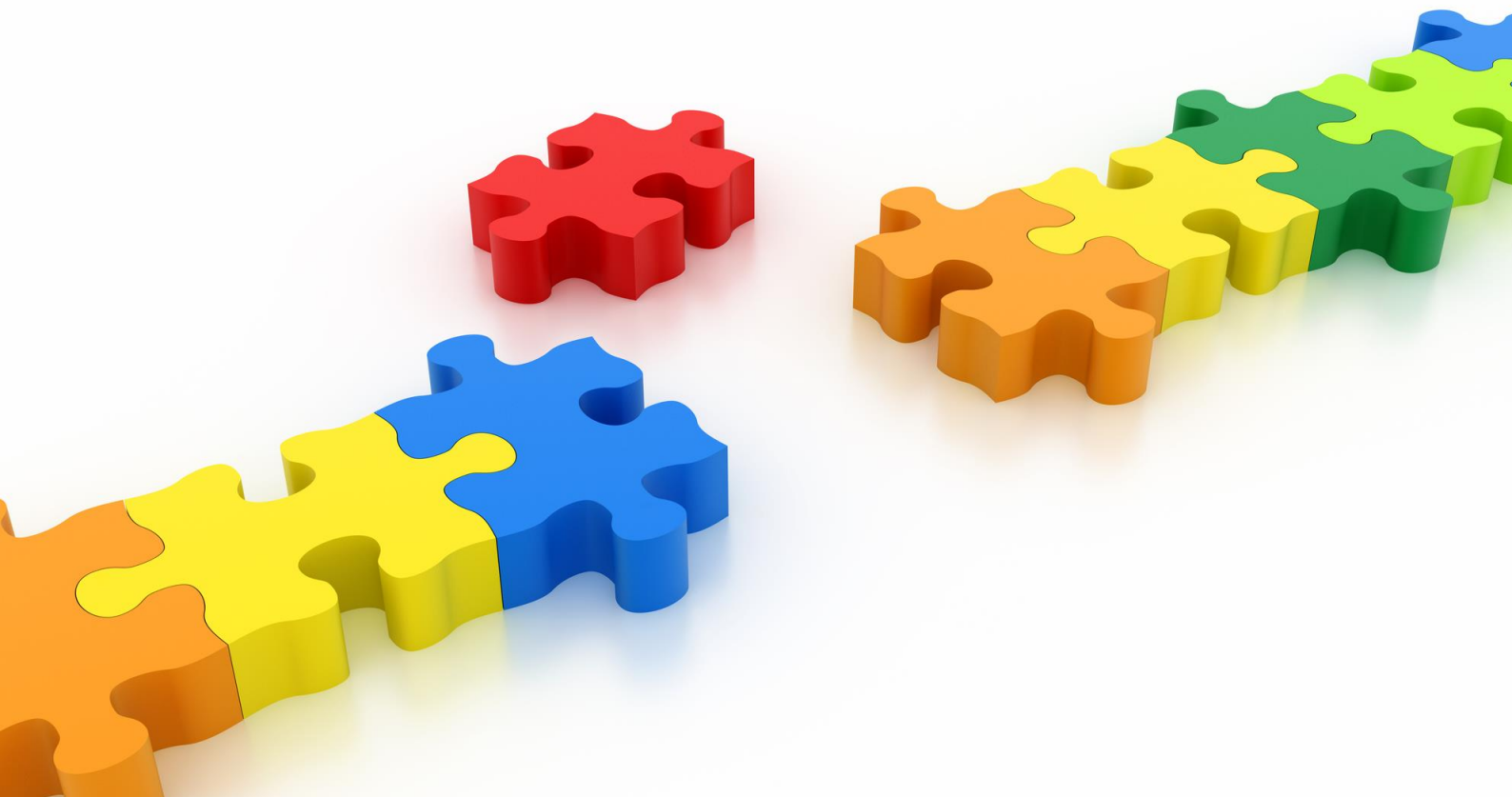


Finding a **NEET** solution

**How to prevent young people from
falling out of our education system**

Tom Richmond and Eleanor Regan



About the authors

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He subsequently spent two years as an advisor to ministers at the Department for Education, first under Michael Gove and then Nicky Morgan, where he helped to design and deliver new policies as well as improve existing ones. After leaving the Department for Education, he spent two years teaching at a Sixth Form College before moving back into education policy and research, first at the Reform think tank and then at Policy Exchange before deciding to launch EDSK.

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It should not be inferred from their sponsorship that the Youth Futures Foundation necessarily agrees with the report's conclusions and recommendations as these are independently determined by EDSK.

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Executive Summary

A young person being 'Not in Education, Employment or Training' (NEET) can be particularly harmful and have long-term 'scarring' effects. Individuals who spend time NEET are more likely to be unemployed, receive lower wages, have a criminal record, report lower levels of life satisfaction and job satisfaction and suffer from health problems such as depression. At the end of 2021 there were over 700,000 16 to 24-year-olds classified as NEET in England – equivalent to 1-in-10 young people. Worse still, despite endless initiatives and interventions from successive governments, the proportion of young people who are NEET after leaving school or college stands at 12.6 per cent - just 0.4 per cent lower than in 2016, and only 0.7 per cent lower than two decades earlier.

Far from being a homogenous group, there are many reasons why a young person may become detached from education, employment and training. Only around 40 per cent of young people recorded as NEET are currently 'unemployed', with the remaining 60 per cent being 'economically inactive' (e.g. long-term or temporarily sick due to poor physical and / or mental health; looking after their family or home). Previous reviews have often presented a long list of characteristics that are associated with being NEET, such as poor school attendance and behaviour or having learning difficulties. However, from a policymaking perspective, it is more important to focus on factors that are predictive of future NEET status rather than merely correlating with it.

In about two-thirds of cases, a young person's overall labour market trajectory can be predicted correctly based on four main 'risk factors' at age 16: low educational attainment; low self-confidence / self-esteem; early pregnancy; and a disadvantaged family background. Teenage pregnancy and disadvantaged family backgrounds are clearly important issues, but it is not realistic to expect our education system alone to solve them. Instead, this report analyses the evidence base on various aspects of our secondary education system (ages 11-18) that are within the control of ministers and civil servants, and which could therefore be reconfigured to improve young people's educational attainment and increase young people's confidence and self-esteem.

Careers information, advice and guidance

Access to high quality careers information, advice and guidance (IAG) is an important component of preventing young people from becoming NEET, yet some individuals must overcome numerous hurdles when trying to progress to the next stage of their career. For example, a young person experiencing financial hardship may have limited time and attention

for engaging with IAG. Young people from less privileged backgrounds can also struggle to navigate the qualification landscape and have more limited knowledge of career options as well as being less confident about reaching out to careers services. Research has also identified a disconnect between the sectors young people aspire to work in and the jobs that are typically available, making it even more important that young people at risk of ending up NEET get the best possible support and advice.

The evidence shows that high quality careers IAG can make a tangible difference to young people's future trajectories. Analysis by the government-funded Careers and Enterprise Company (CEC) found that if the most disadvantaged schools met all eight of the 'Gatsby Benchmarks' for providing high-quality careers advice to young people, they would see an average increase of 31 per cent in the chances of their pupils securing a sustained education, employment or training outcome. Furthermore, research by the Education and Employers Taskforce found that the more times a young person encounters employers (e.g. work experience) during their secondary school years, they are less likely to become NEET and more likely to earn a higher wage later on.

There have been several well-intentioned government programmes to improve IAG over the past two decades. Around £500 million a year was spent on 'Connexions', which provided a national careers guidance service from 2001 to 2012 (alongside support and advice on housing, health and relationships) but it was frequently criticised by both young people and independent inquiries for the quality of its provision. Connexions has since been replaced by an increasingly disjointed and confusing landscape that includes, among other things, 'Careers Hubs' and Enterprise Advisors (overseen by the CEC), the National Careers Service (which operates nationally through contracted independent providers), 'Youth Hubs' (run by the Department for Work and Pensions) and the 'Youth Offer' and local employment advisors based in Jobcentre Plus offices. The evidence shows that the considerable promise held by some of these initiatives in terms of supporting 'at risk' young people will have a greater chance of being realised with better coordination.

Subject and curriculum options

Research has shown that for many young people, studying academic subjects at school is 'uninspiring and irrelevant'. Meanwhile, vocational courses and qualifications have repeatedly been shown over the past 20 years to have a positive impact on the attainment and self-esteem of those most likely to become NEET. The 'Increased Flexibility Programme' (IFP) in the 2000's, which offered vocational learning (often at local colleges) alongside academic subjects at school, was not only popular but also improved pupils' "attitudes, behaviour and social skills". Separate reviews from the National Foundation for Educational Research and

Ofsted reported that pupils progressed at least as well in their IFP qualifications as they did in their school subjects, if not better. Both teachers and pupils agreed that the IFP had led to “improved confidence” and “greater maturity” among participating pupils and helped them “engage (and in some cases re-engage) into learning.”

Other vocationally oriented approaches have noted a similar impact. A review by Ofsted of curriculum flexibility in 2007 found that vocational courses “reengaged many students”, “improved their self-confidence”, “motivated them to attend more regularly” and “raised the achievement of ...those at risk of disaffection or disengagement”. What’s more, “some parents spoke movingly of how schools had helped change their children’s approach to learning and taking control of their lives.” More recently, the DfE’s own research has shown that Technical Awards – currently the only vocational qualifications approved for 14 to 16-year-olds – are associated with a 23 per cent reduction in unauthorised absences, a 10 per cent reduction in fixed period exclusions and a 62 per cent reduction in permanent exclusions. Despite this obvious potential, GCSE exam entries outnumber Technical Awards by 14 to 1.

Despite such an array of compelling evidence regarding the benefits of vocational courses, the Government has spent the last decade or so prioritising traditional academic subjects above all else. For example, the ‘EBacc’ and ‘Progress 8’ accountability measures focus almost exclusively on a school’s ability to get their pupils to pass exams in academic subjects, which has contributed to a dramatic decline in the teaching of creative and technical courses. Furthermore, institutions such as University Technical Colleges (UTCs) that offer a more vocational curriculum have been undermined by nearby schools using them as “a dumping ground for the difficult or disaffected”, even when many pupils (including higher achievers) may wish to pursue more practical subjects. Despite this disappointing behaviour from some schools, fewer learners from UTCs subsequently become NEET (3 per cent) compared to the national average (5 per cent). Clear favouritism from government towards academic subjects is thus a bad outcome for young people who may be more likely to end up NEET but often remain interested in, and potentially well suited to, vocational and technical education.

Apprenticeships, traineeships and work experience

Spending time in the workplace can be beneficial for young people, particularly those at risk of disengaging. However, many pupils do not get the chance to experience the world of work before the very end of their time at school or college, if at all. This is partly explained by the 2011 ‘Wolf Review’ insisting that there should be “no substantial degree of specialisation” before the end of Key Stage 4 (age 16), resulting in pupils being expected to take classroom-based GCSEs instead. In addition, employers are often hesitant to recruit young people due to concerns about their possible lack of maturity, the absence of soft skills (e.g.

communication) and not having the required skills or competencies for the job. Furthermore, the apprenticeship levy incentivises employers to invest in their existing workforce rather than taking on young people, with over half of all 'apprentices' now aged 25 and over.

Previous schemes that gave pupils a chance to gain work experience and qualifications have often proved immensely successful. For example, the 'Young Apprenticeships' programme, which began in 2004, allowed pupils aged 14 to 16 to spend two days a week in the workplace. As a result, 95 per cent of participants progressed onto Further Education / training, with 19 per cent moving onto an apprenticeship. An evaluation by Ofsted found that pupils were "enthusiastic, well-motivated and well-behaved" and they "spoke highly of the provision which they enjoyed a great deal", with pupils reporting that they were "treated more like adults". Teachers also noted that "young apprentices took more responsibility for their own learning than their peers in school did". Employers were equally impressed, and felt the programme helped pupils link "their school studies to the world of work" and "developed skills and attributes which made them more employable".

Similarly, the 'Student Apprenticeship' pilots - again for 14 to 16-year-olds - found that the vast majority of training providers, schools, colleges and young people involved believed there were 'real benefits'. This was most evident in the way it helped "under-achieving pupils with low motivation, to develop a sense of direction to help steer their transition from school into a trade or a career they were interested in". The majority of the participants had low or no academic qualifications as well as low career aspirations, having "largely disengaged with the school as a learning environment". Despite these considerable barriers, the programme was "successful both in re-engaging the young person with the learning process and in preparing them for successful study [as an apprentice]", with employers and training providers seeing a "marked improvement" in their attitude.

More recently, Traineeships have offered 16 to 24-year-olds the opportunity to develop their skills and gain experience in the workplace. Traineeships have struggled to attract learners since they began in 2014, with only 15,000-20,000 starts a year. Nonetheless, 92 per cent of trainees would recommend it to others and a survey by the Institute for Employment Studies (IES) found that 79 per cent of young people who were NEET thought traineeships could help them to access good quality work. Moreover, an official evaluation by the Department for Education showed that 75 per cent of trainees moved into further education, an apprenticeship or employment within 12 months of starting a traineeship. This figure is particularly laudable as almost half of trainees had no GCSE passes at A*-C (compared to 18 per cent among non-trainees) and trainees were also 22 percentage points more likely to have Special Educational Needs as well as having a poorer school attendance record and experiencing more exclusions.

Financial incentives for young people and employers

Disadvantaged young people may be unable to fully engage in their education when they need to cover costs such as transport to and from school / college, clothing (for work or interviews), course books and other required materials. Financial support given directly to young people can have a significant impact. From 2004 to 2011, an Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA) of up to £30 week was available to 16 to 19-year-olds from lower-income households. Evaluations of the EMA, which distributed around £580 million a year from government at its peak, found that it improved student participation and attainment, particularly amongst those from deprived areas and from families with the lowest incomes. Despite these positive effects, the EMA was scrapped due to concerns over high deadweight costs. However, its replacement – the 16-19 Bursary Fund – only offers annual financial support totalling £150 million, making it considerably less generous than its predecessor.

Young people can also benefit from financial support being given to employers. The 2019 Employer Skills Survey of 80,000 organisations showed that around a quarter do not have enough spare time or resources to offer opportunities to younger recruits. Furthermore, research by the IES found that 15 per cent of employers reported financial costs as making it difficult to employ a disadvantaged young person specifically, with this being the main barrier for small businesses. Regardless, 42 per cent of employers showed enthusiasm for working with disadvantaged young people, which suggests that providing employers with additional support could unlock more job opportunities.

Government has sometimes used financial incentives to encourage more employers to create jobs for young people. During the pandemic, ‘incentive payments’ were available to employers of £3,000 for offering apprenticeships and £1,000 for offering traineeships. A decade earlier, ‘wage incentive payments’ of up to £2,275 were given for recruiting an unemployed 18 to 24-year-old and the ‘Apprenticeship Grant for Employers’ (AGE) offered a £1,500 grant per apprentice. In both of these previous schemes, the majority of recipients said that the payments had influenced their decision to recruit a young person. A fifth of recipients of the ‘wage incentive payments’ had even created an extra vacancy as a direct result of the payment. Small employers were also more likely to value the additional financial support. The AGE was found to be most effective at promoting apprenticeships when it was targeted at smaller organisations, and 76 per cent of recipients of the ‘wage incentive payments’ had less than 50 employees.

Academic and pastoral support

Young people without any A*-C grades in their GCSEs account for two-thirds of the NEET population. As a result, a number of interventions exist to improve the academic performance of lower-attaining pupils. For example, a teacher or teaching assistant can deliver short and regular one-to-one or small group tutoring sessions, with strong evidence to show that both approaches improve attainment. In response to the pandemic, the Government has invested hundreds of millions in a 'National Tutoring Programme' (NTP) to give schools access to high-quality subsidised tutoring. However, the NTP has only delivered 15 per cent of its target of two million courses in the current academic year, and just 44 per cent of pupils who received tuition last year were from disadvantaged families. In light of this lacklustre performance, Randstad - the current operator of the NTP - has been stripped of their contract and the £349 million of funding for tutoring will go directly to schools instead.

Another intervention designed to improve young people's academic attainment is the GCSE English and maths resit policy, which states that students who are one grade below a 'pass' at age 16 must retake their GCSE in the relevant subject(s). However, only around 30 per cent of students resitting either subject go on to pass their GCSE by age 19. What's more, Ofsted have warned that "the impact of repeated 'failure' on students should not be underestimated", particularly in relation to damaging their confidence and self-esteem after several years of difficulties with the subject(s). Cambridge Assessment also flagged the potential for the resits to create resentment and demotivate students, finding that students tend to be disaffected by prior learning experiences. The resits policy is even harder to fathom when the DfE allows students to study English and maths at lower levels (including 'Functional Skills' qualifications) *after* failing their GCSEs but not beforehand.

Research has shown that offering social and emotional support is another aspect of promoting young people's academic progress and building their confidence. For example, the transition from primary to secondary school is known to be "a risk-point for vulnerable learners", with a poor transition associated with "deleterious effects on self-esteem, depression and academic attainment at age 18". Several 'protective' factors have been found to support successful transitions including curriculum continuity and effectively sharing information between schools. Even so, there is little evidence about how to best support young people at later transition points such as moving into post-16 learning. Another source of support for young people is mentoring, where they are paired with an older peer or adult who regularly meets with them and acts as a positive role model. The evidence suggests that mentoring only has a limited impact on building a young person's confidence and raising their aspirations, although some studies have found more positive impacts for pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds and for non-academic outcomes such as attitudes towards school, attendance and behaviour.

Aside from academic interventions, a crucial component of pastoral support is mental health and wellbeing, as one in seven young people aged 11 to 19 experience at least one mental disorder and the peak age for onset is 14.5 years old. The percentage of young people who are NEET and have a mental health condition has almost tripled from 7.7 per cent in 2012 to 21.3 per cent last year. A review by the Early Intervention Foundation found that school-based mental health interventions could play a ‘crucial role’ in enhancing young people’s social and emotional skills to reduce low-level symptoms in the short term, but access to specialist practitioners and services is still essential. The Government has recently pledged to invest almost £400 million to tackle the growing mental health crisis, including setting a target of 400 mental health support teams to be in a third of schools by 2022-23. However, such measures have been criticised for ‘lacking ambition’ when the number of referrals to Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services are 50 per cent higher in 2021 than they were in 2020, and over a third of children accepted onto waiting lists in 2020-21 are still waiting for their treatment to begin.

Conclusion

Such is the slow rate of improvement in the national NEET figures, it will take over 150 years on current trends to eradicate the problem of young people becoming NEET in this country. Consequently, this report proposes three major shifts in policy thinking to bring about a sustained fall in the number of young people who do not progress into education, employment or training.

First, a greater emphasis must be placed on prevention rather than cure – meaning that far more attention needs to be paid to preventing young people from leaving school or college with low self-esteem and poor academic attainment. Too often, government waits until a young person has already fallen through the cracks, only to then ask taxpayers to subsequently spend considerable sums of money trying to bring these young people back into the fold later. Not only is this desperately inefficient from a public expenditure perspective, but it is also an inexcusable waste of young people’s talents.

Second, the enduring bias towards studying academic subjects in a classroom must come to an end. Government ministers are right to set high expectations and offer an academic pathway to all pupils. Even so, this report has found compelling evidence that making pupils concentrate almost exclusively on academic subjects can undermine their motivation, aspirations and confidence. This is particularly objectionable when vocational courses have been repeatedly shown to increase pupils’ attainment and self-esteem.

Third, the various initiatives and programmes across government that strive to offer better support, better advice and better options for young people across the country need to be coordinated more effectively. There is an enormous amount of expertise and goodwill available, yet the analysis in this report suggests that it is not yet being fully utilised to help those young people at greatest risk of being left behind.

There are good empirical reasons to believe that the recommendations in this report will lead to more young people remaining engaged and motivated in secondary education by increasing their academic attainment and progress while also improving their confidence and self-esteem. Preventing young people from becoming NEET is thus a realistic and desirable goal, but this cannot be achieved without additional investment in young people and the institutions and organisations who work with them. In the aftermath of the pandemic, this investment - alongside the improved coordination of services for supporting vulnerable young people - cannot come soon enough.

Recommendations

New roles and responsibilities in government

- **RECOMMENDATION 1:** To create clearer accountability and responsibility in government for preventing young people from becoming NEET, the current role of ‘Minister for Skills’ at the Department for Education (DfE) should be converted into a ‘Minister for Skills and Youth Employment’ that is shared between the DfE and the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP).
- **RECOMMENDATION 2:** To coordinate the support available to young people who are at risk of becoming NEET, a new government-funded service called ‘CareersLink’ should be created. CareersLink will bring together the Careers and Enterprise Company, the National Careers Service and ‘Youth Hubs’ to create a single one-stop-shop for young people aged 14 to 24 in England who require additional support and advice to find a suitable place in education, employment or training.

Ending the bias towards academic subjects

- **RECOMMENDATION 3:** To prevent the downgrading of non-academic courses in the curriculum, the two EBacc performance measures for secondary schools in England – the percentage of pupils entering the English Baccalaureate and the English Baccalaureate Average Point Score – should be withdrawn with immediate effect.

