



Here for young people
Here for communities
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Working on it

Personal experiences of young
people in supported housing
trying to enter employment

September 2026



Everyone should have a fair chance to discover who they are and what they can become.

About YMCA

YMCA believes in fairness and opportunity. There are essential building blocks for a full and rewarding life: a safe home; acceptance; guidance; friendship; physical and mental health; academic support; employment skills; and access to real opportunities. Many young people have never known these things; other people have lost one or more as they grew up, but we all need them. All of us. At YMCA, we provide these critical foundations for a fresh, strong start for young people and a better quality of life in the community.

For any questions about this report, please contact policy@ymca.org.uk.

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Summary

NEET, meaning Not in Education, Employment or Training, is only a status which does not cover the depths of experiences and positions young people are in when looking for work. This is even more pronounced in supported housing, where young people may have faced difficulties or trauma, putting further blocks between themselves and employment.

The following diagram shows different categories that young people in YMCA supported housing fall into, as revealed by a survey of more than 270 residents from across England and Wales. Through identifying these groups and their distance from entering employment, the right support can be given from the JobCentre, employers and other state agencies to help those who may be furthest from work feel like they can belong, contribute and thrive in the workplace.

From categories to a pathway

A young person may move between these categories as their circumstances change. For example, someone whose health currently prevents them from working may, after receiving the right treatment and undertaking a work placement, become ready for employment. Someone missing a qualification may need only a short course before becoming job-ready. Someone working ten hours a week may need changes to Housing Benefit and help securing additional hours before they can move towards independent living.

The purpose of employment support should therefore be to identify the next barrier and the next step, rather than applying the same blanket intervention to every young person who happens to be NEET.

Supported housing resident employability profiles

Group 1: When work feels out of reach

Who are they?	This is a fairly small group, but among them are different reasons why they may not want to work. Some have mental or physical health conditions that will be exacerbated by work, others are parents to young children, some are young and in the asylum system. A third are from families where neither parent or carer worked when they were growing up. More than half have worked before.
What barriers do they face?	Some have severe mental health challenges where entering work will have a dangerous impact on their wellbeing. They have become disenfranchised by the job-searching experience with little success. Their previous experience in the workplace ended negatively (making mental health worse, an unfriendly environment) or was short-term
What would help?	Positive role models – Give young people access to people who can provide guidance, broaden their horizons and demonstrate the opportunities employment can create. Peer employment mentors – Connect young people with someone who has recently been in a similar position - including former supported-housing residents who have moved into employment and independence. Trusted engagement outside the Jobcentre – Commission youth workers and trusted voluntary and community organisations to engage young people who are furthest from employment. The initial relationship does not always need to be explicitly about getting a job. As in good youth work, activities such as sport, creative programmes or volunteering can provide the route through which trust, confidence and aspiration are built. YMCA has had success with JobCentres co-located within their services, allowing residents to engage with support in a trusted environment with tailored youth support.

Group 2: When health is holding someone back

Who are they?	They are on health-related benefits (PIP, LCW, LCWRA). They predominantly have mental health conditions, some have neurodivergences and a smaller group have physical health conditions. They do not feel well enough to work and do not think this will change. They are not considering how hard it might be to get a job as they are removed from the process.
What barriers do they face?	They worry that working will make their mental or physical health worse, or that this prevents them from being able to work. They feel less confident in themselves and their skills when it comes to entering work, and less likely to feel ready to keep a routine, write a CV or do interviews. They perceive trying to find a job they may want at as very hard. They are more likely to worry about being able to retain work once in it, either through employers not being able to adapt to their needs, or being fired.
What would help?	Low-risk exposure to work – Expand volunteering, work tasters and supported work-experience placements. These can build experience while also reducing anxiety about entering a workplace and allowing young people to discover what they are capable of without immediately risking their financial security. Faster and more appropriate health support – Employment policy cannot succeed if young people are waiting months for the treatment that would enable them to participate. Reducing waiting times, ensuring sufficient duration and intensity of treatment, expanding community mental-health provision and making better use of social prescribing should be viewed as part of the employment response. Jobs designed to accommodate health needs – Support employers to offer flexible starts, gradual increases in hours and reasonable workplace adjustments. Government should explore whether additional financial support for adjustments could remove perceived costs and risks for employers recruiting young people with more complex needs. In-work progression coaching – Support should not end on the first day of employment. Young people who need it should have access to a work or progression coach who can help them navigate workplace problems, adjustments and relationships with employers, and ultimately help them stay in work. A genuine Right to Try – Young people receiving health-related benefits should be able to test if employment works for them without fearing an unsuccessful attempt will leave them without the support they previously relied upon.

