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Not in education, employment or training (NEET) – evidence summary

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Disclaimer: This evidence summary includes relevant literature identified from searches on the above topic. It is not an exhaustive list, it presents key finding and not recommendations for practice.

Overview

This report looks at young people aged 16-24 years who are not in education, employment or training (NEET). In Wales, there are concerns over the increasing number of young people who are NEET.[1]

The report will look at the risk factors contributing to a young person being out of education, employment or training, and identify specific populations most at risk of being NEET. It will look at the needs of young people who are classed as NEET, and also look at the barriers and needs of specific groups of young people including ethnic minorities, LGBTQ+, special educational needs and disabled young people, mental health, young parents, care experienced, young carers, and young offenders.

The report focuses on research and reports which are based on Wales or the UK.

Risk factors linked with young people being NEET

There are many risk factors which may be linked with young people not being in education, employment or training. These include:

- A weaker labour market [2–4]
- Lack of work experience [3]
- Disability, poor physical or mental health [2,3,5–8]
- Health system not supporting health conditions [2]
- A lack of support for transition into work [2,3]
- Low attainment in education [2–5,7–9]
- Lacking the skills needed for starting school [3]
- Persistent absence from school [3–7]
- Socioeconomic status, family adversity, or poverty [3,5–8]
- Behaviour issues / exclusions from school [3,6,7]
- The impact of the pandemic [3]
- The education system not suiting them / too focused on exams [3]
- A lack of aspirations for the future (education or occupation) [5]
- Attitude to learning [5]
- A lack of progression in their education [6]
- Parent factors (family breakdown, parent education, parental interest, unemployment, single parent) [5,7]
- Isolation [5]
- Previous adverse childhood experiences [6]
- Housing issues [6]
- The impact of COVID / the pandemic [4]
- Contact from the police, social services, or educational welfare [7]

Young people may have more than one risk factor, and the more risk factors a young person has the higher their risk of becoming NEET.[7]

It is important to note that although some of the above risk factors may be linked with young people being NEET, we must look deeper to the root causes. For example, low attainment, poor school readiness, attitude to learning, and absence from school, usually have underlying causes, such as mental health, bullying, family issues, or special educational needs, which need to be addressed.[5]

There are specific groups of young people who may be more likely to be NEET. The groups at increased risk of being NEET include:

- Ethnic minorities, which include:
    - White Gypsy or Irish Traveller communities, young people with migrant backgrounds and unaccompanied asylum-seeking children [3]
    - Migrants, particularly women [5]
    - Unaccompanied asylum seekers / refugees [5,6]
- LGBTQ+ [7,10]
- Special educational needs, health conditions, or disabilities [1–4,6,7,9,11,12]
- Mental health difficulties [2–4,7,11,13,14]
- Young mothers [2,3,5–7]
- Care experienced [2,3,6,7,15–17]
- Young carers [3,6,7,9,18]
- Youth offenders [3]

The challenges faced by young people who are classed as NEET

Young people who are NEET can face many challenges. These might include:

- Being seen as a problem or risk that needs to be managed [3]
- Schools not recognising their strengths and capabilities [3]
- Schools not preparing them with the skills needed for work [3]
- Going unsupported by services [3]
- Overshadowed by the labels they have been given (absent, anxious, behind, difficult, care experienced, NEET, etc) [3]
- Feeling isolated and having a lack of belonging [3]
- A lack of or loss of confidence [3,8]
- Unaddressed mental health needs [3]
- Developing mental health issues as a result of being NEET [3,8,11]
- Being wary of institutions [3]
- Lack of feedback from unsuccessful job applications and interviews [3]
- Entry level jobs requiring experience [3]
- Transport being a barrier, narrowing options [3]
- Costs of working being a barrier including uniforms, transport, childcare, and equipment [3]

- Employers being less likely to take a chance on young inexperienced people [3]
- Impact on future earnings and employment [3,4,9]
- Poorer health in the future [4]
- Inequality, discrimination, and / or social exclusion [8]

It is important to note that the barriers to work are likely to be varied and complex and require holistic, person-centred support, and there may also be regional variations.[9]

Challenges faced by specific groups of young people who are NEET

Some groups of young people may be at increased risk of becoming classed as NEET. Some groups face additional challenges, including disabled people.

Ethnic minorities

There are conflicting findings over whether ethnic minorities are more or less at risk of being NEET. Due to small sample sizes it can be risky to look at specific ethnic groups to determine which groups are at increased risk of being NEET [9].