- **RECOMMENDATION 4:** To allow all pupils to study the subjects that suit their interests and abilities, the 'Progress 8' measure should be reformed. In future, pupils should be able to choose any six subjects alongside English and maths, which would then feed into a school's Progress 8 score.
- **RECOMMENDATION 5:** To create a 'level playing field' between academic, vocational and technical education, a new Baccalaureate should be introduced for the final years of secondary education. This rigorous and flexible Baccalaureate would allow learners in state schools and colleges to select courses across three pathways: **Academic** (academic subjects and disciplines); **Applied** (broad areas of employment); and **Technical** (specific trades / occupations).
- **RECOMMENDATION 6:** To enhance the employability skills of younger learners and increase their engagement and progression, the DfE should create a new programme called 'Young Traineeships' for 14 to 16-year-olds. This will provide an extended work placement of 50 days over two years with a local employer during Key Stage 4 (approximately one day a week), the completion of which would be equivalent to a 'pass' (grade 4) in a GCSE subject.

Increasing attainment and confidence with English and maths

- **RECOMMENDATION 7:** To offer high-quality support to schools through the National Tutoring Programme, the Department for Education must focus its procurement for a new supplier from September 2022 on the quality of proposals rather than their price. This will help avoid a repeat of the mistakes with the previous contract.
- **RECOMMENDATION 8:** To prevent some young people from being made to experience repeated failure in English and maths from ages 11 to 16, the English and maths component of the Progress 8 measure should be expanded to include 'Functional Skills' qualifications in both subjects.
- **RECOMMENDATION 9:** To develop their literacy and numeracy skills, the Government should set a long-term goal of requiring all students to study two compulsory subjects - 'Core English' and 'Core Maths' - up to age 18. Students must continue studying both subjects until they achieve at least a 'Pass' at Level 3 (equivalent to A-levels).

More support for young people within schools and colleges

- **RECOMMENDATION 10:** To increase the number of young people who are eligible for financial support in their final years of education, the 16-19 Bursary Fund should be increased from £150 million a year to £225 million a year for the start of the academic year 2022/23.
- **RECOMMENDATION 11:** To improve the availability and accessibility of mental health services for young people, the Government should invest an additional £80 million by September 2022 to support those with the most complex needs. A further £75 million should be invested to accelerate the establishment of Mental Health Support Teams in education settings, with a new target of half of schools being supported in the academic year 2022/23.
- **RECOMMENDATION 12:** To create a stronger evidence base regarding what contributes to a successful 'transition' at ages 11, 14 and 16, the DfE should fund research trials that aim to identify the most effective practices and approaches at each transition point.

Encouraging more employers to recruit young people

- **RECOMMENDATION 13:** To build capacity among employers to recruit and support young people, financial incentives ranging from £500 to £5,000 should be available to organisations offering apprenticeships, traineeships and T Level placements. These incentives should reflect the size of the company, the age of the recruit and the length of training required for the role.
- **RECOMMENDATION 14:** To stimulate more demand for, and supply of, apprenticeships for young people, Level 7 apprenticeships (equivalent to a Masters degree) should be removed from the scope of the apprenticeship levy and the requirement for 5% 'co-investment' from non-levy paying employers towards the cost of training younger apprentices should be scrapped.

1. Introduction

“To get a better trained and more flexible workforce we need to start with better preparation for working life in schools and better opportunities for continuing education and personal development in the early years at work. The last two years of compulsory education are particularly important in forming an approach to the world of work. Every pupil needs to be helped to reach his or her full potential, not only for personal development but to prepare for the whole range of demands which employment will make. The Government is seeking to ensure that the school curriculum develops the personal skills and qualities as well as the knowledge needed for working life, and that links between schools and employers help pupils and teachers to gain a closer understanding of the industrial, commercial and economic base of our society.”¹

These sentiments illustrate the benefits that can be accrued when young people make a smooth transition from education to employment. They are found in a White Paper from a Conservative government in the aftermath of a major economic downturn with a recently elected Prime Minister at the helm, although the Prime Minister in question is Margaret Thatcher and the White Paper was published in 1981. It is as vital today as it was forty years ago that schools and colleges do everything they can to support young people’s academic and personal development so that they are well placed to move onto the next phase of their lives - be that continuing with education, embarking on a training course or starting a job.

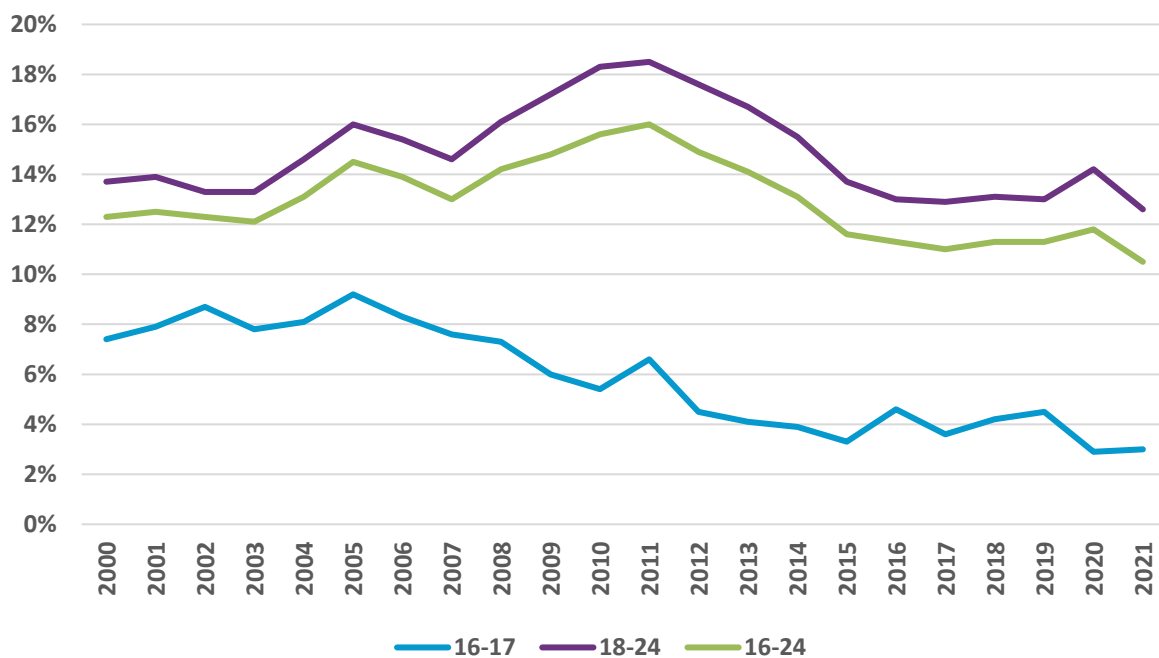
The White Paper was correct that “good academic results are prized by many who recruit direct from school”,² and for some young people an academic pathway will be entirely appropriate. However, if ministers assume that good grades are the only attribute required to succeed in life then young people who possess other skills and talents – many of which are crucial in our economy and society – will inevitably be at a greater risk of falling through the policy cracks and ending up ‘Not in Education, Employment and Training’ (NEET).

At first glance, one might assume that it has generally been a positive story in recent years regarding the number of 16 to 24-year-olds who are NEET in England. In the aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis, around one in six young people were recorded as NEET, but this has since fallen back to around one in ten (10.5 per cent) at the end of 2021 – approximately 713,000 young people. Nonetheless, complacency would be unwise for two reasons.

First, the raising of the ‘participation age’ (RPA) for young people – initially to age 17 in 2014, then to age 18 in 2015 – means that they are now legally required to remain in some form of education and training for longer. As can be seen in Figure 1 (overleaf), there was indeed a

drop in the proportion of 16 and 17-year-olds who were NEET from 2013 to 2015 following the RPA legislation. That said, there was no further improvement in reducing the NEET rate for this age group in subsequent years, although the pandemic appears to have encouraged more young people to remain in education due to the lack of job opportunities and apprenticeships. In other words, whatever value the RPA had as a tool to prevent young people from becoming NEET may have been exhausted.

Figure 1: the percentage of young people in England not in education, employment or training since 2000 ³



Second, the proportion of 16 to 24-year-olds who were NEET at the end of 2021 is worryingly similar to the proportion who were classified as NEET two decades earlier - even more so for 18 to 24-year-olds. This indicates that there could be some deep-rooted systemic issues in our education system, and arguably in wider society, that are preventing tens of thousands of young people from making the transition into the next stage of education, employment or training every year.

What's more, these figures do not compare well internationally. The latest data from the OECD shows that the proportion of 15 to 24-year-olds in the UK who are classified as NEET is 12.1 per cent compared to the OECD average of 11.4 per cent and the EU average of 9.7 per cent. In the best performing OECD nations – Germany, Japan, the Netherlands and the Czech Republic – only around 6 per cent of young people are NEET.⁴ Recent analysis by PWC, produced in collaboration with the Youth Futures Foundation, estimated that reducing the UK's NEET rate for young people down to Germany's level would increase UK GDP by 1.8 per cent in the long-term, or £38 billion.⁵

There are good reasons to be concerned about a high level of young people ending up NEET. Multiple studies, such as a recent evidence review by Public Health England,⁶ have described why being out of work at a young age makes someone significantly less likely to be employed in a good career later in life as well as having a direct effect on their health and wellbeing:

- People who are NEET for longer than six months before the age of 21 are more likely to be unemployed, low paid, have no training, a criminal record, and suffer from poor health and depression;
- Spending time unemployed under the age of 23 lowers life satisfaction, health status, job satisfaction and wages more than twenty years later – often known as ‘scarring’;
- Compared with other groups, a significant period of unemployment for those of a young age is likely to persist, meaning that early unemployment has a significant negative effect on employment opportunities later in life;
- When those who were NEET do move into work, they are likely to earn less, with one study estimating the effect of early unemployment to be an 8-15 per cent reduction in wages by the age of 42;
- Being NEET can influence unhealthy behaviours. In one survey, 11 per cent of 16 to 25-year-olds who had been unemployed said that they had “turned to drugs or alcohol” as a result of their unemployment.

It is important to remember that young people classified as NEET are not a homogenous group. At the end of 2021, around 60 per cent of young people classed as NEET were ‘economically inactive’. This was the result of them being ‘long-term or temporarily sick’ (25 per cent of those who were NEET), ‘looking after family / home’ (11 per cent) or ‘other reasons’ such as not wanting to work, not having started looking for a job yet or waiting for the results of a job application (26 per cent). This leaves around 40 per cent of young people classed as NEET who are able and willing to work but remain unemployed, with about 15 per cent of all young people who are NEET having been out of work for more than six months.⁷ Even though the proportion of those categorised as NEET because they are unemployed has shrunk over the past year, the proportion who are ‘long-term or temporarily sick’ leapt by over four percentage points from 2020 to 2021. These trends emphasise why any strategy to reduce the number of young people ending up NEET must tackle the issue on multiple fronts, including (but not limited to) increasing education and training opportunities and reducing the level of inactivity in this group.

Many individuals and organisations, from government departments and agencies to charities and frontline workers, work hard to reduce these NEET statistics, yet much of their effort is directed towards supporting those young people who have already become NEET. This was emphasised by the Government’s pandemic response measures for young people, which

focused almost exclusively on those who had already left school or college and become unemployed. These include:

- The £2 billion ‘Kickstart’ scheme, which started in September 2020, gave bursaries to employers who offered work placements for young people aged 16 to 24 who were on Universal Credit and are at risk of long term unemployment.
- The ‘Restart’ scheme, which began in July 2021, aims to provide “intensive and tailored support to over 1 million unemployed people” aged 18 and over.

Although such measures are well-intentioned and will help some young people find work, they illustrate how little attention has been paid to whether our school and college system may be inadvertently making it more likely that some young people will subsequently end up NEET. This is due, at least in part, to the separation of responsibilities between the Department for Education (DfE), which supports young people during their time in education and training, and the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), which supports young people who are out of work. As a result, neither department has ultimate responsibility or accountability for preventing young people from becoming NEET in the first place. This is surprising given that previous estimates have put the lifetime costs to the public finances of every young person who is NEET at £76,800 and the total costs to the economy and wider community at £142,300.⁸

Several organisations have attempted to identify the characteristics of young people who are more likely to end up NEET, including Ofsted,⁹ the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER),¹⁰ Impetus,¹¹ the National Institute of Economic and Social Research¹² and the Welsh Government.¹³ Although their respective lists are not identical, they typically cite the following ‘risk factors’ for young people:

- Those with low educational attainment
- Those with poor attendance at school
- Those with unsatisfactory behaviour and attitudes towards school
- Those with low self-confidence
- Looked after children
- Young people with learning difficulties and/or disability
- Teenage mothers and pregnant teens
- Young carers
- Those with health problems, especially mental health problems
- Those from low-income families
- In some areas, some young people from particular minority ethnic backgrounds

However, it is not clear how useful such 'factors' are in practice. Several concerns have been put forward by academics and researchers about the practicalities of using these indicators:¹⁴

- Using demographic variables to identify 'at risk' young people can result in 'over-targeting', which could make the problem appear so large that it is perceived as too difficult to solve or results in pupils being unnecessarily labelled and 'treated' as being at risk of becoming NEET;¹⁵
- A universal list of indicators would only be useful to local authorities (LAs) and schools if it could be tailored to the characteristics of their own area,¹⁶ but there is no agreed process for 'weighting' the indicators to match the challenges in different areas;
- The indicators are only as good as the data that schools have uploaded onto their information management systems, which can lead to inconsistency across LAs;
- A set of indicators must not be too long and complicated for schools to complete, but qualitative indicators and statistical data might be cumbersome and impractical for LAs and schools to use;
- There is a risk of subjective interpretations of some indicators by whoever collects the data (e.g. 'family circumstances');
- A young person can go from being 'not at risk' to being 'at risk' overnight because of a one-off event (e.g. bereavement, family separation) but it is difficult and time-consuming to capture this kind of information in an accurate and timely manner;

In short, young people having any (or even several) of the 'risk factors' does not mean that they will require interventions. Furthermore, as described in a recent review of international policy responses to young people who are NEET, it is not easy to differentiate between those risk factors that *cause* or lead to NEET status versus those factors that are simply *correlated* with being NEET.¹⁷ Young people can also display multiple disadvantages and risk factors, making it hard to determine which factor(s) may be contributing to their own NEET status.¹⁸

To try to separate causation from correlation, recent analysis has shown that in about two-thirds of cases, a young person's overall future labour market trajectory can be predicted correctly on the basis of their circumstances at age 16.¹⁹ Furthermore, it was discovered that despite the apparent heterogeneity among young people who become NEET, virtually all at-risk trajectories are associated with a relatively small set of key 'risk factors':

- Low educational attainment
- Low self-confidence / self-esteem
- Early pregnancy
- Disadvantaged family background²⁰

This evidence suggests that rather than focusing on broad lists of characteristics recorded in the post-18 NEET population, it is more constructive to focus on these four 'predictive' factors when seeking to reduce the number of young people who become NEET after they leave school or college.

Teenage pregnancy and disadvantaged family backgrounds are clearly important issues, but it is not realistic to expect our education system alone to solve them. Instead, this report from EDSK will analyse the evidence base on various aspects of our secondary education system (ages 11-18) that are within the control of ministers and civil servants and could thus be reconfigured to **improve young people's educational attainment** and **increase young people's confidence and self-esteem**. The report will conclude with a set of recommendations for how to improve young people's outcomes in each area, particularly for individuals from less privileged backgrounds. It is therefore hoped that this report makes a valuable contribution to preventing young people from becoming NEET in England both now and in future.

2. Careers information, advice and guidance

The value of high-quality careers guidance is regularly cited as a means to prevent young people from becoming NEET, as young people from lower socio-economic backgrounds benefit from being exposed to a wide range of people, jobs and career options as well as challenging class-based stereotypes.²¹ Previous reviews by the NFER,²² OECD,²³ the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development²⁴ and the government-funded Careers and Enterprise Company (CEC)²⁵ have identified the following barriers that disadvantaged young people can face in progressing to positive destinations:

- **Basic needs taking precedence over careers advice:** these young people are more likely to face competing pressures due to having more complex needs (e.g. poverty), which limits their time and attention to engage with career support;
- **Difficulty navigating post-16 pathways:** they are more likely to move institutions at age 16, select technical pathways that have a vast array of options and experience ‘career confusion’ whereby career goals are misaligned with their attainment or qualifications;
- **Influence of social networks:** not only can the lower ‘social capital’ among disadvantaged young people make them less confident about reaching out to careers services, they are also more likely to use informal sources of support (e.g. parents, friends);
- **Limits of school-mediated careers support:** by the time they receive careers support, these young people may have already ruled out many options as being unsuitable for them because the support was not high quality, timely or sufficiently well targeted;
- **Lack of knowledge of career options:** they might have access to less information about higher status occupations, regardless of academic attainment and capability, and may therefore be less motivated to engage with careers advice relating to such occupations.

“I think that’s a big problem with young people just feeling like they are being chucked through a system that isn’t actually taking the time to focus on what you really want”

Young person E

Last year, a survey of 1,275 young people by the Institute for Employment Studies (IES) found that among young people who were NEET, 41 per cent felt that careers guidance would help them ‘a lot’ with accessing good quality work while 84 per cent felt it would be useful overall.²⁶

Furthermore, there is increasing evidence about the importance of ‘realistic’ careers aspirations. A recent report based on survey responses from over 7,000 14 to 18-year-olds in the UK found that the sectors young people aspire to work in differ greatly from the jobs available, creating a disconnect between aspiration and opportunity.²⁷ Many young people reported receiving only limited careers support from their schools and colleges, but those who were benefitting from careers activities and multiple career influences in secondary education have aspirations that are – in aggregate – better connected to the labour market.²⁸

The ‘Gatsby Benchmarks’

Commissioned in 2013 by the Gatsby Foundation, Sir John Holman identified what constitutes international best practice on career guidance,²⁹ leading to the creation of eight ‘Gatsby Benchmarks’ of high-quality career advice for young people:³⁰

1. **Stable careers programme:** every school and college should have an embedded programme of career education and guidance that is known and understood by pupils, parents, teachers, governors and employers;
2. **Learning from career and labour market information:** every pupil and their parents should have access to good quality information about future study options and labour market opportunities, with support available from informed advisers;
3. **Addressing the needs of each pupil:** pupils have different careers guidance needs at different stages, so advice and support needs to be tailored to the needs of each pupil;
4. **Linking curriculum learning to careers:** all teachers should link curriculum learning with careers and STEM subject teachers should highlight relevance of STEM subjects for a wide range of future career paths;
5. **Encounters with employers and employees:** every pupil should have multiple opportunities to learn from employers about work, employment and the skills that are valued in the workplace e.g. visiting speakers, mentoring and enterprise schemes;
6. **Experiences of the workplace:** every pupil should have first-hand experiences of the workplace through work visits, work shadowing and/or work experience;
7. **Encounters with further education and higher education:** all pupils should understand the full range of opportunities that are available to them, including both academic and vocational routes in schools, colleges, universities and in the workplace;
8. **Personal guidance:** every pupil should have opportunities for guidance interviews at appropriate decision points with an appropriately trained career adviser.

A recent study by the CEC found a positive relationship between Gatsby Benchmarks being met by schools and positive student destinations for Year 11 leavers, after controlling for factors such as their level of disadvantage, academic grades, school type and location.³¹ The analysis showed that a hypothetical school which has met all eight Benchmarks would see a 9.7 per cent decline in the proportion of students who did not go on to confirmed positive destinations (e.g. apprenticeships, Further Education (FE) college, Sixth Form, Sixth Form College) compared to an otherwise similar school who did not meet any of the Gatsby Benchmarks.³² What's more, the positive relationship between meeting Gatsby Benchmarks and pupils' education, employment and training (EET) outcomes was stronger in schools with more disadvantaged intakes. The CEC analysis found that if all eight benchmarks were achieved in the most disadvantaged quarter of schools, there would be an average increase of 31 per cent in the chances of pupils securing a sustained EET outcome compared to an otherwise similar school who did not meet any of the Gatsby Benchmarks.³³

"...I don't think [external careers advice] really necessarily helped too much, and I don't think they necessarily really cared about it other than just getting someone in to give us a quick talk and then leave, or do like a careers day or have a whole period of it being building a tower out of like pasta, marshmallows as 'skills development' and stuff like that."

Young person B

The impact of effective careers support can be seen in other countries too. By analysing multiple national longitudinal datasets to identify patterns of attitudes and activities that are associated with better transitions into employment, the OECD 'Career Readiness' project highlighted 11 indicators that were linked to positive adult career outcomes in a minimum of three countries:³⁴

- **Exploring the future:** career conversations; engaging with people in work through career talks/job fairs; workplace visits or job shadowing; application and interview skills development activities; occupationally focused short programmes
- **Experiencing the future:** part time work; volunteering;
- **Thinking about the future:** career certainty; career ambition; career alignment; instrumental motivation towards school.

Such is the long-term value of these activities, the OECD concluded that secondary school students exploring, experiencing and thinking about their future in work can lead to those

students experiencing lower levels of unemployment, receiving higher wages and being happier in their careers as adults.³⁵

Similarly, research by the Education and Employers Taskforce uncovered various associations between ‘employer engagement’ and positive outcomes. Their survey of 1,755 young people, conducted by polling firm YouGov, identified a correlation between higher volumes of school-mediated engagement and a reduced incidence of being NEET,³⁶ with teenagers who had at least four instances of employer engagement appearing to gain the greatest benefits.³⁷ Earlier research from the same organisation had observed a “strong advantage associated with employer engagement” during school or college, even after controlling for factors such as level of education and social background of pupils. Their modelling indicated that two or more employer contacts had a broadly robust association with a reduced probability of NEET status.³⁸ They also found that in general, participants who experienced greater levels of contact with employers were “more likely to be earning at a higher level”.³⁹

Who is responsible for delivering careers guidance?