Group 3: A step or two away

Who are they?	They need either GCSE qualifications or more industry-specific courses. They want to work but don't know what type of job they want. They would consider apprenticeships but don't know what's available in their area, or what they would do an apprenticeship in.
What barriers do they face?	They are less certain about what type of job they want not only today, but are unsure about what career they would like more long-term. Affording the cost of the course or exam fee they need to do can prevent them from getting these qualifications. Some struggled in the classroom during education and worry about returning to gain the qualifications they need.
What would help?	Remove unnecessary qualification barriers – Review entry requirements for courses and apprenticeships and expand genuinely accessible entry-level provision for young people who are not yet ready for Level 2 or Level 3 study. Remove the financial barrier to qualifications – Young people receiving Universal Credit should have free access to qualifications where these would materially improve their employment prospects. Government could also explore a training guarantee or repayable training bond for courses not covered by existing provision, with repayment beginning only once someone is earning. Rapid-access employment qualifications – Jobcentres should maintain access to commonly required local qualifications and certificates – for example health and safety or sector-specific entry requirements – so a young person can be booked quickly rather than navigating providers and discretionary funding each time a vacancy arises. Careers guidance connected to the real labour market – Young people need meaningful exposure to different occupations and advice based on actual local opportunities, rather than simply information about possible careers. Link qualifications directly to jobs – Government should work with employers to create qualification-to-interview pathways, where completing an agreed course or certificate guarantees a young person an interview or work trial. Specialist post-16 education funding – Government should increase funding so that providers can provide more specialist one-to-one support and smaller class sizes for young people who struggle to succeed in mainstream education, particularly those with SEND or mental health challenges or are aged over 19.

Group 4 - Ready to work, but locked out

Who are they?	They are engaged in the job search process. They're applying for roles – often many – but are unsuccessful. They either know what they want to do, or will take whatever's available. They have not always found the JobCentre useful in searches for work.
What barriers do they face?	They are sending out plenty of job applications but are seldom receiving feedback if unsuccessful. They are held back by their local labour market, with not many opportunities in their area or finding a job that they want. Some are young parents who would like to work, but feel unable to because of having young children.
What would help?	Direct employment opportunities – Create a bank of genuinely entry-level roles which do not require previous experience or unnecessary qualifications and into which eligible young people can be directly referred. These opportunities should reduce reliance on automated recruitment and repeated online applications, instead offering a guaranteed interview, work trial or other direct route to an employer, stopping people applying for hundreds of jobs and never hearing back. Incentivise employers to create opportunities – Learn from programmes such as Kickstart and provide targeted incentives for employers that recruit young people who have been out of work for a sustained period. Support should encourage genuine additional jobs and sustainable employment rather than short-term placements alone. Make Jobcentres employment brokers – Work coaches should be able to connect young people directly to real vacancies and employers, not simply support them to make more applications. Success should be measured by whether the right young person reaches the right opportunity. Remove childcare barriers before work begins – Explore extending childcare support to prospective workers where childcare is required to attend interviews, training, work experience or begin employment. Support that only becomes available after someone has secured work can itself become a barrier to getting there.

Group 5 – In work, but unable to progress

Who are they?	They are currently working, typically a part-time or zero-hours contract. They would like to work more hours but are currently unable to. Some took the job they have because they needed to accept any job offered, or were not offered a role by anywhere else they applied.
What barriers do they face?	They are prevented from working more than 12 hours per week because of a 65% taper on Housing Benefit, where full-time hours could lead to barely any of their salary in their pocket. Some would like to work full-time but could only get a part-time or zero-hours job. For others, looking after young children as a single parent can make it difficult to work more hours, as funded childcare hours for working parents start at a similar earnings threshold to when the Housing Benefit taper kicks in.
What would help?	Make additional hours pay – Reform the interaction between earnings and Housing Benefit for supported housing residents so that taking additional hours cannot leave someone financially worse off. Young people should be able to see clearly what they will gain before agreeing to additional work. Provide in-work progression support – Employment support should continue for young people who want more hours, a more secure contract or a better-paid job. The objective should be progression from limited employment towards financial independence. This may also open up part-time, low hours work, which could benefit more people unable to work full-time. Create the jobs young people need – Ultimately, employment programmes cannot compensate for a shortage of vacancies or hours. National and local growth strategies should consider how investment translates into accessible entry-level jobs and progression opportunities for young people, and the transport and infrastructure that goes with it.

