

## Briefing paper

# Entry and retention in the labour market: narratives and solutions for NEET and care leaver employment support

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### About the research

The Employment Related Services Association (ERSA) and Education Development Trust (EDT) have undertaken research to understand the barriers that young people not in education, employment, or training (NEET) face, and the support that is currently available to them. Through a review of existing literature, a survey of ERSA members and speaking to young people and the practitioners who support them, we better understand what works and what more needs to be done to best support young people into employment, education, or training.

**More than one in ten young people are NEET**



### Key statistics

More than one in ten young people between the ages of 16 and 24 are classified as not in employment, education or training (NEET).

The prevalence of NEET young people in the UK has remained structurally high over the last 20 years, with levels of NEET 16–24-year-olds never falling below 10%

Care-experienced young people are almost four times more likely to end up being NEET than non-looked-after groups, with 41% of care-experienced 19 to 21-year-olds being classified as such.

## Key findings

- » **Mental health and a lack of confidence are overwhelmingly considered the biggest barriers to employment, education or training for NEET young people.**

92% and 90% of responding organisations in the survey, respectively, selected mental health and a lack of confidence as the biggest barriers to EET for the young people they support. The Office for National Statistics reports that although the rate of young people diagnosed with a mental health condition has risen for all young people over the past decade, the increase in rate amongst NEET young people is steeper than the wider population. During our qualitative research, it was clear that for care-experienced young people, this often resulted from a lack of familial support network to provide encouragement and support.

- » **Employment support organisations often fill the gaps in vulnerable young people's lives, providing the advice, financial support, and "checking in" that they might not receive from their families.**

On the journey towards the labour market, employment support organisations build strong relationships with young people, specifically tailoring advice and opportunities based on the individual and location. Practitioners spoke about the responsibility they felt to ensure that young people were not worse off by entering opportunities recommended to them. After they are in education or employment, employability organisations continue their relationships to ensure retention. However, the lack of geographical security for some young people (particularly care experienced young people) makes this very difficult as they are often having to form new relationships with practitioners and personal advisors.

- » **There is sometimes a mismatch between what is available to young people and what young people want or need when attempting to move into employment, education, or training.**

Mental health conditions are viewed as the biggest barrier for a young person entering employment, education or training. However, when employability organisations were asked if they provided mental health support, this was only selected by 49% of respondents. Similarly, the mismatch between the practitioner survey responses and young people's perspectives with regard to the importance they place on peer mentoring. Only one survey respondent out of 87 mentioned peer mentoring when asked about effective strategies, however care-experienced young people indicated that, for them, it needs to be a priority.

- » **A strong relationship between a young person, a practitioner and a supportive employer is one of the deciding factors behind successful integration and retention in the labour market for young people.**

Practitioners described how establishing good, working connections with understanding employers ensured that there was flexibility in the employers' expectations of young people. For instance, employers identified through this strategy were more likely to allow a phased approach to employment, allowing a young person to start on reduced hours and build up to full-time hours over a six-week period, or having a guaranteed interview at the end of a trial period. Similarly, some organisations will act as a mediator between the employer and the young person if any issues arise to ensure a higher chance of retention in the labour market.



## Recommendations for policy

1. Whilst waiting times for NHS mental health services remain long, funding for NEET programmes should include **allocations for young people to access private mental health support**, such as talking therapies. As we explained in section one, the negative effects of being NEET can cause 'scars' across the life course and cause or exacerbate mental health conditions. Providing swift mental health intervention for this young age group should therefore be a priority to prevent the severity of conditions increasing and reduce burden on services later on.
2. **Evaluate the fees and funding structures of supported/semi-independent accommodation** to ensure they do not act to directly prohibit young people from entering or staying in employment. When doing this, consult with young people who live in foyers to gain their first-hand expertise.
3. **Review accommodation allocation for care leavers** in each Local Authority to ensure that young people are, as far as possible, able to stay within their local area after age 18 or 21, to enable them to apply their knowledge of the local area to find suitable EET next steps.
4. All local authorities should **consistently provide ring-fenced employment opportunities** for care leavers within their organisation or partner organisations.
5. Provide **fully funded trauma-informed and mental health training** for small-to-medium businesses, to equip them with the tools to take on and support NEET young people who may have mental health issues.

This research has been undertaken  
in partnership with ERSA:



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