In the past, the main careers guidance for young people in England was provided by ‘Connexions’. Operating from 2001 to 2012, the purpose of Connexions was to support young people by offering impartial information, advice and guidance (IAG), primarily around post-compulsory educational routes (i.e. post-16),⁴⁰ although it also offered support on topics such as housing, health and relationships.⁴¹ Connexions aimed to remove barriers to learning and progression as well as enable young people to make a smooth transition into adulthood and working life. It was available for young people aged 13 to 19, and to those with learning difficulties until age 24.⁴² Connexions received an annual budget of approximately £500 million^{43,44} with around £200 million dedicated to careers guidance.⁴⁵

The careers advice and guidance available through Connexions received mixed reviews, with some young people finding it “absolutely brilliant” and others “a complete waste of time”.⁴⁶ An Ofsted thematic survey in 2010 identified inconsistencies in provision, and a survey of young people in the same year showed that around half felt the careers provision was not meeting their needs.⁴⁷ Similarly, the ‘Panel on Fair Access to the Professions’ in 2009 stated that throughout their work examining barriers and pathways “we have barely heard a good word about the careers work of the current Connexions service.”⁴⁸ The panel referenced a survey by youth charity YouthNet, which found that only one in five 16 to 25-year-olds felt that Connexions was ‘helpful’.⁴⁹ In a separate survey on how useful Connexions careers advice had been, around 45 per cent reported that it was ‘poor’ or worse.⁵⁰

The 2013 Education Select Committee noted that the broad remit of Connexions had “led to resources being focused more on its targeted youth support role than on universal careers guidance.” That said, this was not necessarily a bad outcome for young people as the Committee commented that the “most enthusiastic proponents [of Connexions were] those who had accessed the youth support service.”⁵¹ A separate study found that young people who had a systemic and close contact with Connexions were very positive about the service they received.⁵² Furthermore, the ‘Activity Agreement’ (AA) scheme for 16 and 17-year-olds, operated by Connexions from 2006 to 2011, appeared to have a positive impact.⁵³ Targeted at young people who were NEET, these AA pilots offered participants a financial incentive and programme of activities (personal development, help to address obstacles, careers advice and short training courses).⁵⁴ After three months, there was an approximate 13 percentage point shift away from being either NEET or employed in a job without training and towards work-based training and studying.⁵⁵

As a result of public spending cuts by the Coalition Government, Connexions stopped operating as a national service in 2012, with responsibility for careers guidance handed to schools and the responsibilities around participation passed to local authorities. As Connexions was being wound down, the National Careers Service (NCS) launched in April 2012 to provide people in England over the age of 13 with free and impartial information, advice and guidance on learning, training and work opportunities, supported by qualified careers advisers.⁵⁶ The NCS received £120 million in 2017 and operates as a contracted programme delivered by various suppliers in specific geographical areas.⁵⁷ The service can be provided face-to-face, via telephone or online, but only adults have access to face-to-face support as young people are expected to receive such support through their school or college.⁵⁸ A government report in 2019 found that 84 per cent of telephone and face-to-face customers were generally satisfied with the service.⁵⁹ However, the NCS appears to have a low profile among young people. One witness told the Education Select Committee that they had not received a single request from a young person about how to access the NCS.⁶⁰

Another source of support for young people is the CEC, which has supported collaboration between schools, colleges and employers since 2014 to help pupils aged 12 to 18 access better careers advice. It does not deliver programmes directly, but instead offers free support to schools and targets resources to those areas most in need based on indicators such as levels of deprivation and school exam results.⁶¹ The overall aims of the CEC are to support school and college careers leaders, link employers with schools and colleges, and provide practical tools and resources to help schools meet (and track their progress towards meeting) the Gatsby Benchmarks.⁶² The CEC initially received £6.2 million in start-up funding for 2015/16,⁶³ including £5 million as ‘investment funding’ to stimulate good practice across England.⁶⁴ This funding has fluctuated over the years, with the CEC’s most recent report from 2019/20 stating it had received £21.3 million in grant funding.

In line with the Government's 2017 Careers Strategy, the CEC is responsible for:⁶⁵

- **Cornerstone Employers:** businesses that are experienced and have a good track record in engaging with education, who drive leadership and strategic support with their communities to galvanise business engagement with local schools and colleges (as of 2020, there were 260 Cornerstone Employers in England⁶⁶).
- **Careers leaders:** all schools and colleges have a named careers leader to lead their careers guidance programme.
- **Careers Hubs:** funded by the Government but coordinated by the CEC, a Careers Hub is a group of between 20 to 40 secondary schools and colleges in an area that work together to deliver the Gatsby Benchmarks (as of 2020, there were more than 2,265 schools and colleges in careers hubs⁶⁷).
- **Enterprise Advisors:** business volunteers from a range of sectors who play a pivotal role in helping education institutions deliver high-quality careers plans (as of 2020, there were over 3,600 Enterprise Advisors working with schools and colleges⁶⁸).

A new inquiry into careers education was launched by the Education Select Committee in January this year to explore whether current arrangements provide young people with sufficient guidance about career choices, employment, training and further and higher education opportunities.⁶⁹ This will cover a range of topics, including whether organisations like the CEC provide value for money to the taxpayer.⁷⁰ This follows previous criticism by the Committee of the CEC's expenditure and lack of data demonstrating their impact on schools and colleges.⁷¹ The House of Lords Youth Unemployment Committee recently observed that progress has been made with the CEC's role and the wider use of the Gatsby Benchmarks, but they heard from witnesses that "more could be done to better support those who would benefit most."⁷²

In terms of the additional support available to young people, they are already legally entitled to information about technical education qualifications and apprenticeships provided by education and training providers thanks to the 'Baker Clause' - an amendment to the *Technical and Further Education Act 2017*, which came into force in 2018.⁷³ It states that for all pupils aged 13 to 18 in England, there must be "an opportunity for a range of education and training providers to access registered pupils during the relevant phase of their education for the purpose of informing them about approved technical education qualifications or apprenticeships".⁷⁴ This has since been extended to pupils in Year 7.⁷⁵ Schools are required to have clear arrangements in place to ensure pupils have these opportunities to hear from other providers at, and leading up to, important transition points, including a published policy statement outlining how providers can access them.⁷⁶

Despite the Baker Clause having been in place for several years, the ‘Youth Voice Census’ in 2021 found that many young people said they had never had traineeships (65.6 per cent) or apprenticeships (14.2 per cent) discussed with them. Although apprenticeships were discussed more frequently than traineeships, almost half of respondents reported having apprenticeships discussed with them on just two occasions or fewer.⁷⁷ It also cannot be assumed that greater awareness necessarily translates into more young people from less privileged backgrounds having the opportunity to start an apprenticeship. In addition, the House of Lords Committee heard that 70 per cent of the FE providers they approached said they found it difficult to access schools.⁷⁸ In an attempt to resolve this, Ofsted guidance was updated for September 2021 so that if a school does not meet the Baker Clause, this will be reported in the ‘Personal Development’ judgement of a school’s inspection report.⁷⁹ An amendment to the Skills Bill going through Parliament at the time of writing would also make the Baker Clause legally enforceable⁸⁰ - a move that is supported by various business groups.⁸¹

“...they tried so hard to keep people within that school rather than letting them go off to college, or work, or to do their own thing...We saw that with unis as well, there would be kind of discussions about getting as many people into uni as possible, whether that was right for them or not, whether it was the right time etc. I think they kind of had one goal, and one goal only to get people to progress through that system so that it looks good for them.”

Young person B

Meanwhile, the Government is expanding young people’s access to information through a new *Education (Careers Guidance in Schools) Bill*, which would extend the duty to provide careers guidance in schools in England to students from Year 8 down to Year 7 and would also extend this duty to all academies and alternative provision academies.⁸² The changes will come into force in September 2022⁸³ and could be beneficial for many pupils. Even so, such broad changes are unlikely to guarantee that young people from the least privileged backgrounds get enough high-quality advice and guidance to overcome the specific barriers that they face (outlined at the start of this chapter).

Youth Hubs

Since 2016, Jobcentre Plus has run a scheme that offers 12 to 18-year-olds advice on the labour market and the training options available to them such as apprenticeships and traineeships.⁸⁴ In 2019 this initiative was extended, with a further 90 Jobcentre advisers employed to work

with schools.⁸⁵ In October 2021, the Government extended their 'Youth Offer' to support 16 to 17-year-olds until 2025, having previously targeted 18 to 24-year-olds on Universal Credit.

This support from the Youth Offer is provided in three ways:

- **The Youth Employment programme:** a 13-week scheme that helps people prepare for work, which includes an employment and skills review and a work search review;
- **Youth employability coaches:** introduced to support young people who have complex needs or other barriers stopping them from finding a job (150 coaches had been recruited across the UK by October 2021);
- **Youth Hubs:** these centres offer support for up to six months from a Youth Hub work coach (135 Youth Hubs had opened across the UK by October 2021).⁸⁶

Youth Hubs have attracted considerable interest. Previous research into similar schemes such as MyGo in Ipswich showed that co-locating Jobcentre Plus services with additional employment support and working closely with local partners can provide a personalised and intensive package of support to young people – some of whom were not previously engaging with any employment services. For example, two-fifths of the young people reached by MyGo were not claiming benefits at the point of referral. Having welcoming and friendly staff, effective support and an in-house employer engagement team – all in convenient locations – were pivotal to this success. Many participants directly attributed successful outcomes to the quality of the coaching support received, while the co-ordination of activity between MyGo and Jobcentre coaches were vital to delivering a single and seamless service.⁸⁷

These findings chime with an evidence review by the Youth Futures on co-located employment services that aim to operate as an effective and accessible 'one stop shop' for young people. In addition to the promising features of initiatives like MyGo, this review drew attention to other important aspects of delivery:

- **Creating the right environment** with an appealing brand that is distinct from JCP.
- **Outreach services** that can engage hard-to-reach young people including activities and partnerships with other organisations in the local area
- **Active case management** and tracking the needs of young participants to minimise the drop-out rate, including shared systems and processes among the different partner organisations (incorporating service level agreements where necessary)
- **Staff training** to ensure high quality provision and help advisors / coaches to identify and support young people with additional needs e.g. mental health, learning disabilities

- **Co-design of services with young people** e.g. regular feedback from young participants, incorporating the ‘lived experiences’ of young people, using young people as ‘peer mentors’ and challenging providers’ assumptions around the needs of young people
- **Local authorities acting as ‘broker’** between partner organisations to create strong local relationships and networks as well as facilitating data sharing
- **A ‘test and learn’ approach to delivery**, supported by early robust evaluations to understand ‘what works’ for young people.

A report by Impetus earlier this year on the creation of the Youth Hub in Birmingham flagged some design and implementation challenges, including the need to be able to track data on outcomes to make the right decisions about their delivery model. Moreover, “there is a risk that in an effort to see everyone work together, Youth Hubs lack a leader to really drive things forward [because] without leadership, it will be too easy for everyone to default to playing it safe and doing what they know – but doing things differently is the point, and it will require some difficult decisions to be made.”⁸⁸ Even so, the notion of bringing services for ‘at risk’ young people together under one roof evidently has considerable potential in ensuring that these individuals can access and benefit from high-quality support.

3. Subject and curriculum options

The landmark review of vocational qualifications by Professor Alison Wolf in 2011 (the ‘Wolf Review’) stated that vocational education needs to take “a far more active role in helping young people gain the workplace and employment-based skills and experience which are crucial to their futures”,⁸⁹ adding that “the value of practical skills as part of a rounded education; the potential to sample different material as a form of orientation; and the opportunity for young people to excel on a variety of dimensions are all important and should be encouraged.”⁹⁰ Nevertheless, the Wolf Review asserted that “there should be no substantial degree of specialisation before the end of KS4”⁹¹ as “neither the existing research literature, nor analyses carried out for the Review by academics and DfE analysts, found any indication that KS4 students (whether generally, or more specifically those ‘at risk of disengagement’) made substantial improvements in their general attainment as a result of taking more vocational courses.”⁹² This chapter will scrutinise these claims to assess whether offering different courses and qualifications could prevent some young people from ending up NEET.

Partnerships between schools and colleges

In 2005, Ofsted published an evaluation of the ‘Increased Flexibility Programme’ (IFP), which was introduced in 2002 to support partnerships of schools, FE colleges and work-based learning providers in order to provide a more diverse curriculum at Key Stage 4 including a range of vocational qualifications. The goal was to extend participation in education and training post-16 by offering more opportunities to engage in vocational learning from 14 to 16. At the time of the evaluation, these partnerships involved half the secondary schools and three quarters of FE colleges in England.⁹³ Ofsted’s findings were broadly positive:

- *“The courses offered through these partnerships have proved so popular that the numbers of students taking IFPs have exceeded expectations”*
- *“...more students are staying on in post-16 education at colleges as a result of attending IFPs due to improved information and guidance that students receive at points of transition.”*
- *“Students respond well to the broader learning opportunities available through the IFP, and this has resulted in improvements among a large number of students in their attitudes, behaviour and social skills at college and back at school”⁹⁴*

Ofsted identified several challenges that had not yet been fully resolved, particularly around the need to build strong relationships between schools and colleges, synchronise timetables, improve the quality of assessments and expand quality assurance procedures.⁹⁵ Even so, these

early signs were encouraging. The following year, the NFER published a separate evaluation of the third and fourth cohorts of students on the IFP, which echoed what Ofsted had found:

- *“Students themselves were generally very happy with their IFP courses. ...Furthermore, the majority of students said they would be happy to recommend their respective courses to other students considering getting involved.”*
- *“...the majority of young people who took GCSEs in vocational subjects and GNVQs attained their qualifications, and that the majority of the sample of young people who had undertaken NVQs and other vocational qualifications through the programme had achieved the qualification at the end of Year 11.”*
- *“...early outcome indicators from schools were reported to suggest that cohort 3 and 4 students were progressing at least as well in their IFP qualifications as they were in their school subjects, and in some cases better on their IFP courses.”*
- *“The majority of school staff agreed that the IFP had helped many students to become more confident and to engage (and in some cases re-engage) into learning”*
- *“...students identified ways in which participation in the IFP had helped them develop both socially and personally. The two most widely reported factors were: improved confidence [and] greater maturity. The majority of views expressed related to students becoming more confident and the knock-on effects this had had on their college work. ...many were appreciative of the opportunities the IFP afforded them.”*
- *“Many students agreed that experience on IFP had made them more prepared for working life. In addition to learning trade skills, young people pointed to the ‘soft skills’ such as confidence and self-esteem that they had developed while participating on the programme, as well as the experience of working under ‘real world’ conditions.”⁹⁶*

As Ofsted had observed, there were still some logistical issues that needed attention, such as small numbers of pupils discontinuing and schools still trying to find the optimum ‘selection procedures’ for determining which pupils would benefit most from the IFP. Nonetheless, the impact of the programme on young people at risk of disengaging from their education was palpable. Despite these two independent evaluations illustrating the potential of the IFP, the Wolf Review merely commented that “it was popular with participants but expensive, and participants’ GCSE outcomes were poor.”⁹⁷ Criticising the IFP for producing poor GCSE outcomes was a strange observation, given that the Wolf Review described the IFP as being “aimed at lower achieving pupils” in the previous sentence.⁹⁸ What’s more, the NFER evaluation found “there was a consensus amongst college staff that ‘achievement outcomes have generally accurately reflected the abilities of the students’” and that there were “high numbers of students with Special Educational Needs participating in IFP courses.”⁹⁹

When Ofsted returned to the same subject in 2010, they concluded that “the development of a richer and more flexible curriculum was a key factor in re-engaging young people in education, employment or training and also in preventing 14- to 16-year-olds from becoming disengaged.”¹⁰⁰ A literature review by the NFER in 2012 reported that “many young people [find] academic qualifications such as GCSEs and A-levels ‘uninspiring and irrelevant’”. The review summarised previous research in this area:

*“[Vocational qualifications] are regarded as important provision for young people at risk of becoming disengaged, with a range of outcomes for learners reported in the literature reviewed (for example, Burgess and Rodger, 2010; Gutherson et al., 2011, Ofsted, 2010). These include enhanced engagement with learning, improved personal and social skills (including confidence, self-esteem and motivation), and a greater understanding of the world of work. There is also evidence that studying vocational qualifications, particularly where some learning takes place out of school, at a college or training provider, helps to improve young people’s progression to further learning by preparing them better for the transition at 16, and helping them make more informed decisions about their choices (for example, HMIE, 2010; Marson-Smith et al., 2009; O’Donnell et al., 2006). Birdwell et al. (2011) report evidence that the increase in choices of vocational qualifications for 14–16 year olds is encouraging young people, who would otherwise have disengaged from education, to continue into FE or training.”*¹⁰¹

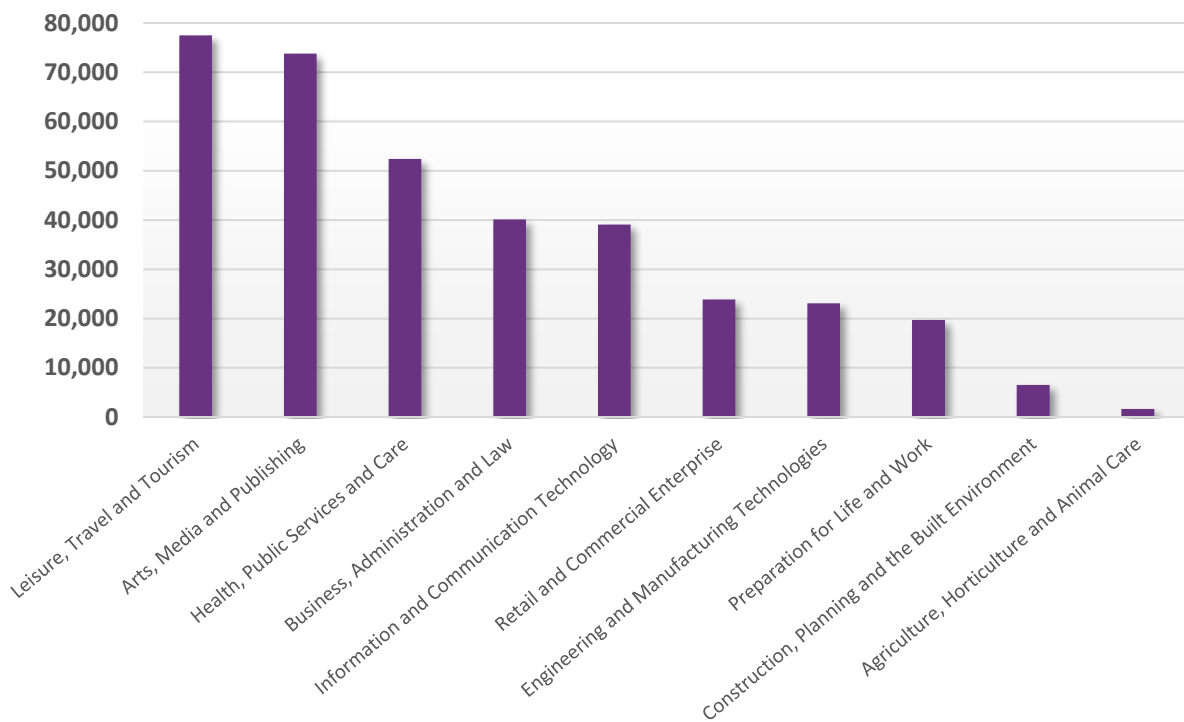
In other words, there is good reason to think a more vocationally-oriented curriculum could improve both attainment and self-esteem among pupils who are most likely to become NEET.

Technical Awards

The Wolf Review was rightly concerned about the quality and value of some vocational qualifications. In line with the Review’s recommendations in 2011, thousands of qualifications were subsequently stripped out of performance tables to prevent schools from taking advantage of the fact that some of these courses counted for as much as four (sometimes even six) GCSEs. The Review found that schools were “under enormous pressure to pile up league-table points”, leading them to deliver qualifications that may offer poor progression after age 16 or did not include any external assessment.¹⁰² A decade on, the effects of these changes are plainly evident. The only approved vocational qualifications in Key Stage 4 are known as ‘Technical Awards’, which the DfE define as “high quality level 1 and 2 qualifications that provides 14 to 16 year olds with applied knowledge and practical skills.”¹⁰³ 92 Technical Awards were included in the pre-pandemic 2019 performance tables¹⁰⁴ and, as shown in Figure 2 (overleaf), the most popular Technical Awards were in areas such as *Leisure, Travel and Tourism, Arts, Media and Publishing* and *Health, Public Services and Care*. However, there were only 358,000 exam entries for Technical Awards in 2019 compared to 5.1 million GCSE

entries.¹⁰⁵ Previous analysis by the DfE had shown that although 35 per cent of pupils took at least one Technical Award, the majority of pupils took only one Technical Award and very few pupils took more than two Awards.¹⁰⁶

Figure 2: 2019 exam entries for Technical Awards ¹⁰⁷



Although they are dwarfed in number by GCSE entries, the impact that Technical Awards have on pupils should not be underestimated. The same analysis from the DfE showed that, for pupils in state-funded mainstream schools, taking a Technical Award was associated with a 23 per cent reduction in unauthorised absences, a 10 per cent reduction in fixed period exclusions and a staggering 62 per cent reduction in permanent exclusions.¹⁰⁸ What’s more, this pattern was repeated for pupils with Special Educational Needs (SEN). These outcomes suggest that, far from being a distraction alongside academic courses, entry-level vocational qualifications can have a substantial positive impact on the pupils who complete them. Moreover, because Technical Awards have all been examined and approved by the DfE, the Wolf Review’s concerns around pupils being entered for poor-quality qualifications is now far less of an issue than it was in 2011.