Headline findings

Preparing for work

- **Three-quarters of those reporting physical or mental health conditions, or neurodivergences, are NEET.** Young people with these experiences are likely in need of more tailored and targeted support to help them feel ready to enter employment, education or training.
- **Only 16% of NEETs in supported housing said that they don't want to work.** The vast majority of this group have mental health conditions, and around a third were from workless households.
- **Half (54%) of those not in work, education or training are looking for work at the moment,** with earning money cited as the biggest driver to enter employment.
- **The majority of those in work are doing so part-time, although half would like to work full time but are unable to.** This was because either doing so meant they risk losing their Housing Benefit, or they were unable to find a full-time job, leading to underemployment.
- **Two-fifths of respondents in work chose their job because they needed to accept any job offered,** and a third were not offered a role by anywhere else they applied.
- **Three-in-five of those not in employment, education or training would like to have a job at the moment,** although the proportion of those not in receipt of health related benefits that would like a job (73%) was double that of those who receive health-related benefits (73%).
- **A third of those not in employment on health-related benefits do not feel well enough to work at the moment and do not think this will change in the next few years.** This is a high proportion of those on benefits that have no hope in their health to improve to the point of working, or to envision how a job could be adapted to fit to their needs or condition.

Barriers to work

- **More than half of NEET respondents that don't receive health-related benefits feel ready to work part-time,** but feel less ready for employability steps like having the qualifications they need or doing an interview.
- **Significantly fewer of those receiving health-related benefits are ready for various elements of job searching and applications.** This may be due to not

having the practice of doing so, but indicates the extra support this group will need to enter work across both their self-belief and skills.

- **A quarter of all NEET respondents not in employment, education or training said they need either GCSE Maths or GCSE English to get a job, with slightly more needing GCSE Maths.**
- **The biggest barrier for young people getting the qualifications they need for work is their mental health, followed by affording the course or exam fee.**
- **Three-quarters of respondents who are NEET have previously had a job, although these were typically held for less than a year.**
- **A third of NEETs who previously had jobs cited their mental health as a reason why they left it, either by affecting their ability to work or that working made their mental health worse.**
- **Half of NEET respondents cited labour market issues as stopping them from starting work, with not many job opportunities in their area and not being able to find the job they want.**
- **More of those not in work who are not actively looking think it will be hard to get the type of job they want at the moment than those who currently are.** While this could represent a perception of fear compared to reality, this may be based on previous experiences of looking for work or not being in a place where it is easy to imagine working.
- **A third of those not in work had employability barriers, such as not feeling ready to work or not knowing the type of job they want.**
- **A fifth had worries about retaining employment, including fears of being fired or not thinking that an employer would adapt to their needs.**
- **Both those in employment and out of work were more likely to see the JobCentre as putting up barriers to get into employment rather than helpful to do so. More of those in work considered it a barrier (39%) than those not (30%).**
- **A third of those in receipt of health-related benefits do not feel well enough to work and don't think this will change in the next few years.**
- **While two-fifths of out of work respondents are interested in starting an apprenticeship, the biggest barriers for starting one are not finding any in what they want to do where they live, or not knowing what to do an apprenticeship in.**

Enablers to work

- The most-wanted singular intervention to support them into work amongst those not in employment, education or training was their Housing Benefit not being affected when they earn money, as selected by a third.
- Almost half of NEET respondents thought workplace adjustments could help support them into work, such as employers understanding their needs before they start work, starting on part-time hours, and opportunities for flexible working.
- Two-fifths wanted some form of employability support, such as help with finding a suitable job, and help with CV applications and job interviews.
- Three-tenths wanted help with training and qualifications such as GCSEs, Level 3 qualifications and training that feeds into a job.
- A quarter felt changes in the local labour market could help them get into work, such as more job opportunities in their area and better or more reliable public transport to where jobs are.
- One-in-six wanted health-related support, such as access to talking therapies and medical treatment.
- Those currently in work cited a good relationship with their line manager they can talk to as something their employer has done to help them stay in their job, as well as being understanding about their mental health difficulties. Both these underline the importance of a supportive and personalised work environment and empathetic managers to guide those who are coming into the workplace from complex backgrounds.

Introduction

The issue of young people not in employment, education and training is nothing new. Since the first use of the acronym NEET in the 1990s, it has carried the association of youngsters not engaging in their futures.

Since then, the number of young people counted as not in work, training or learning topped one million for the first time since 2013 earlier this year.¹

While many programmes, schemes and legislation have been enacted over the past several decades to bring these young people into employment, or prevent them from becoming 'NEET', these have often been small-scale and short-term, with numbers only once falling below 700,000 since the start of the millennium.

To address this growing cohort of young people, the Labour government recruited former minister Alan Milburn to conduct a review into the drivers of youth unemployment, and recommendations to help these young people into good jobs, education and training.