However, young people whose first language is not English or Welsh are at increased risk [6], and young people from ethnic minorities who are NEET face additional challenges or barriers. These might include:

- Experiencing racism and discrimination [5,19]
- Cultural expectations [5]
- Lack of access to resources [5]
- Language barriers [5]
- Being more likely to have a lower socioeconomic status [5]
- Over representation in insecure and low pay jobs [19]
- Discrimination and bias in recruitment [19]
- Being at greater risk of exploitation in work [19]

White Gypsy or Irish Traveller communities

White Gypsy or Irish Traveller young people who are NEET face many challenges. These might include:

- Being more likely to be suspended or excluded from education [3]
- Higher rates of school absence [20]

- Racism and discrimination from other students and teachers [20,21]
- Lack of flexibility and cultural sensitivity within the education system [21]
- Perceived discrimination from colleagues and employers [21]
- Lacking skills, education or formal qualifications [21]

LGBTQ+

LGBTQ+ young people who are NEET face many challenges. These might include:

- Family rejection or strained relationships [10]
- Fear of or experiencing rejection when coming out [10]
- Lack of peer support [10]
- Homophobic, bi-phobic and transphobic bullying [10]
- Increased risk of mental health issues and / or low self-esteem [10]
- LGBTQ+ people being invisible in the school environment (among staff, other pupils, and the curriculum) [10]
- Inadequate LGBTQ+ support [10]
- Work places not feeling safe or inclusive [10]
- Fear of being discriminated against when applying for work [10]
- Lack of confidence due to negative past experiences [10]
- Lack of good careers advice [10]

Special educational needs or disabilities

Disabled young people are more likely to be NEET, and the likelihood increases in young people age 19-24.[1] Young people who are NEET and have special educational needs or disabilities face many challenges. These might include:

- Finding it difficult to find and remain in paid employment [3]
- Worrying about losing their benefits if they do work [3]
- Not getting the support they need in education, leading to placement breakdown, non-attendance, and mental health issues [3,12]
- Being more likely to be suspended or excluded from education [3]
- A lack of support tailored to their needs, to help them join education or gain employment [3,12]
- Difficulties in education long before they become NEET [12]
- Issues with post-16 transition [12]

Mental health conditions

Young people who have mental health conditions and are NEET face many challenges. These might include:

- Motivation, confidence and capacity to engage in training or job searching being affected [3]
- Not getting the support they need [3]
- Employers and educators not understanding / accommodating their needs [3]
- System only responding when they reach crisis point [3]
- Needing to build up to working / studying full time [3]
- Being NEET impacting their mental health further [13]
- Having fewer soft skills to help them succeed in the workplace, such as problem solving, leadership, and time management [13]

Young parents

Young parents who are NEET face additional challenges. These might include:

- The costs of childcare [6]

Care experienced

Care experienced young people who are NEET face many challenges. These might include:

- Support ending at age 18, compared to other young people who stay at home and supported by family for much longer [the When I'm Ready scheme in Wales attempts to address this by enabling young people in foster care to remain with their carers past the age of 18] [3,16]
- The care system having many transitions at a time when continuity matters most [3]
- Issues transitioning into adult services [3,16]
- The lasting impact of trauma [16,22]
- More likely to have a disability, poor health or mental health [15–17,22]
- More likely to have caring responsibilities [22]
- Having had a poor / disrupted education journey [16,17,22]
- Having had negative experiences in education [16,17,22]
- More likely to have been suspended or excluded [17]
- More likely to lack formal qualifications / reduced attainment [16,17,22]

- More likely to face housing and financial instability [16,22]
- Experiencing stigma [16,22]
- Lack of a support network after leaving care [22]
- Practical issues such as access to transport, devices, work appropriate clothes, and ID [15,16]
- Needing support to develop soft skills needed for work, such as adaptability, problem-solving, communication, and time-management [15]
- Lack of trust in professionals [16]

Young carers

Young carers are at increased risk of being NEET[6], and young people who are carers and NEET face many challenges. These might include:

- The skills they have gained caring not being recognised to gain employment [3]
- Young women being more likely to be a carer [3]
- Higher rates of absence [23]
- Increased likelihood of suspensions and exclusions [23]
- Having missed school or training due to their caring role [23]
- Their caring role preventing them from attending education or employment [23]
- Their caring role making it hard for them to keep a job [23]
- Experiencing poor physical and / or mental health [18,23]
- Having reduced academic achievements [18,23]
- A lack of tailored information and support [23]
- Experiencing financial difficulties [23]
- Being less likely to progress to further education [18]

Young offenders

Former young offenders who are NEET face many challenges. These might include:

- Being more likely to have been excluded from education [24]
- Being more likely to have an education, health and care plan (EHCP) [24]
- Their needs not being met, and lack of support when in education [24]
- Having undiagnosed special educational needs or disabilities [24]

Supporting young people who are NEET

It is important when considering how best to support a young person who is NEET or at risk of becoming NEET, that we look at the potential root causes and consider the needs of that individual.[5]

A recent review considered various interventions, which found they could potentially improve a range of mental health and well-being outcomes; however, the evidence was limited, often low quality, and did not look at the long-term outcomes of the interventions. The review highlights that young people who are NEET are complex with varying needs, so it is important to consider the individual and their needs.[14]

The Youth Engagement and Progression Framework: guidance on early identification provides guidance on the early identification of young people at risk of becoming NEET and includes some case study examples.[6]

Search strategy

Basic searches of Social Care Wales, Gov.Wales, Senedd Research, Insight Collective, and Google were completed. A detailed search of Scopus was also completed.

Scopus

NEET OR “not in education” OR “not in employment” OR “not in training” (abstract)
AND
“young people” OR “young person*” OR “young adult*” (abstract)
AND
wales OR "united kingdom" OR UK OR Britain (affiliation country)
Limit: 2021-2026

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