“I think the general theme is they want you to do the academic stuff, and there was that stigma of doing a BTEC. Even in how you were onboarded into the school, it was in the processes, it was in the policies institutionally.”

Young person A

The impact of accountability measures

Two of the main accountability measures for state-funded schools in England are:

- **The English Baccalaureate (EBacc):** introduced in 2010, this records the percentage of pupils who enter and pass their GCSEs in all the following subjects: English language and English literature; maths; either history or geography; a language (modern or ancient); and at least two of the three single sciences (biology, chemistry, computer science and physics) or ‘Combined Science’
- **Progress 8:** introduced in 2016, this is calculated based on pupils’ performance in three groups (‘baskets’) of qualifications: first, English and maths; second, any three remaining EBacc subjects (e.g. history, chemistry, French); and third, any three other subjects (either EBacc or non-EBacc, including vocational qualifications)

The significant emphasis placed on ‘traditional’ academic subjects in these accountability measures is plainly apparent, leaving barely any room for non-academic / vocational courses. As [EDSK discovered in our 2019 report on the impact of the EBacc](#), Art & Design, Dance, Drama, Media/Film/TV Studies, Music and the six Design & Technology (D&T) subjects had all seen a decline in GCSE entries since 2010 and were falling year-on-year. The number of teachers for these subjects had also dropped, with many non-EBacc subjects experiencing a fall of over 1,000 teachers following the EBacc’s introduction (the number of D&T teachers had fallen by over 3,500).

Numerous studies have illustrated how the EBacc has changed the behaviour of teachers and school leaders. Research by Ipsos Mori, which was commissioned by the DfE, found that many schools had changed their curriculum to accommodate more EBacc subjects and sometimes redeployed staff to deliver them, but this often resulted in schools withdrawing or restricting other subjects.¹⁰⁹ The same study found that parents were unenthused by this emphasis on academic subjects:

“Some parents/carers were concerned about the narrow academic focus of the EBacc, and the detrimental impact it might have on the uptake of non-EBacc subjects. Ultimately, however, parents/carers felt that pupils have to make individual choices that are right for them and were sceptical of the value of the EBacc in encouraging children down routes that might not be appropriate for them.”¹¹⁰

In 2016, a research paper by Dr Rebecca Allen and Dave Thomson noted that “in setting the EBacc as the ‘gold standard’ Key Stage 4 curriculum, we risk deprioritising the educational experiences of those for whom it is inappropriate [and] this group of pupils – whether 10% or 30% of cohort – deserve to receive a curriculum that will equip them with the right skills to

progress to further study and onto work.”¹¹¹ The following year, a report by the Education Policy Institute found that non-EBacc subjects were being downgraded in the curriculum to the point where they were sometimes taught after school or as a replacement for other crucial activities such as providing pastoral support.¹¹² The same trend was identified by the NFER in 2016. They found that all EBacc subjects except science had increased Key Stage 4 teaching time per pupil since 2010, while almost all non-EBacc subjects had seen significant reductions in teaching hours.¹¹³

Last year, the House of Lords Youth Unemployment Committee was told by numerous witnesses that the EBacc and Progress 8 “are limiting schools’ and colleges’ abilities to provide a broad and balanced curriculum”.¹¹⁴ In addition, the Committee received “overwhelming evidence that the expectation to teach eight basic academic subjects and to judge schools on this requirement has led to a significant decline in the teaching of creative and technical subjects.”¹¹⁵ As noted above, these non-academic subjects are sometimes relegated to be taught as ‘extracurricular activities’, which is particularly concerning as the Committee heard that “young people from disadvantaged backgrounds are less likely to take up extracurricular activities”.¹¹⁶

“...there was, like, an elitism around qualifications. You were seen as less if you did a BTEC over an A level, and it’s like a BTEC is equivalent to A levels so why is that seen as less just because it has a different name? But then you’d see people making jokes like, ‘All you’ll ever amount to is a BTEC’. ... I don’t think that people should be led to believe that a qualification is worth less than the other one and I think that can really hold people back from going for the thing that they actually want to do.”

Young person E

Some institutions have explicitly set out to provide a more vocational curriculum. University Technical Colleges (UTCs) offer a 14-16 curriculum made up of 60 per cent academic subjects for three days a week, plus two days of technical subjects such as engineering and computing including project-based learning. Post-16, the split is reversed to 60 per cent technical and 40 per cent academic. [EDSK’s research last year into the secondary education system in England](#) showed that the decision to allow pupils to move to UTCs and other institutions at age 14 has been a mixed blessing. In 2016, Sir Michael Wilshaw, then Chief Inspector at Ofsted, stated that “for far too long, we have let down millions of young people and allowed their talents to go to waste because we have not given the non-academic pathway into employment the priority it deserves.” He added that “the consequences of an inflexible curriculum are plain to see. We see it in the demotivated youngsters who leave school with few relevant

qualifications and an antipathy to learning. We see it in the ranks of the unskilled unemployed.” Despite his praise for the concept of UTCs, Michael Wilshaw was aware of the risk that UTCs might “become a dumping ground for the difficult or disaffected”.¹¹⁷

Although Michael Gove was not a fan of UTCs either during or after his stint as Education Secretary, he too noted the following year that “students whose poor academic prospects might hamper league table performance have been directed towards UTCs and higher-performing contemporaries have been warned off”.¹¹⁸ As a direct result of this behaviour from many nearby schools, some UTCs have struggled to recruit enough students, forcing several UTCs to close in recent years. Seeing as only three per cent of UTC leavers go on to become NEET compared to a national rate of 5 per cent, the difficulties faced by UTCs do not appear to be a good outcome for disadvantaged young people.¹¹⁹ Stricter enforcement of the ‘Baker Clause’ would therefore go some way to ensuring that young people, particularly those at risk of leaving education, are able to access a curriculum and set of qualifications that appeals to their interests and aptitudes.

4. Apprenticeships, traineeships and work experience

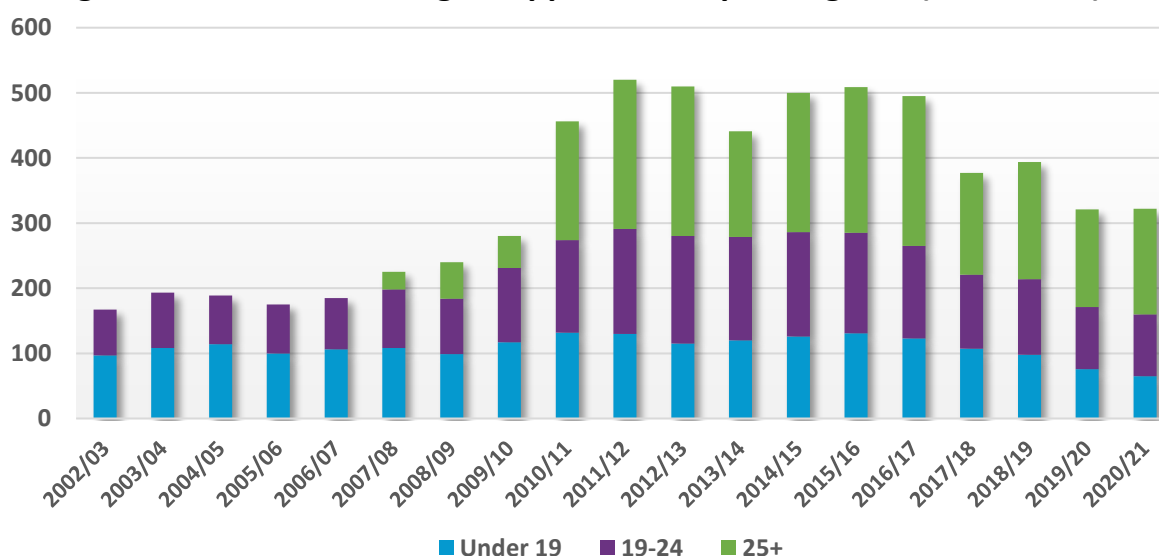
As noted by the NFER when they reviewed the curriculum needs of young people at risk of disengaging from education, the benefits of an apprenticeship are widely recognised:

- They provide access to work-related learning environments that many young people find engaging with applied learning using up to date methods and technologies
- They combine real world practice learning with formal and theoretical learning and provide opportunity to develop general skills (literacy and numeracy)
- They offer the opportunity to develop personal and social skills and employability skills like confidence, team working and using initiative
- They provide a potential route into employment¹²⁰

Apprenticeships are also associated with a positive earnings premium. Among learners educated up to Level 2 (GCSE or equivalent), those who start an apprenticeship earn 15-23 per cent more than those who left school with only GCSEs and 4-16 per cent more than those who left with a Level 2 vocational qualification. For learners educated up to Level 3 (A-level or equivalent), those who start an apprenticeship earn 9-36 per cent more than those who left education with A-levels (and did not progress any further) and 15-35 per cent more than those who left with a Level 3 vocational qualification.¹²¹

As shown in Figure 3, apprenticeships have expanded dramatically over the past decade, yet the number of 16 to 18-year-old apprentices has remained largely unchanged since 2002 and has actually fallen beneath the 2002 level during the pandemic.

Figure 3: Learners starting an apprenticeship in England (thousands) ¹²²



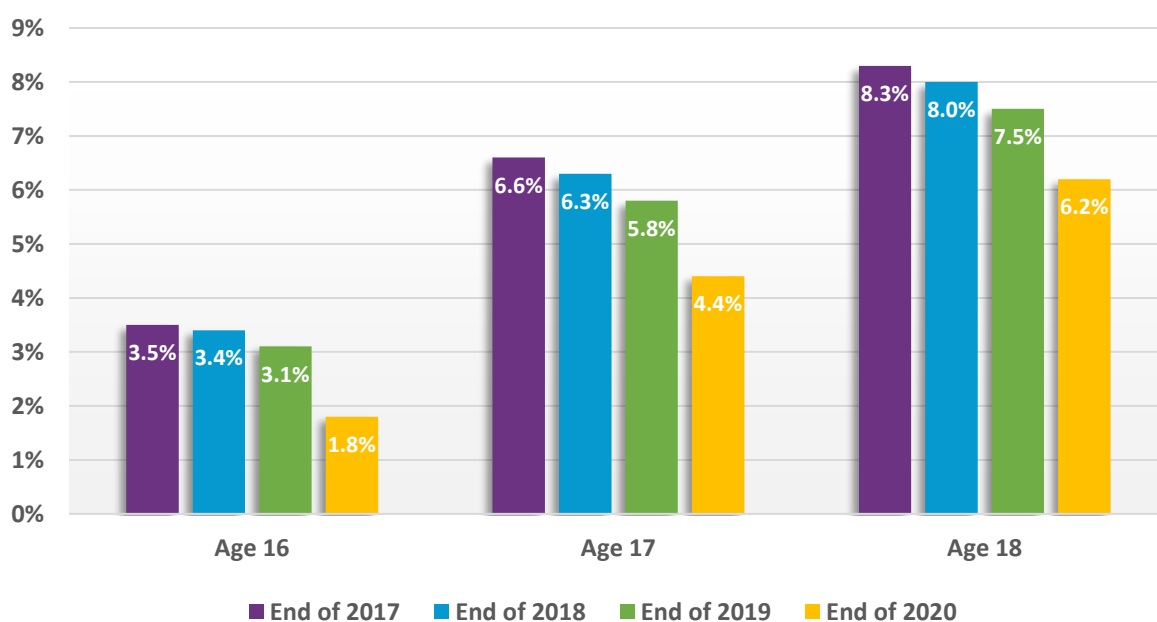
Even before the pandemic, apprenticeships had been declining among under 19s. A significant factor in this decline was the introduction of the ‘apprenticeship levy’ in 2017. EDSK,¹²³ the Youth Futures Foundation,¹²⁴ the House of Lords Youth Unemployment Committee¹²⁵ and many other stakeholders have objected to the decline in young people starting an apprenticeship in recent years. Official statistics for the 2020/21 academic year raise numerous concerns about young people’s prospects in the current apprenticeship system:

- **AGE:** 50.3 per cent of apprenticeships are now accounted for by learners aged 25 and over – up from 46.5 per cent in 2016/17. Just 20.3 per cent of apprenticeships were accounted for by learners aged 16 to 18 – down from 24.8 per cent in 2016/17.
- **LEVEL:** only 26.2 per cent of apprenticeship starts are now at Level 2 – down from 52.7 per cent in 2016/17. Meanwhile, apprenticeships at Level 4+ (which are dominated by older learners) have increased from 7.4 per cent of starts in 2016/17 to 25.6 per cent.¹²⁶

As if these headline trends were not worrying enough, 55 per cent of all ‘apprentices’ have been working for their employer for at least three months before their apprenticeship began,¹²⁷ which further emphasises the shift away from new and younger recruits and towards older and more experienced staff since the levy was introduced five years ago.

Within the 16-18 age group, there are also important distinctions. As shown in Figure 4, apprenticeships are less common among those aged 16, with a mere 3 per cent of 16-year-olds on an apprenticeship at the end of 2019 before the pandemic struck – falling to just 1.8 per cent by the end of 2020. Apprenticeship numbers steadily increase by age, with 18-year-olds being the most likely to participate.

Figure 4: The percentage of learners aged 16 to 18 on an apprenticeship ¹²⁸



Aside from the impact of the apprenticeship levy, there is some evidence to suggest that some employers are hesitant to hire young apprentices. The Employer Skills Survey (ESS) is based on over 80,000 telephone interviews with employers in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, making it one of the largest employer surveys in the world.¹²⁹ The pre-pandemic 2019 ESS survey showed that, of the organisations which had recruited 16-year-olds for their first job from school in the last 2-3 years, 38 per cent felt these young people were ‘poorly prepared’ or ‘very poorly prepared’ for work. 17 to 18-year-olds were viewed slightly more favourably by employers, with only 29 per cent reporting that they were ‘poorly’ or ‘very poorly prepared’.¹³⁰ The skills that were most frequently absent among young employees were (in order of most cited):

- *‘lack of working world / life experience or maturity (including general knowledge)’;*
- *‘poor attitude / personality or lack of motivation e.g. poor work ethic, punctuality, appearance’;*
- *‘lack required soft/personal skills or competencies e.g. problem solving, communication or team’;*
- *‘lack of common sense’;*
- *‘lack required technical skills or competencies e.g. technical or job specific skills’*¹³¹

The Wolf Review in 2011 had suggested that employers see 16 and 17-year-olds who are looking for employment as “likely to be low achieving, or below average in terms of personal qualities such as application and perseverance”.¹³² Professor Wolf argued that this perception is due to the growing number of young people who remain in full time education – meaning that those who choose not to stay in school or college are perceived as ‘low quality’.

‘Young Apprenticeships’

“I feel like studying a vocational course really changed my life in an amazing way and helped me to focus on my interests. I wish that it had been promoted more to me at younger ages”

Young person G

Although the findings of the ESS and the Wolf Review may seem persuasive, one should not be surprised if young people lack the skills needed to succeed in the workplace when our education and training system gives them minimal exposure (if any) to the workplace before age 16. One scheme that tried to address this deficiency was the ‘Young Apprenticeships’ (YA)

programme for 14 to 16-year-olds, which was set up in 2004 and offered at least 50 days of workplace experience over two years (typically two days per week) alongside a Level 2 vocational qualification in the relevant industry sector.¹³³ The YA programme was intended to ease the transition to apprenticeships at age 16 as well as create an alternative to classroom-based qualifications that would engage young people who were uninterested in classroom learning. That said, the programme was only available to pupils who met minimum levels of attendance and academic attainment. The number of pupils enrolled on YA quickly rose from 1,000 to 9,000 by 2007,¹³⁴ thus undermining the stereotype that only 'low achievers' are disinterested in classroom-based education. When Ofsted evaluated the YA programme in 2008, they were full of praise for what it had achieved:

- *"[It] continues to provide a successful alternative to traditional routes through Key Stage 4 for average and above average ability students."*
- *"From the beginning a strong characteristic of the programme has been the students' good personal development. In almost all the partnerships throughout the three years of inspection, students have been enthusiastic, well motivated and well behaved."*
- *"In all but two partnerships in 2006/07 there was no underachievement and all students were on track to achieve level 2 qualifications"*
- *"Attendance was good in all partnerships and behaviour never less than satisfactory"*
- *"Students spoke highly of the provision which they enjoyed a great deal.... Treated more like adults, took pride in their work and went on work placements"*
- *"In all but one partnership students took advantage of opportunities for independent learning... and teachers noted that young apprentices took more responsibility for their own learning than their peers in school did"¹³⁵*

Employers were equally impressed, and felt that the YA programme benefited students because they:

- saw relevance in their school studies to the world of work
- sampled various aspects of the industry before committing themselves to it
- understood the progression routes post-16 leading to a career in the vocational area
- gained experience and training in real working environments
- developed an understanding of how the industry works
- gained a detailed insight into the high levels of technical skills required in some vocational areas
- developed skills and attributes which made them more employable, including a willingness to learn, interpersonal skills through working with adults in the workplace, communication skills, teamworking, good timekeeping and attendance.¹³⁶

Many of these benefits were seen by employers as beneficial to them as well as the students, with some YA participants receiving job offers after their placement. Inevitably, the YA programme still had some weaknesses in its early stages. Not all of the YA partnerships were setting challenging targets for students, while some timetabling and recruitment procedures (e.g. offering visits to local colleges that provided the courses) had run into difficulties, but Ofsted said that these problems were being resolved.

An official evaluation of the YA programme in 2010 found that 95 per cent of young people who completed it progressed into further education/training and 19 per cent had progressed into an apprenticeship at age 16. Young people who completed the programme in hairdressing, motor industry and engineering were more likely to have chosen an apprenticeship post-16. Interestingly, “those with lower levels of prior attainment among YA participants appeared to gain even more at [Key Stage 4] relative to those with similar levels of attainment who did not participate”.¹³⁷

Despite this positive picture, the Wolf Review dismissed its value on the basis that “there should be no substantial degree of specialisation before the end of KS4.”¹³⁸ The Review also asserted that the YA programme “had a significant negative impact on the likelihood of a YA passing maths and English GCSE at A*-C.”¹³⁹ Bizarrely, the footnote accompanying this finding accepted that:

*“Several engineering employers submitted evidence to the Review noting their positive experiences with YA placements, and that they had selected a number of Advanced Apprentices from the previous year’s YA cohort. While this was clearly very helpful to the companies and young people concerned, it does not, in my view, alter the balance of the evidence.”*¹⁴⁰

Such comments from employers are unsurprising given the aforementioned evidence of the benefits of the YA programme to both young people and employers, yet the Wolf Review was unmoved. The impact of YA on English and maths attainment is also debatable. The official evaluation found that a ‘typical’ YA learner had a 28 per cent probability of achieving five GCSEs (or equivalent) including English and mathematics at grades A* to C versus 32 per cent among similar learners nationally. However, this gap shrunk to just two percentage points when those participants who failed to complete the YA programme were excluded.¹⁴¹ The evaluation also pointed out that some YA participants had difficulty coping with their workload during the programme as a result of spending two days a week out of school,¹⁴² which may have affected their performance in English and maths. In addition, the evaluation reported that the gap in attainment between YA participants and non-participants had shrunk dramatically since the early days of the YA programme, which raises the possibility that the

gap would have disappeared altogether if the Coalition Government had not closed the programme shortly after the 2010 election.

Ironically, the Conservative Party's 2010 election manifesto had just committed them to "create 20,000 additional Young Apprenticeships",¹⁴³ presumably in response to the powerful evidence of the programme's impact. Nevertheless, it was decided that in the context of the spending cuts enacted by the Coalition Government, "the high cost of the [YA] programme could not be maintained" and "it was also felt that that the programme would need to be significantly re-designed to fit with the English Baccalaureate and the recommendations of Professor Alison Wolf's Review of Vocational Education."¹⁴⁴ As previous chapters have described, the assumption that both the EBacc and the Wolf Review set out the best direction of travel is debatable, to say the least.

The costs involved in the YA programme are indeed notable. That said, given the glowing reviews from pupils and employers, it is entirely counterintuitive to suggest that a YA-style scheme has no role to play in reducing the number of young people who end up NEET, particularly when the YA programme helped so many learners into further education and apprenticeships. Furthermore, the substantial gains made by learners in relation to interpersonal skills, communication and teamwork are vital to understanding the value of YA, seeing as employers frequently cite the lack of these skills as a reason not to offer job opportunities to young people. What's more, a study last year by the IES found that young people who are not in education or employment rated apprenticeships as the best form of support that could help them access good quality work, with 86 per cent agreeing an apprenticeship would help 'a lot' or 'a little'.¹⁴⁵ In short, apprenticeships could and should be a central part of the conversation about preventing young people from ending up NEET.

Traineeships and work experience

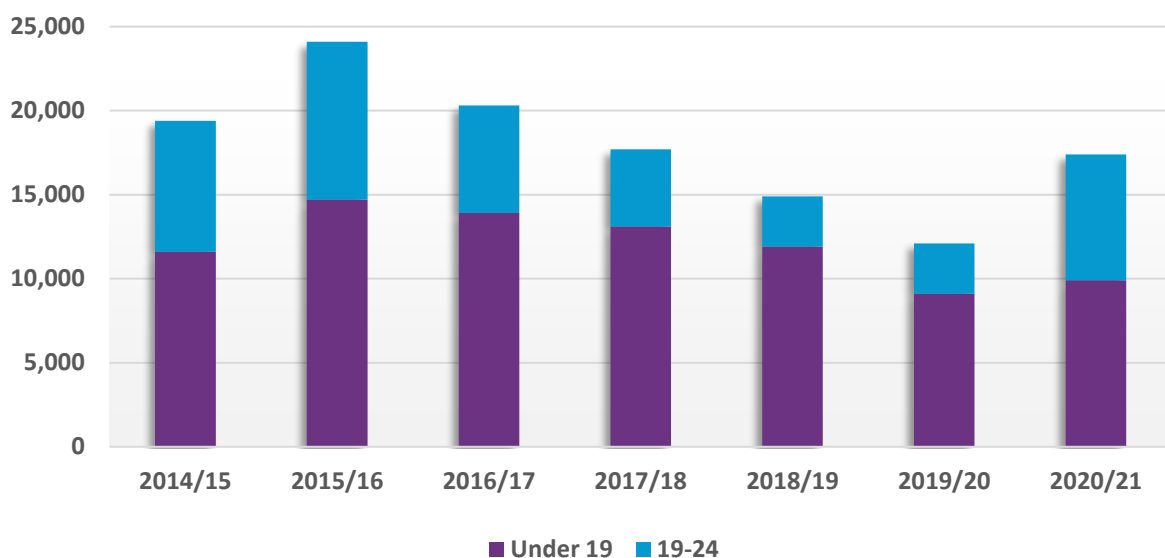
Although they do not have the same profile and recognition as apprenticeships, traineeships are another programme available to those aged 16 to 24 (or 25 with an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP)). A traineeship lasts anywhere from six weeks to a maximum of one year (most last less than 6 months), with the content tailored to a learner's needs, including:

- A meaningful work experience placement of at least 70 hours with a local employer
- Work preparation training with a training provider to learn skills required in the workplace, build confidence and offer support with CVs and interviews
- English, maths and digital skills support

Traineeships are aimed at young people who are not currently in employment, have little or no work experience, are motivated to work and are qualified up to Level 3 (e.g. A-levels or equivalents such as BTECs). Traineeships are free for young people but they do not offer a wage because it is a ‘skills development programme’ rather than a form of employment. Even so, trainees may be eligible for support with education-related costs (e.g. 16-19 Bursary Fund) and employers are encouraged to cover expenses e.g. transport and meals. If a learner is receiving benefits such as Universal Credit, these should also continue whilst they are completing their traineeship.

As shown in Figure 5, traineeships have struggled to gain traction since they were introduced in 2014, although the pandemic seems to have given traineeships a more prominent role.

Figure 5: The number of learners starting a traineeship in England ¹⁴⁶



Despite struggling to expand rapidly since their launch, traineeships deliver impressive results. An official evaluation in 2019 found that around 75 per cent of trainees had started in a positive destination (further education, apprenticeship or employment) within 12 months of starting a traineeship, with younger learners more likely to end up in further education or an apprenticeship while older learners were more likely to move into further education (although neither age group was more likely to end up in employment).¹⁴⁷ These figures are all the more laudable when one considers that, compared to other learners, trainees were 22 percentage points more likely to have SEN, had a poorer school attendance record and had experienced more exclusions.¹⁴⁸ Almost half the trainees also had no GCSE passes at A*-C (compared to 18 per cent among non-trainees) and they were about twice as likely to have been below the expected level of attainment in English and maths at age 11 and 14.¹⁴⁹

Moreover, an earlier survey had found that 82 per cent of trainees were satisfied with their experience of a traineeship, 92 per cent would recommend traineeships to other people and 83 per cent felt it had improved their chances in future job applications.¹⁵⁰ A survey by the IES last year added that 79 per cent of young people who were not in education or employment thought that traineeships could help them access good quality work.¹⁵¹ In light of these positive findings, the Government has recently introduced ‘occupational traineeships’ that aim to support progression into a specific apprenticeship or occupation by aligning the content of the traineeship with the relevant occupational standard.¹⁵² Examples of occupational traineeships include rail engineering, adult care and bricklaying, all of which are linked to their respective apprenticeships. An evaluation of several early pilots of occupational traineeships indicate that they have a higher overall completion rate than traineeships as a whole and lead to higher levels of progression into employment than general traineeships.¹⁵³

Traineeships are by no means the first attempt to offer extended work experience to young people, especially those from less privileged backgrounds. In the early 2000’s, ‘Student Apprenticeships’ (SA) offered work placements to 14 to 18-year-olds in Walsall, Birmingham and Bristol. SAs were created to introduce Sixth Form and college students to the world of work through structured work placements to help them gain vocational skills in the workplace on a weekly basis, with an expectation that the students would ideally progress into an apprenticeship afterwards.¹⁵⁴ Unlike Young Apprenticeships, which was aimed at middle and high achievers, SAs for 14 to 16-year-olds were used to try to re-engage disaffected or under-motivated pupils, hence the focus on selecting pupils who were underachieving, truanting or at risk of exclusion to participate on the course. Typically, students spent two days a week in school, two days in college and one day a week in a work environment.¹⁵⁵

Yet again, the impact of extended work placements on younger learners was clearly apparent:

*“The Student Apprenticeship was viewed as a ‘good foundation’ by employers and training providers in preparation for [an apprenticeship]. The majority of Student Apprentices in the pre-16 cohort had low or no academic qualifications, and had largely disengaged with the school as a learning environment. The initiative prepared these young people for vocational learning in a work based context, through practical skills acquisition and training in employment issues such as health and safety. This approach was very successful both in re-engaging the young person with the learning process and in preparing them for successful study [as an apprentice]”.*¹⁵⁶

The same evaluation reported the following outcomes:

- *“The vast majority of training providers, schools and colleges, and young people involved in the initiative believed that there are real benefits to be derived from developing the initiative with the pre-16 group”*
- *“Young people ...were positive about the experiences they had gained as an apprentice, commonly referring to it increasing their knowledge of the workplace and the type of careers available to them. ...Many had previously low career aspirations and the initiative provided information on the level of qualifications they would require to enter their chosen career path. Employers and training providers referred to a marked improvement in the attitude of disapplying pupils”*
- *“A key benefit ...was to help under-achieving pupils with low motivation, to develop a sense of direction to help steer their transition from school into a trade or a career they were interested in. ...Teachers and young people frequently referred to the importance of the Student Apprenticeship in acting as a ‘bridge’ between school and the workplace.”¹⁵⁷*

The SA programme encountered some logistical challenges, such as gauging the appropriate level of employer involvement, the motivation of schools to participate and support students during their placement, health and safety issues and getting a good match between the student and the right employer / sector.¹⁵⁸ Nonetheless, the evaluation concluded that “the Student Apprenticeship can provide a seamless transition into [an apprenticeship], particularly for vulnerable groups.”¹⁵⁹ Just like Young Apprenticeships, though, the SA programme was never allowed to reach its full potential.

The loss of workplace exposure for younger learners has not gone unnoticed. The recent House of Lords report on tackling youth unemployment highlighted the detrimental impact of 14 to 16-year-olds losing their guarantee of work experience following a change in the law in 2012, particularly when the Gatsby Benchmarks discussed earlier in this report state that young people should have at least one experience of the workplace (additional to any part time work) by age 16 and another by 18. The Benchmarks also assert that “every year, from the age of 11, pupils should participate in at least one meaningful encounter with an employer” to help them learn about what work is like and what it takes to be successful in the workplace.¹⁶⁰ What’s more, the House of Lords report noted that other countries are much more proactive in this space. For example, the Federal Employment Agency in Germany works with employers and schools to list current vacancies and match students with opportunities, while local branches organise work placements for young people in Years 9 and 10.¹⁶¹

Previous studies have highlighted the importance of work experience to young people, with one report from the Education and Employers Taskforce pointing out that “work experience is under-utilised as a means to stretch the career horizons of young people” and “high proportions of both pupils and teaching staff believe that young people return from work experience more motivated to do well at school.” Not only do “young people strongly believe that work experience helps develop their employability”, but it was also observed that “lower attaining pupils can gain much from the different learning environment presented by extended work experience”. The report also noted that “work experience undertaken closer to ultimate labour market entry (age 16-18) optimises opportunities for jobs to be secured, but is too late to inform important decisions about post-16 educational and training choices”.¹⁶² This highlights the importance of using the earlier years of secondary education to prepare young people for the next step in their education and training journey rather than simply assuming that everything will fall into place after they reach age 16.

5. Financial incentives for young people and employers

Incentives for young people

“From my experiences, coming from a low income background... my finances affected me a lot.”

Young person E

Financial incentives given directly to students are typically designed to alleviate some of the costs associated with education and training such as travel, clothing (for work or interviews), books and resources. The Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA) was available for 16 to 19-year-olds from low-income households in post-compulsory education. The EMA was first piloted in 1999 and later rolled out nationally in 2004.¹⁶³ The allowance sought to improve attendance and attainment, with eligible students entitled to weekly payments of up to £30 that were conditional on reaching the targets specified within a ‘learning agreement’ between the student and their school / college. There were also ‘bonuses’ available for those who surpassed their targets. By 2010, the Government was spending £580 million a year on the 643,000 students receiving EMA: approximately 80 per cent were entitled to £30 per week, 10 per cent were entitled to £20 per week and 10 per cent were entitled to £10 per week.¹⁶⁴

An evaluation of the EMA pilots published in 2005 found that the programme was effective in improving student participation and attainment:

- Young people seemed to have been drawn into education who would have otherwise entered work or training (-3.4 percentage points) or the NEET group (-2.4);
- EMA increased the proportion of eligible young people who were in full-time education at age 16 and 17 by 6.1 percentage points;
- 10.9 percentage points more ‘moderate achievers’ at the end of Year 11 and 8.8 percentage points more ‘low achievers’ were in education at both 16 and 17 relative to the control group who did not receive EMA;
- There was an improvement in attainment for ‘low’ and ‘moderate’ achievers receiving EMA of around 3.5-5 per cent relative to the control group.
- EMA had a disproportionate positive impact on the destinations of specific target groups who tended to be under-represented in post-16 education; namely, young people from lower income families and young men¹⁶⁵

A subsequent evaluation in 2007, using data from the pilot scheme and its later extension, found similarly positive impacts:

- Participation rates for females in areas where EMA was available increased by just over 2 per cent when compared to female participation in control areas. Effects on male participation rates were also positive but slightly smaller.
- Participation effects seemed to be greatest for those from deprived areas, but not *the* most deprived areas, as well as on females who received free school meals (FSM).
- Average performance in Level 2 and 3 qualifications increasing by around 2.5 per cent for females and just under 2 per cent in males in areas where EMA was available. Average Key Stage 5 grades saw an even greater increase of around 5 per cent for females and 4 per cent for males.
- Positive impacts on attainment were concentrated amongst black and Asian students, and impacts were greatest for females from most deprived areas.

Alongside these apparent improvements there was still a particularly hard-to-reach demographic, with a persistent lack of responsiveness to EMA found among male students, particularly black males and those from the most deprived areas.¹⁶⁶

Despite the recorded impact of EMA, the Coalition Government announced that the academic year 2010/2011 would be the final year of the programme in England. This was justified on the basis that when recipients had been asked in a separate study what impact *not* receiving EMA would have had on their educational choices, 45 per cent said there would be no impact and 42 per cent said they would have done the same course but would have needed to earn more money. The remaining respondents said they would have gone into work-based learning instead or would not have stayed on at all.¹⁶⁷ Another evaluation found that only 12 per cent of young people receiving EMA believed they would not have participated in their course without the incentive¹⁶⁸ – representing a ‘deadweight cost’ of 88 per cent.

Although these findings may appear stark, they can be interpreted in different ways. Research by the Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS) on the impact of EMA had findings consistent with the Government’s position, although the IFS argued that the benefits of EMA in terms of higher wages completely offset the costs. The IFS added that many public policies have a high deadweight cost and that EMA could have other benefits such as improving attendance or allowing students to spend more time studying and less time on part-time work.¹⁶⁹

High deadweight costs are certainly not unique to EMA. Furthermore, the NFER found that access to EMA was viewed by many professionals as an important enabler for young people, although it was deemed ‘not enough incentive alone’. Even so, just under a quarter of

professionals reported knowing young people who had not continued into further education because they had not received EMA.¹⁷⁰

“I went to ...an agricultural college. ...it was quite far away and that meant the bus costs were like £800 per year which was absolutely crazy. And it meant, like, a lot of people really struggled ... students had to work a lot to be able to afford to actually be able to go there and do a course ...It was really difficult because vocational courses that people really were passionate about and really wanted to do, like Level 3 BTECs and stuff, and it meant that they either couldn’t go there or they had to ...work quite a lot”

Young person G

Regardless, the Government scrapped the EMA and replaced it in 2011 with the ‘16-19 Bursary Fund’, which provides targeted funding to help young people aged 16 to 19 with the costs of staying on in education and training. There are two types of support: bursaries of up to £1,200 a year for vulnerable groups e.g. care leavers, recipients of Disability Living Allowance (covering 22,000 students in 2020/21 at a cost of £21.3 million¹⁷¹) and discretionary bursaries that institutions award in line with their own policies (£130.1 million in 2020/21¹⁷²). Although the desire to target the support at those students who need it the most is entirely understandable, the total support to students from the 16-19 Bursary Fund is still only a quarter of that available when EMA was in operation.

Financial incentives for employers

Incentives offered to employers generally seek to stimulate demand for young employees, apprentices or trainees through subsidised jobs or reducing the cost of recruitment and training young people. The goal is therefore to open progression routes and job opportunities as well as remove a key barrier for young people entering the labour market: a lack of work experience.

However, research by the IES in 2016 showed that 76 per cent of employers do not target their apprenticeship and training opportunities at disadvantaged young people, with micro enterprises and sole traders the least likely to do so, although 42 per cent of employers showed enthusiasm to work more with disadvantaged groups. Moreover, 15 per cent reported that financial costs made it difficult to employ a disadvantaged young person, and these costs were the single biggest barrier to offering more apprenticeships to disadvantaged young people among small businesses.¹⁷³ This led the researchers to propose that “greater support [from the apprenticeship levy] with the costs of training an apprentice may help these companies to

increase the opportunities they offer". Training providers added that even where disadvantaged young people can access training opportunities, their continued engagement is not guaranteed as it is harder and more resource intensive to prepare them for work while also ensuring a good match between the employer and young person and put the appropriate support is in place.¹⁷⁴

Financial incentives for employers to recruit young people have rapidly expanded in response to the pandemic. In the Government's *Plan for Jobs 2020*, they announced that there would be a new payment for employers who hired new apprentices: £2,000 for each new apprentice under 25 and £1,500 for each new apprentice over 25 (in addition to the £1,000 already offered for recruiting 16 to 18-year-old apprentices and those aged under 25 with an EHCP).¹⁷⁵ These new incentives were subsequently extended until January 2022,¹⁷⁶ and were raised to £3,000 per hire from April 2021 regardless of the apprentice's age.¹⁷⁷ At the time of writing, a total of 172,850 incentive payments have been made to employers since August 2020, with 78 per cent of payments going to employers recruiting a 16 to 24-year-old.¹⁷⁸

Although some of these bursaries may look sizeable, England has tended to offer far less support to employers than other countries when it comes to recruiting apprentices. For example, in Austria companies have received government grants for each apprentice since 2008 equivalent to as much as three times an apprentice's gross wages. In France, organisations employing apprentices for at least one month can benefit from a tax credit of €1,600 per apprentice per year. In the Netherlands, a subsidy for employers was introduced in 2014 of up to €2,700 per apprentice per year.¹⁷⁹

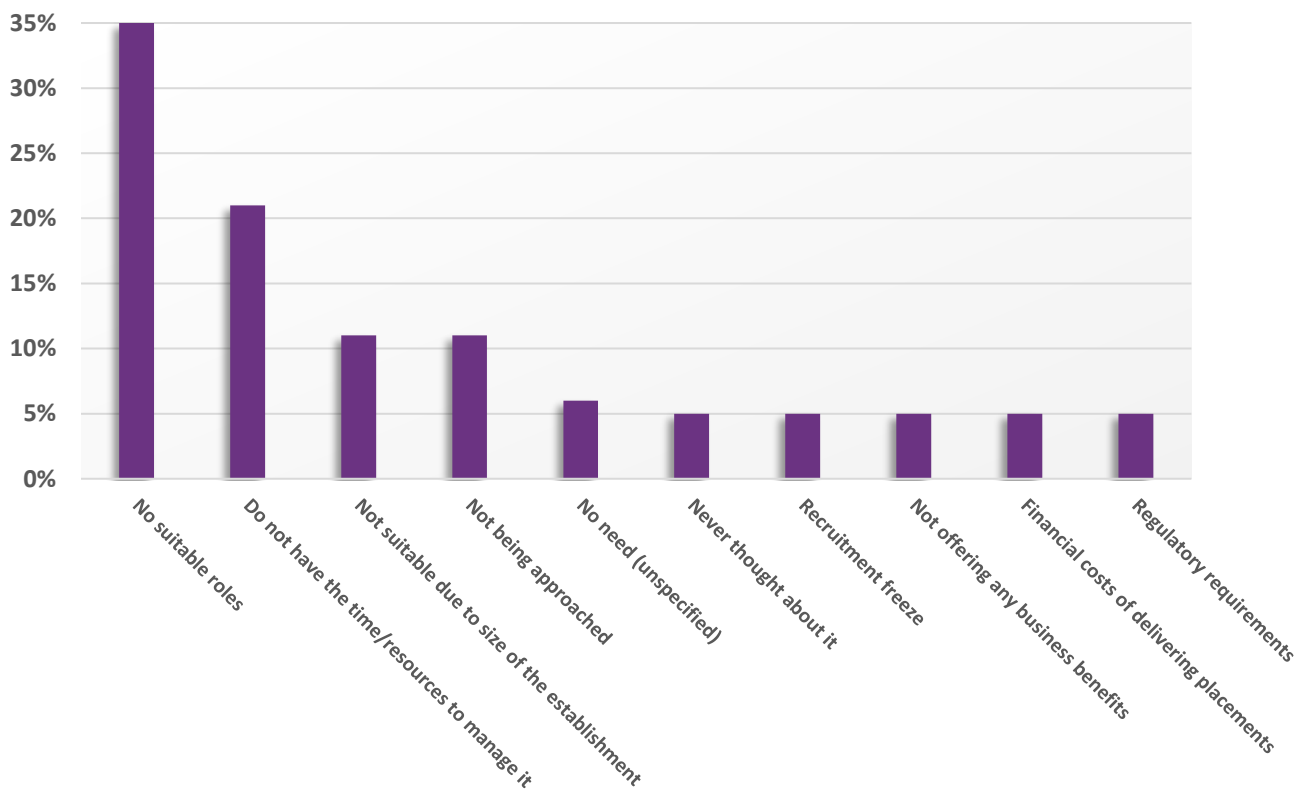
Before the pandemic emerged, other incentives were available as well. Employers with fewer than 50 staff who train apprentices aged 16-18 (or aged 19-24 with an EHC plan or who had previously been in care) are not required to contribute the 5 per cent 'co-investment' towards their training costs, as the Government pays 100 per cent of the costs instead.¹⁸⁰ Moreover, there is a £1,000 bursary available for apprentices aged 16-24 who have previously been in care to help ensure they are able to access apprenticeships. Training providers also receive the same £1,000 payment as employers for supporting apprentices aged 16-18 or those aged 19-24 who are a care leaver or have an EHC plan.¹⁸¹

Another pandemic-related measure is a £1,000 bonus to employers for hosting a traineeship work placement from September 2020 to July 2022, up to a maximum of 10 learners. By the end of January 2022, 3,226 bonuses had been paid out by the DfE.¹⁸² In addition, employers were offered a £1,000 grant for every T-Level student hosted on a high-quality industry placement between May 2021 and July 2022.¹⁸³ However, the government-commissioned review of technical education led by Lord Sainsbury (published in 2016) insisted that "widespread, locally-brokered expansion of work placements will only be delivered if

colleges and employers know that facilitating funding will continue in the long-term". On that basis, the review recommended that £500 per T-level work placement would be required in future¹⁸⁴ (although the DfE only provided £250 as part of their work placement pilots in advance of T-levels being rolled out in 2020¹⁸⁵). Thus, even before T-levels and the pandemic existed, it was widely recognised that employers would need financial support to generate enough work placements for young people.

Figure 6 shows the top ten reasons that employers did not offer placements, internships and work experience to younger learners according to the 2019 Employer Skills Survey. The most frequently cited reason was a lack of suitable roles for young people (35 per cent of employers). While 'financial costs' was only cited by 5 per cent of employers, more than 20 per cent reported concerns about 'a lack of time / resources' – presumably in relation to staffing and management. This suggests that some form of financial support could encourage companies to increase the volume of opportunities that they offer young people.

Figure 6: Reasons that employers do not offer placements, internships and work experience ¹⁸⁶



Recent research on T Levels commissioned by the DfE echoed these concerns from employers about a lack of capacity to support work placements. The main challenge was the supervision and training necessary to manage industry placements. Many employers reported that they were already “reaching a ‘saturation point’, where taking on more learners would require a level of staff time beyond that which they could reasonably spare” including “additional time for the upfront administrative requirements as well as quality checking and oversight to avoid costly mistakes”.¹⁸⁷ Among employers who were not currently offering placements “there was a reluctance to divert resources away from employees’ usual work in order to train and supervise a young learner”. This was mostly driven by “a perceived inability to offer any ‘meaningful opportunities’, i.e. beyond basic or administrative tasks, without diverting significant resources to training and supervision.”¹⁸⁸ Furthermore, the research found that “some employers considered that the nature of their work or the learning environment made it either inappropriate or legally impossible to support young people”.¹⁸⁹

Well before the pandemic, ‘wage incentive payments’ of up to £2,275 were available to employers from 2012 to 2015 when they recruited an unemployed 18 to 24-year-old from the DWP’s ‘Work Programme’.¹⁹⁰ An evaluation of the wage incentives, based on a quantitative survey of 376 employers, found that the majority of claimants were small employers (76 per cent had fewer than 50 employees) and a large proportion were in service industries (63 per cent) such as retail, accommodation and food services.¹⁹¹ The main reasons employers gave for taking up the incentives were to get financial support (40 per cent), to give young people a chance (24 per cent) and as an incentive to recruit (23 per cent).¹⁹²

55 per cent of employers reported that the incentive had influenced their behaviour in some way (slightly more so among small employers). 60 per cent said they would still have taken up the incentive if the amount was lower, while 32 per cent said they would not have done so. Furthermore, 19 per cent of employers said that they created an extra vacancy because of the wage incentive, and 34 per cent said that the incentive made them more likely to keep the employee on for at least six months.¹⁹³ Overall, the wage incentive appears to have had some limited success, with smaller employers appearing to benefit more than larger employers.

Another example of a financial incentive is the ‘Apprenticeship Grant for Employers’ (AGE 16 to 24) programme that had a budget of £60 million. Introduced in 2012, it aimed to encourage employers to take on up to three young apprentices by providing a £1,500 grant per apprentice. The grant was originally available for up to 40,000 organisations with fewer than 250 employees that were new to apprenticeships (defined as having never had an apprentice nor taking on an apprentice in the last three years). The eligibility criteria were later widened to include employers with up to 1,000 employees and those who had not taken on an apprentice within the last year, while the maximum number of apprentices was also increased to ten.¹⁹⁴

An evaluation in 2013 found that the government officials responsible for the AGE believed it was ‘a valuable contribution’ to tackling youth unemployment.¹⁹⁵ Officials also thought £1,500 was “about right: sufficient to trigger employer engagement but not so high as to incentivise employers who have only low intrinsic interest in Apprenticeship into the programme”.¹⁹⁶ Meanwhile, the employers who took on apprentices were generally positive about taking on further apprentices in future, but only 10 per cent said that the availability of the grant would have no significance to their future decisions.¹⁹⁷ Only 22 per cent of employers said the grant had made no difference to their decision to recruit an apprentice – meaning that the AGE effectively had a ‘deadweight cost’ of 22 per cent.¹⁹⁸ Overall, it was concluded that “even allowing for some deadweight in the programme, the benefits arising from AGE 16 to 24-supported Apprenticeships substantially surpass the costs.”¹⁹⁹

A later analysis suggested that the AGE programme was not a resounding success. Research by the Centre for Vocational Education and Research (CVER) found that any added value of the national scheme was small at best.²⁰⁰ It also noted that giving some local authorities flexibility in how the scheme operated made “no measurable difference to the number of apprenticeship starts in devolved areas.”²⁰¹ The authors suggested that “more effort should have been made to make the system more generous for [very small] firms, rather than expanding subsidies to larger firms where take up had been poor in the national scheme.”²⁰² This suggests that, as with the Youth Contract wage incentives, a well-designed financial incentive can help some groups of employers overcome their barriers to recruiting young people, particularly those from less advantaged backgrounds.

6. Academic and pastoral support

As discussed in the introduction, low educational attainment has been identified in the research literature as a 'predictive factor' in a young person becoming NEET, with numerous studies highlighting the close association between attainment and NEET status:

- Research by the DfE that followed a cohort from the end of Key Stage 4 in 2010/11 for three years found that those without any A*-C grades in their GCSEs were the most over-represented group in the NEET population. They accounted for two-thirds of those who were NEET but only 19 per cent of the cohort as a whole.²⁰³
- A report by Impetus showed that young people with low qualifications are twice as likely to be NEET compared to those with five GCSEs (29 per cent vs 15 per cent), with the highest-qualified young people experiencing the lowest NEET rates (8 per cent).²⁰⁴
- The CVER found that NEET rates are typically three to four times higher for those with qualifications below GCSE level (30 per cent) compared to young people with A-Levels or equivalent vocational qualifications (7 per cent).²⁰⁵

General educational attainment appears to influence the probability of a young person ending up NEET, but literacy and numeracy qualifications seem particularly important. Young people with English and maths GCSEs are 16 per cent less likely to be NEET for six months and 9 per cent less likely to be NEET for 12 months compared to those young people with any five GCSEs.²⁰⁶ Research by the DfE has also noted that those who do not achieve the expected standard of literacy and numeracy at the end of primary school were 32 percentage points more likely to become NEET at age 18.²⁰⁷

The implications of low educational attainment can be profound. Poor attainment can restrict young people's options available post-16, and acts as a barrier to getting into further education, employment or training.²⁰⁸ Interviews with young people who became NEET found that many of them believed their poor educational qualifications, especially not passing English and maths, were a key reason for the difficulties they faced, with interviewees saying "no one wants to employ me because I don't have maths" and "...I ain't got no qualifications and no shot at work."²⁰⁹ Furthermore, the 2021 'Employer and Skills survey' by the CBI found that literacy and numeracy skills were identified by 51 per cent of employers as one of the top three most important factors in recruiting school / college leavers.²¹⁰

The role of tutoring programmes

One intervention for poor educational attainment is tutoring. This can be done on a one-to-one basis with a teacher / teaching assistant or other suitable adult providing intensive individual support, or in a small group where the tutor works with around two to five pupils. Short regular sessions between three to five times a week over a set period (up to ten weeks) appear to create the optimum impact.²¹¹²¹² Studies comparing the two approaches have shown mixed results, with one-to-one tuition leading to greater improvement in some cases, while in others small group tuition has been equally or even more effective. It has been concluded that the variability of these findings may suggest that it is a particular type or quality of teaching enabled by very small groups that is important, rather than the precise size of the group itself.²¹³ Overall, they are both regarded as effective approaches, with one-to-one tuition having a ‘high impact’ at ‘moderate cost’,²¹⁴ while small group tuition has a ‘moderate impact’ for ‘low cost’.²¹⁵

Given the evidence of the impact of tutoring, it is not surprising that the Government has recently invested in a ‘National Tutoring Programme’ (NTP) in response to the disruption caused by the pandemic. The NTP began in November 2020 across state-maintained primary and secondary schools in England, allowing them access to high-quality subsidised tutoring provision for pupils aged 5 to 16 through various channels:²¹⁶

- **Tuition partners:** schools have access to subsidised tutoring from an approved list of tutoring providers (‘partners’), who have passed a set of quality, safeguarding and evaluation standards. They offer a range of subjects and provide targeted support for pupils in small group or one-to-one sessions.
- **Academic mentors:** these mentors are graduates or teachers who undergo intensive training before becoming salaried members of staff. They work alongside teachers to provide a range of interventions, focusing on small group and one-to-one tuition, and provide tailored support including subject-specific work and revision lessons.
- **School-led tutoring:** this was introduced for the academic year 2021/22 to fund schools that want to use locally-sourced tutoring provision for disadvantaged pupils, which could include using existing staff such as teachers/teaching assistants or external tutoring resources such as private tutors or returning teachers.

Despite its strong evidence base, the NTP has been repeatedly criticised for its limited impact so far. In 2021, the multinational HR firm Randstad was awarded the £25 million contract to deliver the Tuition Partners and Academic Mentors schemes.²¹⁷ By January this year, Randstad was already 85 per cent off meeting its target of two million courses of 15 hours tutoring in this academic year.²¹⁸ Figures from March 2022 revealed that only 14 per cent of

schools have used the Tuition Partners pillar and 5 per cent have taken part in the Academic Mentors route,²¹⁹ with the vast majority of schools (76 per cent) opting for the school-led route to secure their own tutoring provision.²²⁰

The NTP has also faced challenges reaching the most disadvantaged pupils. Then Schools Minister Nick Gibb told the Education Select Committee in Parliament last year that just 44 per cent of those receiving tuition from the NTP in the academic year 2020/21 were from disadvantaged families and eligible for additional ‘Pupil Premium’ funding, leading the Committee to say that the NTP should be better targeted at the most disadvantaged pupils.²²¹ For the current academic year, Randstad was set a target of 65 per cent of children receiving tuition being from a disadvantaged (low income) household, although this target was jettisoned in March to, according to Randstad, “remove complexities”.²²²

Despite a difficult beginning, Education Secretary Nadhim Zahawi said in February 2022 that tutoring may become a permanent part of state schooling, as he urged head teachers to enrol their pupils in the NTP.²²³ Just days after Mr Zahawi’s call, a survey of over 1,000 headteachers by the National Association of Head Teachers found that nearly two-thirds of school leaders say they lack confidence in the NTP or are unsure about its ability to deliver positive impacts for their pupils over the long term, with just a quarter of respondents saying they ‘definitely’ planned to continue using the programme beyond this academic year.²²⁴ Of the respondents who were undecided about whether they would continue to use the NTP, nearly half – 48 per cent – said that this was because of the bureaucracy of the programme.²²⁵

It was announced in March this year that Randstad would no longer be contracted to deliver the NTP. From September 2022, all £349 million of tutoring funding would go directly to schools for them to decide how to spend it.²²⁶ While the two tutoring routes currently organised by Randstad (Tuition Partners and Academic Mentors) will continue to be available, it will be up to schools to arrange them directly. The DfE is launching a procurement process for a new designated supplier to run the NTP on a much smaller contract, as the new supplier will only be responsible for quality assurance, recruiting and deploying academic mentors and offering training.²²⁷

GCSE English and maths resits

Since 2015, it has been a funding requirement for schools and colleges that students who did not pass their GCSE in either subject must continue studying them post-16.²²⁸ This policy has proved controversial from the outset, with Ofsted arguing in 2018 that “the impact of repeated ‘failure’ on students should not be underestimated”²²⁹ – particularly in relation to their confidence and self-esteem. Analysis by Cambridge Assessment also flagged the potential for

the policy to create resentment and demotivate students, finding that they tend to be disaffected by prior learning experiences, more likely to see this compulsory study as a result of their ‘failure’, hold negative beliefs about their ability and demonstrate an unwillingness to engage.²³⁰ The Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL) have previously said that “too many young people are no nearer to the coveted grade 4 at the end of this demoralising process.”²³¹

“...people kind of make you feel like, you should have done this when you were younger. You’re here because you weren’t good enough when you were younger, and that’s not going to help people you know, feel confident”

Young person E

The resit pass rates before the pandemic were indeed low, with only 34 per cent of students who had not achieved Level 2 (GCSE standard) in English at age 16 reaching it by age 19 and the comparable figure for maths being just 24 per cent.²³² The DfE has stated that the resits policy had “resulted in a significant increase in the number of students successfully taking their GCSEs”.²³³ Nonetheless, they recognised the need to improve the quality of alternatives to GCSEs and highlighted their recent reforms to ‘Functional Skills’ qualifications, which are designed to help learners of all ages and levels develop the practical skills needed in real life situations.

The funding rules for learners aged 16 to 19 state that if a student got a grade 3 in their GCSE English or maths (one grade below a ‘pass’ at grade 4) and they are on a full-time course then they must retake their GCSE exam in the relevant subject(s). However, if a student of the same age is on a short programme, a part-time course or got a grade 2 or below in their GCSEs then they can take a Functional Skills qualification in English or maths instead – including at levels *below* GCSEs (‘Entry Level’ and Level 1).²³⁴ In effect, the DfE is content for students at the very end of secondary education to take a Functional Skills qualification at Entry Level, Level 1 or Level 2 instead of a GCSE, yet before the age of 16 students are effectively banned from doing so. As young people must remain in education or training up to age 18 due to the RPA legislation then the goal should be to improve their attainment and self-esteem up to this same age. In that context, it is entirely illogical for a young person to fail their GCSEs in English and / or maths and then be forced to continue with the subject after their confidence has potentially been damaged by ‘repeated failure’ – as Ofsted noted. This approach is even harder to fathom when the DfE allows students to study English and maths at lower levels *after* failing their GCSEs but not beforehand.

“I feel like the curriculum needs to be adapted for older learners. ...I also think functional skills should be promoted and valued too.”

Young person G

Previous research has demonstrated why basing all policy decisions around examinations at age 16 is unwise. When Ofsted investigated the impact of greater flexibility in the curriculum (discussed in earlier chapters), they found that encouraging students at risk of dropping out to take GCSE English and maths at Level 1 in Year 10 had “motivated them and made it more likely that they would not leave school without qualifications.”²³⁵ In Singapore, low-attaining students can take their national maths exams a year later than their peers, thereby giving weaker students more time to learn the material but without the stigma of being made to ‘fail’ their exams at a specific age.²³⁶ Baroness Wolf – who has recently been advising the Prime Minister on vocational education and skills – was the architect of the GCSE resits policy, but even she thinks a new approach may be needed. In 2019 she told the Education Select Committee in Parliament that “when adults do want to come back into adult education and improve their English and maths – and there’s huge demand for it – they are faced with a single curriculum”²³⁷ due to the focus on GCSEs. She emphasised that she believed English and maths should be compulsory up to age 18, but that England should follow the example of Sweden and Germany and have a set of alternative curricula that went up to 18.

Mentoring

In an educational context, mentoring normally consists of pairing young people with either an older peer or an adult who acts as a positive role model. Mentoring tends not to focus on developing specific academic skills or knowledge, but rather on building confidence and relationships, resilience and character, and raising aspirations.²³⁸ Mentors usually meet with their mentees one-to-one (although it can also be in small groups) for about an hour a week.²³⁹

There are several examples of schemes that have sought to focus mentoring on pupils at risk of becoming NEET – either with mentoring alone, or in conjunction with other interventions:

- **Think Forward:** this scheme supported pupils approaching their GCSEs (lasting 18 months for pupils in Year 10, and 6 months for those in Year 11) to help them transition into further education, employment or training. Young people were assigned coaches who provided support including one-to-one sessions and group work to build life skills and confidence as well as connect young people to relevant services. There was little evidence of improved GCSE scores, pupil absence or pupil attitudes, but teachers reported improvements in the behaviour of the Year 11 group.²⁴⁰

- **The Youth Service NEET programme:** based in New Zealand, this programme provided mentoring and counselling to 16 and 17-year-olds to support and encourage them to remain in further education or training. The programme was found to raise educational participation by 10 per cent.²⁴¹
- **The NEET Prevention Study:** this 6-week package of support consisting of mentoring, counselling, group support networks and work placements intended to keep young people engaged at Key Stage 4. It focused on increasing motivation and identifying opportunities for young people who were NEET while also raising their self-esteem through education and training. Three quarters of participants remained engaged in education between 2013 and 2015 and had more positive attitudes towards school as well as increased confidence and emotional wellbeing.²⁴²

As can be seen from these studies, the evidence base on the effectiveness of mentoring is mixed. According to the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF), mentoring generally has a “low impact for moderate cost”.²⁴³ Some studies have found more positive impacts for pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds, and for non-academic outcomes such as attitudes towards school, attendance and behaviour.²⁴⁴ The EEF note that there are risks associated with unsuccessful mentoring pairings that can have detrimental effects such as causing further disillusionment for a young person who may already feel lacking in support from teachers and schools. As a result, some studies have reported negative overall impacts for mentoring.

In terms of best practice, the EEF found that programmes with a clear structure and clear expectations that provide training and support for mentors who have been recruited as volunteers are associated with more successful outcomes.²⁴⁵ They also found that regular meetings of once a week over a set period (often at least the length of a school year or more) frequently tend to be most beneficial. Furthermore, they emphasised the importance of maximising the recruitment of effective and reliable mentors who are then well matched to mentees. Desirable characteristics of supportive staff such as mentors include kindness, reliability, consistency and calmness.²⁴⁶

Transitions between phases of education

According to the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) – a previous incarnation of the DfE – the signs of a ‘successful’ transition from primary to secondary school include pupils developing new friendships, improving their self-esteem and confidence, settling in so well that their parents are not concerned, showing an increasing interest in school and school work, getting used to their new routines and school organisation with ease and, finally, experiencing curriculum continuity.²⁴⁷

A smooth transition from primary to secondary school is important for several reasons. A report by the EEF in 2017 stated that this transition is “a risk-point for vulnerable learners [so] schools need to diagnose pupils’ needs as soon as possible in order to put in place effective support to help those falling behind to catch up.”²⁴⁸ The NFER has previously reported “deleterious effects on self-esteem, depression and academic attainment at age 18” for pupils who described their transition as difficult.²⁴⁹

“I just remember Year 7 being absolutely awful, but me just sort of getting through it based on, like, my naivety, I was very different to what I am now and I just kind of... I didn’t brush it off, there were things that really upset me but like... it wasn’t the smoothest transition to secondary school”

Young person B

Researchers have looked at whether there is any way to anticipate which students may struggle with their primary-to-secondary transition and may require additional support. The Nuffield Foundation’s School Transition and Adjustments Research Study (STARS) found that Year 6 primary school teachers were good at predicting how well pupils would settle into their new schools in terms of academic attainment, attendance, classroom behaviour and connecting to peers.²⁵⁰ The study concluded that there was a range of risk and protective factors which increased the likelihood of a difficult or positive transition respectively.²⁵¹ Other studies have supported this, identifying several characteristics that can make a positive contribution to the primary-to-secondary transition, including:

- **Pupils:** an ability to control negative emotions; an ability to develop good and stable peer relationships; confidence in their own abilities; enjoyment of school life; and good school attendance, which then increases academic engagement;²⁵²
- **Peers:** ‘peer acceptance’, the number of friends and the quality of friendships before their transition to secondary school;²⁵³
- **Family:** consistent and ongoing support from responsive and engaged parents; a stable home environment; a parenting style that children and young people perceive to support their autonomy;²⁵⁴
- **Teachers:** supportive and caring teachers who make learning fun and enjoyable.²⁵⁵

Beyond these characteristics, a supportive and safe school environment that involves pupils in the transition process has been found to be important as well.²⁵⁶ There are a range of practices used by schools to support the transition, such as ‘bridging materials’ (e.g. using the same workbooks in Years 6 and 7), sharing information between schools, visits to primary

schools by prospective teachers, children and their parents, ‘taster days’ and other joint social events between schools.²⁵⁷ The EEF recently highlighted the importance of ‘curriculum continuity’, ‘school routines and expectations’ and ‘healthy peer networks’ as factors that can support a successful transition.²⁵⁸ A recent thematic review of 29 studies from different countries added that policymakers and school leaders need to take more responsibility for ensuring a smooth transition, develop specific transition programmes and develop programmes for the prevention of bullying.²⁵⁹

Aside from the transition from primary to secondary school, other significant transition points include the completion of GCSEs at age 16 or the end of a training programme between the ages of 16 and 18.²⁶⁰ Previous research by the NFER interviewed 40 young people who were NEET at age 16 and 17, and found that two-thirds had negative feelings about school and learning pre-16, which was associated with resistance to engage in post-16 learning.²⁶¹ These negative feelings had often resulted in low attainment, with most of the interviewees having fewer than 5 A*-C grades at GCSEs, significantly limiting their post-16 opportunities.²⁶² Many interviewees who said they imagined college would be like school felt that this had discouraged them from participating.²⁶³ Interviewees who had considered and rejected attending college provided a range of reasons for doing so, such as lacking appropriate entry qualifications for some courses and the influence of personal financial barriers.²⁶⁴

With some young people particularly vulnerable to becoming NEET at the post-16 transition point, several suggestions have been made by the NFER and other organisations to promote successful transitions:

- Providing more opportunities for applied teaching and learning pre-16 and offering more work-based opportunities;^{265 266}
- Local authorities (LAs) maintaining support and contact with individuals at high risk of becoming NEET even while they are still in school, providing them with relevant information and guidance and extending support beyond the age of 18;²⁶⁷
- LAs designing or commissioning programmes that remove barriers to engagement and help people make transitions into education, work or further education such as ‘taster programmes’;²⁶⁸
- Schools working closely with other partners such as local employers;²⁶⁹
- The importance of impartial, high-quality information advice and guidance to ensure that young people (and their parents and carers) are aware of education and training opportunities and can make appropriate choices.^{270 271}

The question of who is responsible for ensuring that a young person makes a successful transition after leaving school or college is far from straightforward. Although the law

requires young people in England to continue in education or training until at least their 18th birthday, the responsibility and accountability to increase participation and reduce the proportion of young people who are NEET lies with LAs.²⁷² The specific duties of LAs are:

- To secure “sufficient suitable education and training provision” for young people in their area aged 16-19 or aged 19-25 with an Education, Health and Care (EHC) plan;
- To make available to all young people aged 13-19, and to those aged 20-25 with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), support that will “encourage, enable or assist them to participate in education or training.”²⁷³

To deliver these goals, tracking young people’s participation is crucial. LAs are required to collect information about young people so that those who are not participating, or are NEET, can be identified and given support to re-engage. This includes maintaining a tracking system to identify 16 and 17-year-olds who are not participating in education or training.²⁷⁴ Consequently, LAs need to have arrangements in place to confirm the current activity of all young people at regular intervals, which may be through exchanging information with education and training providers, health services, youth offending teams and Jobcentre Plus as well as through direct contact with young people. However, when ‘at risk’ young people move between different LAs then they may slip through the information net if different authorities and providers do not share data quickly or effectively enough. In addition, LAs are required to identify 18-year-olds who are NEET or at risk of becoming NEET and provide them with support, but they are not required to track the whole 18-year-old cohort or return data about them to the DfE.²⁷⁵

Meanwhile, Jobcentre Plus – run by the DWP – has a lead role in supporting young people who are NEET and / or on benefits to re-engage with education and training or to find work (particularly at age 18), yet some vulnerable 16 and 17-year-olds can also claim benefits as the statutory responsibility for ensuring they access suitable education and training remains with LAs.²⁷⁶ Moreover, LAs’ formal tracking responsibilities typically end at age 18/19 because Jobcentre Plus has responsibility for those aged over 18, yet this transfer is also the moment when the task of following young people splinters to an even greater extent as they can move into Higher Education (HE), Further Education (FE) and apprenticeships as well as unemployment and economic inactivity.

Tracking young people across multiple authorities, service providers and agencies is far from straightforward. That said, Scotland’s ‘Annual Participation Measure’ (APM), which measures the participation of 16 to 19-year-olds in education, employment or training, is derived from a central database that combines data from a range of partners including local authorities, schools, colleges, the Student Awards Agency Scotland (for HE) and DWP.²⁷⁷ In effect, this allows the Scottish Government to identify what young people are doing in ‘real

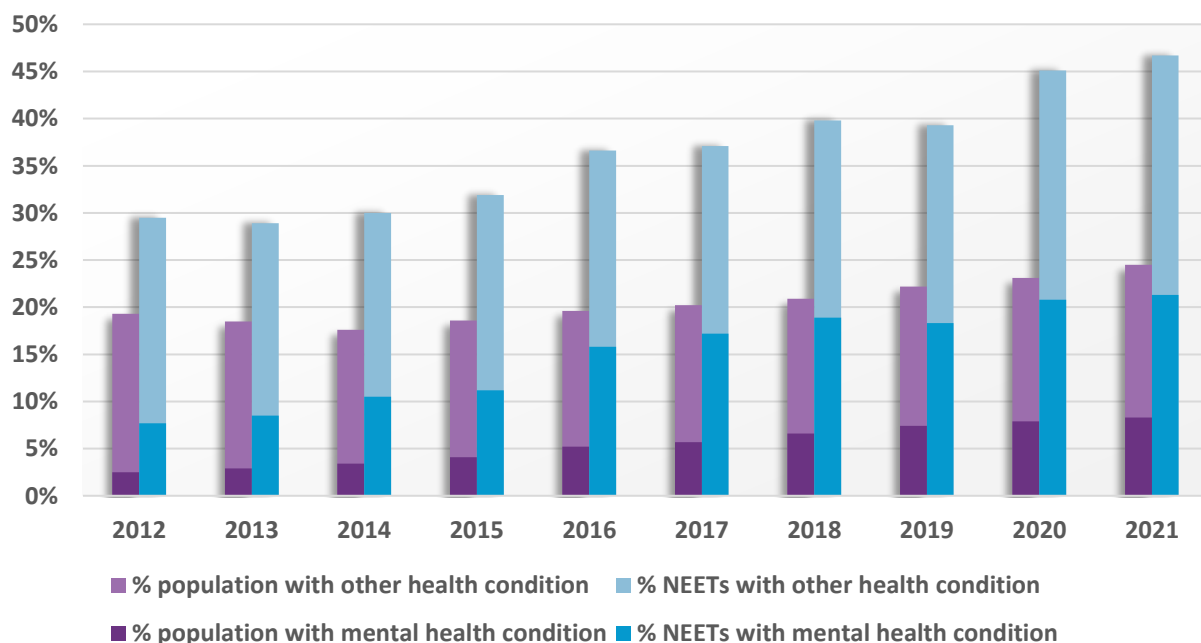
time’ because the APM is constantly updated by the data-sharing partners or directly by government officials following any contact with young people, their parents / representatives or organisations that a young person engages with e.g. schools. Although the APM, like all participation measures, has its imperfections, it is a robust attempt to provide ministers, officials, LAs and providers with the best possible information on which young people are struggling to transition from education and training into employment.

Mental health and wellbeing

Prevalence data shows that approximately one in seven young people (14.4 per cent) aged 11 to 19 in England experience at least one mental disorder, with international data suggesting that the peak age of onset for any mental disorder is 14.5 years old.²⁷⁸ The most common mental disorders experienced by young people are emotional disorders, which include anxiety and depression, followed by behavioural disorders.²⁷⁹

As Figure 7 illustrates, the percentage of the overall population with a mental health condition has been rising in recent years (dark purple bar). However, this trend is even starker among the NEET population (dark turquoise bar), with 21.3 per cent of young people who are NEET having a mental health condition in 2021 compared to 7.7 per cent in 2012. During this period, the proportion of the population with other health conditions (e.g. physical disabilities) has remained broadly constant, albeit with a small increase since the start of the pandemic.

Figure 7: Proportion of overall 16-24 population and 16-24 NEET population in England with a mental health/other mental health condition



Young people who experience persistent emotional and behavioural problems during adolescence have been found to be at greater risk of depression and anxiety during adulthood as well as poorer employment outcomes and being more likely to become NEET.²⁸⁰ Similarly, the Effective Pre-School, Primary and Secondary Education (EPPSE) longitudinal research study, which followed the development of children from the age of 3 to 16 over seventeen years, reported that “the influence of physical and particularly mental health problems on NEET status cannot be overstated”.²⁸¹ Furthermore, the survey of 1,275 young people by the IES (cited in chapter 2) revealed that 70 per cent of respondents who were NEET agreed that their mental and/or physical health had an impact on their ability to access good quality work.²⁸²

“I think mental health needs to be taken seriously, um, because sometimes... it was a bit ironic because ...I kept going and saying ‘I’m really ill’ and they were like ‘No you’re not’ and then I did get really ill and they kind of rushed me through and were like ‘Oh my gosh you’re so ill’ and I was ‘You don’t say’. So I think it’s really important that things are taken seriously.”

Young person C

A recent evidence review by the Early Intervention Foundation (EIF), a ‘What Works’ centre funded by government, on the effectiveness of school-based mental health interventions argued that schools play ‘a crucial role’ in supporting young people’s mental health.²⁸³ The review found that:²⁸⁴

- Universal social and emotional learning (SEL) interventions have good evidence of enhancing young people’s social and emotional skills and reducing symptoms of depression and anxiety in the short term;
- There is good evidence that universal and targeted cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) interventions are effective in reducing internalising symptoms in young people;
- Bullying prevention interventions are effective in reducing the frequency of traditional and cyberbullying victimisation and perpetration;
- The impact of depression and anxiety prevention interventions tend to be stronger when they are targeted at young people with elevated but sub-clinical symptoms, suggesting that programmes aimed at intervening early to reduce emotional and behavioural difficulties are best directed towards at-risk populations and individuals;
- Universal interventions can be effectively delivered by teachers; however, there is no evidence that teacher-delivered interventions are effective in addressing the needs of students with symptoms of depression or anxiety;
- High-quality programme implementation is critical to achieving positive outcomes.

A separate report from the What Works Centre for Wellbeing also highlighted the role of schools. It suggested that investing in activities that enable young people to develop and protect their mental health and wellbeing is likely to enhance not only their sense of happiness and wellbeing, but also support them in future through helping them gain human capital or qualifications – which can in turn facilitate progression into education or work.²⁸⁵ Similarly, the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) observed that secondary schools can provide an environment that ‘fosters social and emotional wellbeing’ as well as equipping young people with the skills and knowledge they need to prevent behavioural and health problems.²⁸⁶

“Back when I was in school, I never personally felt like I got a full understanding of what mental health actually was. ...I think it's something that really should be made aware of younger students of the fact that there isn't just physical health as younger people are aware at that age, but there's also mental health as well, and make them aware of the signs to look out for in themselves so they can actually maybe tell for signs about whether they are actually okay mentally.”

Young person D

That said, NICE acknowledged that activities in secondary education can only form one element of a broader, multi-agency strategy as young people’s social and emotional wellbeing is influenced by a range of factors including their individual make-up, family background, community and society at large.²⁸⁷ The NICE review proposed several practical steps that schools and other agencies can take in this regard:

- Enable all secondary education establishments to adopt an organisation-wide approach to promoting the social and emotional wellbeing of young people.²⁸⁸ Partnerships between young people and staff should also be developed to formulate, implement and evaluate these organisation-wide approaches.²⁸⁹
- Headteachers, governors and teachers should demonstrate a commitment to the social and emotional wellbeing of young people.²⁹⁰ They should also be helped to develop the necessary organisational capacity to promote social and emotional wellbeing, including leadership and management arrangements and sufficient resources.²⁹¹
- Tailor social and emotional skills education to the developmental needs of young people²⁹² and provide a safe environment that nurtures and encourages young people’s sense of self-worth and self-efficacy, reduces the threat of bullying and violence and promotes positive behaviours.²⁹³

- Secondary education establishments should have access to the specialist skills, advice and support they require, which may involve working with local authority advisory services, personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education services, educational psychology and child and adolescent mental health services.²⁹⁴
- Integrate social and emotional wellbeing within the training and continuing professional development of practitioners and governors involved in secondary education, ensuring they have the knowledge, understanding and skills needed to develop young people’s social and emotional wellbeing.²⁹⁵

Needless to say, it is hard to achieve all these objectives without more investment. Then Prime Minister Theresa May’s 2018 Green Paper on transforming children and young people’s mental health committed £300 million to an overhaul of mental health support services.²⁹⁶ This included establishing Mental Health Support Teams (MHSTs) in education settings, jointly delivered with the DfE, as well as reducing waiting times for access to specialist NHS children and young people’s mental health services.²⁹⁷ In March 2021, the Government announced a further £79 million to support children and young people in England with the most complex needs.²⁹⁸

However, the Government’s aim to have 400 mental health support teams in a third of schools in England by 2022-23 has been criticised as ‘lacking ambition’.²⁹⁹ Similarly, the Government has set itself a deadline of 2025 to offer training to senior mental health leads in every state school and college, which lacks urgency.³⁰⁰ Meanwhile, the number of referrals to Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) in 2021 was 50 per cent higher than in 2020 (409,347 referrals) according to analysis by the Royal College of Psychiatrists, and data collected by the Children’s Commissioner showed that over a third of children accepted onto waiting lists in 2020-21 are still waiting for treatment to begin.³⁰¹ Evidently, there is a long way to go when it comes to improving the mental health services available to young people.

“I’m still waiting for an actual appointment. So... waiting lists is a massive massive problem with seeking out mental health support.”

Young person E

7. Recommendations

The introduction to this report explained why any attempts to reconfigure our education system to prevent young people from becoming NEET must focus on two core objectives: **improving young people's educational attainment** and **increasing young people's self-confidence and self-esteem**. The evidence presented throughout this report has revealed various ways in which our secondary education system is not only failing to deliver these objectives for many vulnerable young people, but it may in fact be making the situation worse:

1. A lack of accountability for preventing young people from ending up NEET

Because no department or government minister has ultimate responsibility or accountability for preventing young people from becoming NEET, a void has been created in which new policies, speeches and initiatives are inserted yet they are often detached from each other and lack any overall coordination. For example, the DWP have established 'Youth Hubs' and send Jobcentre advisors into schools, while the DfE funds the CEC to deliver 'Career Hubs' and send 'Enterprise Advisors' into schools – with both departments also trying to build relationships with local partners and employers. This means that young people face an unnecessarily confusing and disjointed landscape in which it is not obvious how to access the support they need.

2. Prioritising academic qualifications above other courses

This report has found strong evidence that young people's confidence and self-esteem can be significantly improved by completing vocational courses, particularly those delivered in local colleges or workplaces. Moreover, these improvements are not restricted to young people who struggle with academic subjects. Nonetheless, there has been a dramatic reduction in recent years in the availability of vocational courses for pupils aged 14 to 16. This has been largely driven by the 'Progress 8' and 'EBacc' accountability measures, which incentivise secondary schools to prioritise traditional academic qualifications over vocational courses, even if the vocational options are better suited to pupils' interests and abilities. Vocational programmes can also be highly effective in improving communication skills, teamwork, interpersonal skills and overall employability – thus making young people more likely to successfully transition in the next stage of their education journey.

3. Insufficient funding to directly support young people

The EMA was shown by different studies to increase participation and attainment among 16 to 19-year-olds, although there was also evidence of considerable deadweight as a result of using income-based eligibility thresholds. The EMA was replaced with the 16-19

Bursary Fund, which gives schools and colleges flexibility over how the funds are used to support young people yet the total funding available through the Bursary Fund is only a quarter of what was available through the EMA. This is concerning, as various research studies have identified 'financial barriers' as a critical issue facing some young people from less privileged background who remain keen to continue in education and training. Furthermore, while there is evidence to suggest that school-based mental health interventions can be effective in supporting young people, teachers and headteachers are not receiving enough resources to effectively implement such schemes – particularly when the scale of mental health issues among vulnerable young people is growing.

4. Inequitable access to information, advice and guidance

High-quality information, advice and guidance is needed for all young people but particularly those at risk of becoming NEET. These young people often face additional challenges when they try to identify and fulfil their career aspirations, including having low 'career self-efficacy', struggling to navigate the qualification landscape and having to deal with competing pressures (e.g. financial worries) that limit their time and attention to engage with careers support. The disappointing impact of the Baker Clause, largely due to the intransigence of some schools, has compounded these issues. The CEC has made progress in recent years in bringing schools, colleges and employers closer together, while the 'Youth Hubs' initiative from DWP shows some promise as well. Even so, the evidence suggests that opportunities to prevent young people from ending up NEET through providing timely, well-targeted and relevant careers advice are being missed at present.

5. A lack of capacity among employers to recruit young people

Young people require additional support from employers because their limited workplace exposure (due, at least in part, to the dominance of classroom-based learning) means they often lack the required technical skills, soft/personal skills and the same life experience and maturity typically found among older employees. The pandemic-related grants and bursaries for employers offering apprenticeships, traineeships and T levels are intended to increase their capacity to recruit new staff (particularly among small employers), but these temporary measures will only have a limited impact and are not targeted at disadvantaged young people. At the same time, the apprenticeship levy continues to incentivise employers to offer apprenticeships to existing and senior employees rather than young and new recruits.

6. Failing to promote academic progress and build confidence

Attempts to increase attainment through the National Tutoring Programme are faltering. Furthermore, with a relentless focus on passing academically demanding GCSEs in English and maths at age 16, thousands of young people are experiencing ‘repeated failure’ over the course of several years. This leads these students onto demoralising and demotivating post-16 English and maths courses (including GCSE resits), which can result in them holding negative beliefs about their ability and thus undermining their confidence and making them more likely to disengage. Studies also show that young people failing to make successful transitions between the various phases of education can be detrimental to their future attainment and self-esteem. However, there is currently a lack of rigorous evidence to inform practice around the activities that support effective transitions at different ages.

The following recommendations aim to address all six of these challenges, with the explicit goal of building a package of evidence-based reforms that are likely to reduce the number of young people who become NEET.

New roles and responsibilities in government

RECOMMENDATION 1

To create clearer accountability and responsibility in government for preventing young people from becoming NEET, the current role of ‘Minister for Skills’ at the Department for Education (DfE) should be converted into a ‘Minister for Skills and Youth Employment’ that is shared between the DfE and the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP).

If progress is to be made in preventing young people from ending up NEET, it must be clarified who in government is leading and coordinating the relevant policies and programmes. To this end, it is recommended that a new joint ministerial role is created across the DfE and DWP to provide a focal point for the design and implementation of relevant initiatives. This role is based on a previous incarnation of the position of ‘Minister for Skills’ that was split over the DfE and the then Department for Business, Innovation and Skills in the Coalition Government, and will include responsibility for policies directly related to helping young people make a successful transition into employment. These include apprenticeships, traineeships, careers advice and guidance, vocational qualifications and many of the recommendations described throughout this chapter. Alongside this new ministerial role, the current ‘Minister for Employment’ at the DWP will continue, albeit with a focus on adults outside of Higher Education instead of young people.

RECOMMENDATION 2

To coordinate the support available to young people who are at risk of becoming NEET, a new government-funded service called 'CareersLink' should be created. CareersLink will bring together the Careers and Enterprise Company, the National Careers Service and 'Youth Hubs' to create a single one-stop-shop for young people aged 14 to 24 in England who require additional support and advice to find a suitable place in education, employment or training.

As a national service, Connexions had too large a remit and was not able to provide high-quality frontline services to young people. On that basis, the CEC and Youth Hubs are right to focus on linking young people to the right support and services rather than trying to deliver all the services themselves, and both initiatives are already showing their potential. That said, having two government departments creating separate 'hubs' for young people, working with local employers and sending advisors into schools and colleges is inefficient and unnecessarily confusing. Consequently, this report proposes that a single new service – CareersLink – should be created by government to oversee all this local work across England. Far from detracting from the work of the CEC, NCS and Youth Hubs, this proposal seeks to build on the foundations that they have laid. In effect, these three initiatives will now be combined to form a single organisation in the form of CareersLink. Their current activities will continue but would now operate under one banner.

Rather than delivering frontline services themselves (as Connexions previously sought to do), the focus of CareersLink will be bringing together local partners such as Jobcentre Plus, employers, mentoring charities, NHS and other health services (including mental health teams), contracted NCS providers and local authorities / elected mayors. That said, a core team of advisors would be in place in each CareersLink office to deliver outreach services, signpost young people and employers to the relevant services and coordinate the activities of local partners. In addition, there would be a strong emphasis on co-locating CareersLink with other services so that young people can access additional support, advice or guidance more easily.

Some elements of CareersLink will be universal, whereas other aspects of this new service will be targeted at those young people who are most in need of further information, advice and guidance as they try to move from school or college into a positive destination. The universal elements of the CareersLink provision will include, among other things:

- Providing schools and colleges with resources and advice to help them implement the Gatsby Benchmarks;
- Building relationships with local partners such as third sector organisations, training providers and 'Cornerstone Employers';

- Creating a single point of contact for employers, schools and colleges regarding work experience and work placements;
- Sending Enterprise Advisors into schools and colleges to advise young people on how to access different opportunities in their area;
- Co-locating with different services such as Jobcentre Plus and existing NCS providers.

The more targeted elements of CareersLink will include:

- Giving young people access to high-quality mentoring services to identify and address their individual needs;
- Arranging for Jobcentre Plus Work Coaches to go into schools and colleges to support and advise young people who are most at risk of failing to make successful transitions at ages 16 and 18;
- Encouraging young people who are currently not visible to LAs and other services to engage with the education and training system;
- Improving the ability of LAs to track young people by recording the current and recent activity of all those who engage with services through CareersLink.

Further deliberations would be needed on matters such as how CareersLink would support 11 to 14-year-olds in schools as well as how the contracted-out NCS providers would work with CareersLink. Nevertheless, the evidence in this report suggests that a new organisation with a new brand that sits outside of mainstream education will be the best way to deliver the above goals, hence why the new CareersLink will be an important addition to the education and training landscape.

CareersLink would follow the ‘best practice’ for hub-based services outlined earlier in this report, which includes an emphasis on providing outreach services and commissioning external evaluations of different interventions to build the evidence base around ‘what works’ for supporting young people of different ages, particularly those from less privileged backgrounds. In terms of financing, it is not necessary or desirable to spend £500 million a year attempting to recreate a Connexions-style service, particularly as CareersLink will focus many of its services on young people who need additional support and advice to move into the next phase of education, employment or training. On that basis, we suggest that £125 million a year would represent a sensible starting point for discussions on this matter, with both DfE and DWP contributing to the CareersLink budget. CareersLink would report directly into the new Minister for Skills and Youth Employment, as described in the previous recommendation, although there would also be a strong case for creating clear lines of local accountability into, for example, Mayoral Combined Authorities.

Ending the bias towards academic subjects

RECOMMENDATION 3

To prevent the downgrading of non-academic courses in the curriculum, the two EBacc performance measures for secondary schools in England – the percentage of pupils entering the English Baccalaureate and the English Baccalaureate Average Point Score – should be withdrawn with immediate effect.

The emphasis that the EBacc places on ‘traditional’ academic subjects is plainly apparent and leaves no room for vocational courses and programmes. Since the EBacc was introduced, there have been significant reductions in exam entries, teaching hours and teacher numbers for non-EBacc subjects, yet there is no evidence that this has been beneficial to disadvantaged young people. On the contrary, the EBacc marginalises the very courses and qualifications that young people at risk of becoming NEET (plus some middle- and high-achievers) frequently express a preference for over classroom-based learning. Meanwhile, research has shown that parents are largely uninterested in the EBacc, and both parents and academics have expressed concerns that the EBacc may push young people down routes that are simply not appropriate for them. In light of these findings (and in line with EDSK’s previous report on the EBacc in 2019), this report concludes that the EBacc performance measures do not serve any useful purpose and may even be contributing to more young people becoming NEET than if it were not in place. The EBacc performance measures should therefore be immediately withdrawn.

RECOMMENDATION 4

To allow all pupils to study the subjects that suit their interests and abilities, the ‘Progress 8’ measure should be reformed. In future, pupils should be able to choose any six subjects alongside English and maths, which would then feed into a school’s Progress 8 score.

The Progress 8 measure is well intentioned, especially its double weighting of English and maths to reflect their importance in the curriculum. Even so, Progress 8 compounds the bias towards academic subjects by prioritising EBacc subjects over other courses. If ministers want to improve the attainment and self-esteem of ‘at risk’ young people, the evidence suggests that they should remove the distinction between EBacc and non-EBacc subjects by combining the second and third ‘baskets’ into one single open basket of any six subjects. With the EBacc withdrawn and Progress 8 reformed, young people will be able to take the subjects that best suit their interests and career goals without a school being penalised for their choices. This would give greater recognition to pupils’ attainment in non-academic subjects, and in turn hopefully boost their self-esteem and confidence during their time in secondary education.

RECOMMENDATION 5

To create a 'level playing field' between academic, vocational and technical education, a new Baccalaureate should be introduced for the final years of secondary education. This rigorous and flexible Baccalaureate would allow learners in state schools and colleges to select courses across three pathways: **Academic** (academic subjects and disciplines); **Applied** (broad areas of employment); and **Technical** (specific trades / occupations).

The design of the qualification system sends out powerful messages about the perceived value of each qualification. The emphasis placed on traditional academic subjects in recent years by politicians and policymakers has overshadowed vocational and technical alternatives, even though the latter has been repeatedly shown to improve the motivation and progress of young people at risk of disengaging. A rigorous and flexible 'Baccalaureate' would help overcome the imbalance between academic subjects and other courses by creating a level playing field for learners, teachers and institutions, regardless of which courses a learner chooses. Furthermore, by categorising each course into the most appropriate pathway (Academic, Applied or Technical), the qualification landscape will be simpler and easier to navigate, which would be particularly beneficial for young people from disadvantaged backgrounds. There are various approaches that can be taken to create a coherent Baccalaureate model for the final years of secondary education. A [previous report from EDSK recommended a three-year programme](#), although it would also be possible to create a Baccalaureate spanning two or four years of secondary education. Irrespective of the exact format, the main goal of a Baccalaureate is to end the bias towards academic qualifications. By offering all young people, particularly those from less privileged backgrounds, the chance to pursue the courses which best suit their interests, abilities and aspirations, they are likely to reach higher levels of attainment, become more confident in their abilities and develop higher self-esteem.

RECOMMENDATION 6

To enhance the employability skills of younger learners and increase their engagement and progression, the DfE should create a new programme called 'Young Traineeships' for 14 to 16-year-olds. This will provide an extended work placement of 50 days over two years with a local employer during Key Stage 4 (approximately one day a week), the completion of which would be equivalent to a 'pass' (grade 4) in a GCSE subject.

The evidence presented throughout this report leaves little room for doubt that giving younger learners the opportunity to sample life in the workplace has numerous benefits for both learners and employers. While it is important that young people progress in their classroom-based subjects, allowing them to build their confidence, self-esteem and workplace readiness alongside their academic qualifications is likely to appeal to many learners who are

disinterested and demotivated by the limited choices available to them at present – including both higher and lower achievers.

Based on ‘Young Apprenticeships’, ‘Student Apprenticeships’ and the ‘Increased Flexibility Programme’ that previously offered work placements to 14 to 16-year-olds, this report proposes a new scheme called ‘Young Traineeships’ that offers pupils one day a week in the workplace – up to a maximum of 50 days over two years. Through the new ‘CareersLink’, schools would work with local employers to generate placements that are appropriate for this age group, as was done successfully on the schemes cited above. Rather than aiming to achieve low-level vocational qualifications through each placement, this report suggests that the Young Traineeship is a qualification itself that includes a range of personal development objectives (e.g. improving communication skills) alongside developing pupils’ knowledge of the working environment as well as particular careers and occupations – in line with the new approach already being trialled by ‘occupational traineeships’. This would mean that learners are not restricted to remaining in a specific industry or sector after age 16 following their Young Traineeship placement, although they would be well placed to progress into that industry or sector through, for example, a 16-18 apprenticeship if they so wished.

On successful completion of their placement (as judged by their school and the employer), a pupil will receive a qualification that is equivalent to one GCSE ‘standard pass’ at grade 4. This will allow pupils who are interested in work-based learning to receive credit for their placement without diluting the focus on attainment in classroom subjects, particularly English and maths. Young Traineeships would not be restricted to lower-achieving pupils, but only giving a credit equivalent to a grade 4 at GCSE means that higher-achieving pupils are likely to be better off continuing to study other subjects rather than pursuing a work placement.

Increasing attainment and confidence with English and maths

RECOMMENDATION 7

To offer high-quality support to schools through the National Tutoring Programme, the Department for Education must focus its procurement for a new supplier from September 2022 on the quality of proposals rather than their price. This will help avoid a repeat of the mistakes with the previous contract.

In April 2022, the DfE launched a procurement process for a new supplier to deliver the NTP, albeit with a much smaller contract than the one previously awarded to Randstad. The new contract will focus on quality assurance, recruiting and deploying academic mentors, and offering training to support schools to make best use of their funding. Given that Randstad were only awarded the NTP contract because their bid was so cheap, the DfE must learn from

its mistake and focus the new procurement on the quality of the bids they receive rather than the price proposed by bidders. This should ensure that whichever organisation is appointed by the DfE to support schools, they will be able to deliver a superior service to the one that schools have been subjected to in recent months – to the detriment of learners, particularly those who were most badly affected by the pandemic.

RECOMMENDATION 8

To prevent some young people from being made to experience repeated failure in English and maths from ages 11 to 16, the English and maths component of the Progress 8 measure should be expanded to include 'Functional Skills' qualifications in both subjects.

There is little to be gained by forcing all pupils to sit large and demanding GCSEs in English and maths when there is no realistic prospect of them passing the subjects at age 16. This is compounded by the bizarre situation in which pupils can switch to studying English and maths qualifications below GCSE standard *after* they have failed their GCSEs but not beforehand. Given that young people must participate in education and training until age 18, it is vital that they get the opportunity to experience success in English and maths to prevent them from becoming demotivated and disengaged.

Requiring all pupils to take GCSE English and maths is resulting in some of them losing confidence and momentum (which the GCSE resits policy compounds). On that basis, this report calls for Functional Skills qualifications to be incorporated into the Progress 8 performance measure for schools but with a lower weighting than is given to GCSE English and maths (currently double-weighted relative to other GCSE subjects). This would reflect the fact that Functional Skills qualifications are 'pass / fail', with Level 2 Functional Skills equivalent to a 'pass' (grade 4) at GCSE, Level 1 equivalent to GCSE grades 1-3 and Entry Levels 1, 2 and 3 being below GCSE level.

For purely illustrative purposes, the qualifications could be weighted as follows when calculating the Progress 8 score for each pupil:

- **GCSE English and maths** (Level 2 qualifications): x2 weighting
- **Functional Skills in English and maths** (Level 2): x1.5 weighting
- **Functional Skills in English and maths** (Level 1): x1.25 weighting
- **Functional Skills in English and maths** (Entry Level 3): x1 weighting
- **Functional Skills in English and maths** (Entry Level 2): x0.75 weighting
- **Functional Skills in English and maths** (Entry Level 1): x0.5 weighting

By incorporating Functional Skills into Progress 8, all pupils – particularly those who are low-attaining and lacking in confidence – will be provided with a ladder of qualifications that allows them to build their confidence in, and understanding of, English and maths over time.

Because Progress 8 measures the progress of pupils relative to their peers who attained at a similar level in their SATs exams at age 11, schools will still be incentivised to enter pupils for the highest level of qualification the pupil can achieve. This means that the above proposal can be implemented without reducing standards or allowing schools to stop focusing on high-quality teaching and learning for all pupils regardless of their level of attainment.

RECOMMENDATION 9

To develop their literacy and numeracy skills, the Government should set a long-term goal of requiring all students to study two compulsory subjects - 'Core English' and 'Core Maths' - up to age 18. Students must continue studying both subjects until they achieve at least a 'Pass' at Level 3 (equivalent to A-levels).

Whilst incorporating Functional Skills qualifications into Progress 8 would be an improvement on the current system in the short term, a more systematic approach to promoting progression in English and maths would be preferable in the longer term. [In line with the same report from EDSK that proposed a new Baccalaureate](#), it is recommended that the government introduces two new sets of qualifications in 'Core English' (with a heavy focus on functional literacy) and 'Core Maths' (with a heavy focus on functional numeracy). Broadly speaking, these qualifications would be available at Levels 1-3 so that the improvement of basic skills is a single 'ladder' in the final years of secondary education up to the age of 18 rather than a GCSE-style cliff edge at 16.

The content of these new qualifications could be derived, at least to some extent, from existing qualifications. For example, Core English and Core Maths at lower levels could largely base their content on 'Functional Skills' courses. The more advanced form of 'Core Maths' could be based on the existing Level 3 Core Maths qualification, whereas a new 'Core English' would need to be designed. These new Core English and Core Maths courses would be separate from qualifications in English and maths, which would remain as discrete subjects available to learners as normal. Regardless of where the content for these qualifications comes from, the goal is to encourage all students, including middle- and lower-achievers, to continue to progress in a way that increases confidence and self-esteem rather than undermining it. In doing so, it would allow them to experience success whilst maintaining high standards.

More support for young people within schools and colleges

RECOMMENDATION 10

To increase the number of young people who are eligible for financial support in their final years of education, the 16-19 Bursary Fund should be increased from £150 million a year to £225 million a year for the start of the academic year 2022/23.

Despite different studies showing that the EMA was effective in terms of increasing the attainment and participation of young people, its high deadweight cost was a major factor in the decision to scrap the scheme. The replacement for EMA - the 16-19 Bursary Fund - offers more targeted support and flexibility to providers to ensure the available funding is given to students who need it the most, which is a sensible approach. However, the 16-19 Bursary Fund is a far smaller pot of funding than the EMA.

Given the evidence about the positive impact this financial support can have on young people, particularly those who are at risk of disengaging from education due to their personal or family financial situation, it is recommended that the funding settlement for the 16-19 Bursary Fund be immediately increased by 50 per cent from £150 million a year to £225 million a year, with schools and colleges retaining the flexibility over how the funds are allocated to students. This would mean that the funding for bursaries of up to £1,200 a year for vulnerable groups such as care leavers would increase to approximately £30 million and could support an additional 10,000 students a year, while the funding available for discretionary bursaries that institutions award in line with their own policies would increase to £195 million. These funding increases are intended to expand the number of young people who receive financial support but without significantly increasing the deadweight costs of the 16-19 Bursary Fund, which reflects the research evidence on the impact and potential deadweight risks found in the EMA.

RECOMMENDATION 11

To improve the availability and accessibility of mental health services for young people, the Government should invest an additional £80 million by September 2022 to support those with the most complex needs. A further £75 million should be invested to accelerate the establishment of Mental Health Support Teams in education settings, with a new target of half of schools being supported in the academic year 2022/23.

The evidence shows that school-based interventions can be effective in supporting young people with mental health needs, but some individuals will nonetheless require access to specialist services. The long waiting lists for treatment through CAMHS is both frustrating

and unsustainable. As a matter of urgency, this report proposes that the Government doubles its recent investment of £79 million that was aimed at children with the most complex needs.

Furthermore, the Government must accelerate the rollout of MHSTs into schools and colleges, as the current target of reaching a third of schools by the end of the next academic year seems inadequate given the scale of the challenge at hand. Consequently, an additional £75 million should be invested by the Government on top of the £300 million announced in 2018 to transform children and young people's mental health support services. Although these investments will not solve the problem by themselves, they aim to set a much bolder ambition around tackling the growing prevalence of mental health issues among young people, particularly as poor mental health is leading to some individuals falling out of the education and training system.

RECOMMENDATION 12

To create a stronger evidence base regarding what contributes to a successful 'transition' at ages 11, 14 and 16, the DfE should fund research trials that aim to identify the most effective practices and approaches at each transition point.

This report has considered several research studies that demonstrate the importance of providing high-quality support to children and young people as they transition between different phases of the education system. The local flexibilities in how these transitions are managed is generally a positive approach as there will inevitably be a wide variety of relationships between different providers across the country. That said, the focus of the research evidence thus far has been on the primary-to-secondary transition, with far less consideration being given to how to support pupils at ages 14 and 16 as they make significant decisions about their future. This deficit in the evidence base will become even more visible if and when the implementation of the Baker Clause is strengthened to give pupils better access to information about courses at other providers.

On that basis, this report proposes that a new stream of work is undertaken to identify 'best practice' at each transition point. For transitions at age 11 and 14 the Education Endowment Foundation would oversee new research trials, whereas the Youth Futures Foundation would do the same for transitions at age 16. Building a new evidence base through commissioning high-quality research on this issue will ensure that schools and colleges can create more effective support mechanisms for pupils of different ages in future.

Encouraging more employers to recruit young people

RECOMMENDATION 13

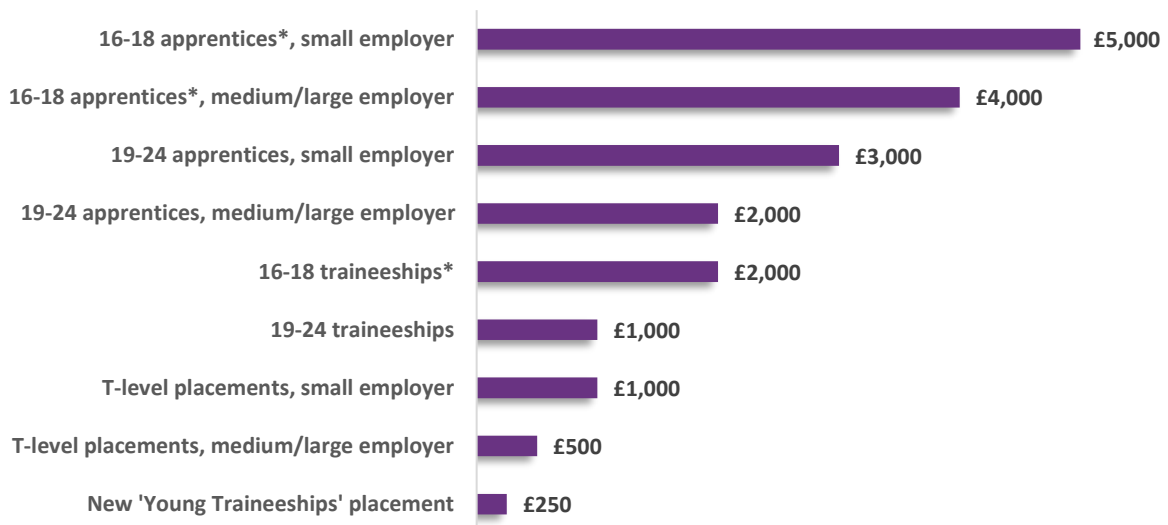
To build capacity among employers to recruit and support young people, financial incentives ranging from £500 to £5,000 should be available to organisations offering apprenticeships, traineeships and T Level placements. These incentives should reflect the size of the company, the age of the recruit and the length of training required for the role.

To help prevent young people from becoming NEET, it is necessary to ensure that a range of progression routes are available to them such as apprenticeships, T-levels and traineeships. Not all past incentives for employers have been successful and previous employer surveys have shown that some employers face barriers (e.g. health and safety considerations) that make it hard for them to offer suitable roles for young people. Nonetheless, the evidence from the Youth Contract and Apprenticeship Grant for Employers as well as several research studies shows that financial incentives targeted at smaller employers and those employers who take on the youngest recruits are likely to have the lowest deadweight costs and the largest impact on employer behaviour.

This report proposes that the DfE introduces a permanent set of financial incentives that are provided on a sliding scale to reflect variables such as the age of the learner, the size of the employer (small: <50 employees; medium: 50-249 employees; large: 250+ employees) and the amount of training required for the programme. Figure 8 (overleaf) illustrates how this sliding scale could operate. For example, an incentive of £5,000 would be available to a small employer recruiting a 16-18 apprentice whereas a medium or large employer would receive £4,000 for the same apprentice. Traineeships require less intensive training than an apprenticeship and therefore come with smaller incentives for employers, while T-level work placements are likely to be shorter than most Traineeships and attract a smaller incentive as a result. The new 'Young Traineeships' placements should come with a small incentive for employers to cover their administration costs but employers are not expected to provide the same level of training as would be required on other programmes.

As is currently the case, these incentives should generally be split into two separate payments (e.g. half the payment after three months of an apprenticeship, with the remainder after 12 months) to mitigate against learners failing to complete their course. It may also be sensible to limit the number of incentives that employers can claim within a calendar year.

Figure 8: The proposed financial incentives for employers offering apprenticeships, traineeships and work placements



* 16-18 learners and those aged 19-24 who have an Education, Health and Care Plan or a history in local authority care

It would be wrong to assume that these new incentives will transform the behaviour of all employers overnight. For instance, this report found that few employers currently focus their recruitment on disadvantaged young people and may therefore need further advice and support from employer / sector-based groups as well as government bodies such as the Social Mobility Commission to reach out to these potential employees. Even so, well-targeted financial incentives will help employers grow their internal capacity in terms of the expertise, staffing and management needed to support young people by providing clarity over what funding is available in the coming years. By combining a stable funding environment with wider efforts to help employers recruit young people from the least privileged backgrounds, it is hoped that these incentives will persuade organisations to offer more opportunities to those who need them the most.

RECOMMENDATION 14

To stimulate more demand for, and supply of, apprenticeships for young people, Level 7 apprenticeships (equivalent to a Masters degree) should be removed from the scope of the apprenticeship levy and the requirement for 5% 'co-investment' from non-levy paying employers towards the cost of training younger apprentices should be scrapped.

At present, the apprenticeship levy encourages employers to turn away from younger recruits and instead focus on putting existing (and often senior) employees through expensive training courses that have sometimes merely been rebadged as 'apprenticeships' to attract levy

funding. As the money raised by the apprenticeship levy is finite and operates on a first-come-first-serve basis, priority should be given to support young people looking to get started in their career rather than older workers who already have a foothold in the labour market.

Consequently, this report proposes that all Level 7 apprenticeships (Masters level) should be removed from the scope of the apprenticeship levy so that they cannot attract any more levy funds. The money saved through this policy change – which will run to several hundred million pounds a year – will be used to fund the new employer incentives outlined in the previous recommendation. What's more, all but the smallest employers must currently make a 'co-payment' of 5 per cent of the training costs for each apprenticeship. In future, the existing co-payment exemption for small employers recruiting 16-18 apprentices should be expanded to encompass all employers who recruit 16 to 24-year-old apprentices instead.

Both these measures will strongly encourage employers and training providers to focus on recruiting and supporting younger apprentices, with the clear aim of stimulating more apprenticeship opportunities for young people – which the evidence shows are especially appealing to those who are not in education or employment.

Conclusion

“Experience suggests that the type of education best adapted to the requirements of a large proportion of the children between 11+ and 15+ years of age is one which has a less ‘academic’ bias, and gives a larger place to various forms of practical work, than is customary in secondary schools today. At the age of 11 or 12 children are waking to various new interests suggested by the world about them. Many of them are already beginning to think of their future occupations, and anxious to be doing something which seems to have an obvious connection with them. Many more, without having any clear idea what they will do when they leave school, feel ill at ease in an atmosphere of books and lessons, and are eager to turn to some form of practical and constructive work, in which they will not merely be learners, but doers, and, in a small way, creators.

*If education is to retain its hold upon children at this critical stage of their development, it must use, and not reject, these natural and healthy impulses. It must recognise that there are many minds, and by no means minds of an inferior order, for which the most powerful stimulus to development is some form of practical or constructive activity. The work of the school must not seem, as sometimes, perhaps, it still does, the antithesis of ‘real life’, but the complement of it.”*³⁰²

The above quotation could sit comfortably within many of the current debates over the future of the education system in England, which is all the more remarkable given that these words come from a government-commissioned report by the educationist Sir Henry Hadow in 1926 (the ‘Hadow Report’) when the school leaving age was just 14. Despite the obvious affection for allowing pupils to pursue the courses and subjects that interested them the most, the Hadow Report asserted that “nothing should be done to prejudice the continuance of the general education of the pupils, or to cramp their mental development for the sake of demanding some form of specialised proficiency.”³⁰³ This report concurs on both counts, as no pupil should be denied the opportunity to study academic subjects as they move into the latter stages of secondary education, nor should they be asked to choose a specific job or occupation before they are ready to do so.³⁰⁴

This report has demonstrated why, a century after the Hadow Report was published, our secondary education system is still failing to engage those young people who have little or no interest in spending more time in front of books in a classroom (which is by no means confined to lower-achieving pupils). What’s more, this failure to engage young people is needlessly driving some of them out of the education and training system altogether by undermining their motivation, aspirations and confidence in themselves and their work over months, if not

years. It is then left to taxpayers and society to subsequently spend considerable sums of money trying to bring these young people back into the fold later. Not only is this desperately inefficient from a public expenditure perspective, but it is also an inexcusable waste of young people's talents.

As noted at the beginning of this report, there are numerous educational, economic and societal factors that can influence whether a young person becomes unemployed or inactive such as early pregnancy, mental health issues, a poor qualification record and much more besides. Even so, there are good empirical reasons to believe that implementing the recommendations in this report will lead to thousands more young people remaining engaged and motivated by their time in school and college through a combination of increasing their academic attainment and improving their confidence and self-esteem. On that basis, these recommendations could help bring about a sustained reduction in the number of young people who are NEET in England.

However, such progress will only be achieved if this government and future governments coordinate their efforts over the course of several years to offer better support, better advice and better options to young people across the country. This cannot be done without additional investment in young people and the institutions and organisations who work with them, but it is hard to think of a more vital investment than helping every young person make a successful transition into education, employment or training. In the aftermath of the pandemic, this new investment and new approach from government to supporting vulnerable young people simply cannot come soon enough.

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