The first part of Milburn's review, published in May 2026, was unlike any investigation before into the issue in terms of the breadths of drivers inspected: the labour market, education, healthcare and the structure of the welfare system.² It also emphasised that although NEET is a status, it is not a homogenous category, covering those with health conditions, care leavers, young parents, different education levels and backgrounds. All young people carrying the NEET label are similarly not all immediately ready to enter the workforce, just waiting for an opportunity to arise. Some have had confidence depleted after endless rejections; others dropped out of an unsuitable course and never got the qualifications they need. There are others who are simply not able to work, through physical or mental health challenges for example, who have more to overcome before the ability to contemplate working in the present, if ever.

While many distinct groups who have distinct challenges to entering the workforce were discussed in Milburn's report, no attention was given to young people living in supported housing. As the biggest charitable provider of housing for young people facing homelessness, YMCA knows that young people receiving the support they need to enter independent living have experiences, stories and challenges that many others not in employment, education or training will not have to face.

¹ Office for National Statistics, [Young people not in education, employment or training \(NEET\)](#), 28 May 2026

² Department for Work and Pensions, [Young people and work: interim report](#), 28 May 2026

This report brings together the views of young people in YMCA housing both in work, education or neither, as well as the experience of housing managers, key workers and progression coaches in trying to help their young people make their way through these extra complications.

Milburn's recommendations are expected in September 2026, which will urge various government departments to enact what could be deeper interventions and changes than ever previously attempted. Given this report's findings on the extra challenges young people in supported housing face, and suggestions on how to overcome these barriers, YMCA hopes that this group's needs form part of any action plan moving forwards.

Methodology

Focus groups were conducted with 31 YMCA housing and employment managers and key workers in March 2026 on their views of how the young people they support are finding entering the workplace, and how accessible the employability system is in their area.

The key themes from these sessions were used to design a survey for residents in YMCA housing, which also incorporated aspects of the interim Milburn report.

The survey was completed by 272 residents aged 16-24 living at 23 local YMCAs in England and Wales.

Young people in supported housing

What makes their experiences different?

Young people living in supported housing have both personal and systemic challenges to enter the workplace.

As implied in the name, residents require more intensive support to ready them for independent living, with the aim of living in supported housing for a few years while they rebuild their confidence, learn life skills and building resilience to move on.

The most common reason young people move into YMCA housing is because their family are no longer willing or able to support them: often family breakdown, but also overcrowding, loss of a family member, or parents or carers leaving the area. In some instances, young people are leaving their family or cohabiting home because of violence, harassment or abuse, or a non-violent relationship breakdown with a partner. Young people also move into YMCA after leaving the care system, or after turning 18 from an unaccompanied asylum-seeking child. Some residents come to live at YMCA because of poor mental health and not being able to maintain their previous occupancy. Some have moved into YMCA because they were evicted or asked to leave by their landlord.

While the reasons young people come to YMCA are varied, many residents are managing difficulties in several aspects of their life in order to be best prepared for life afterwards. They may have experienced a range of adverse childhood experiences, have mental health needs or neurodivergences, or had a disruptive or difficult time in education. While some just need the time and space to settle, others have more to overcome before being ready to enter the workplace.

And when they are ready, getting a job may not be so simple. This goes beyond their individual situations: there may be a certain stigma amongst employers if they see on an application that someone lives in supported housing, for example. Most notable however is the financial cost that comes to residents who work more than part-time hours because of complications in the welfare system.

Supported housing rents are higher than average market rents because of the supported element, 24-hour staffing and the facilities to help them learn skills for independent living. These are typically covered by Housing Benefit. When a resident works more than around 12 hours per week, their income is tapered at 65% of every £1 earned, higher than the 55% for Universal Credit. Accordingly, a resident working could only receive a portion of their earnings in-hand, or for those working more hours, have all their earnings swallowed by rent costs – sometimes to the point of debt. While the Government declared in its 2025 Autumn Budget that it would

introduce new income disregards for residents of supported housing, these will not be enacted until 5 October 2026, with details not released at the time of writing.³ Changes to the Housing Benefit system for supported housing residents is long-needed and greatly appreciated, but the numerical details will determine how useful this change is to allow supported housing residents to enter the workplace without fear of income-stripping.

Residents typically live in supported housing for a few years before moving on to independent living. Housing staff told us that historically they would move into social housing afterwards, but increased demand in some local authorities and prioritisation of allocation has prolonged this pathway at best, or at worst made it impossible. In years gone by, residents who were ready to move on could soon be allocated a social home and start working once settled, without having to face the Housing Benefit taper. Now, with private rented accommodation often becoming the only viable option, housing staff see that residents need to work while still in supported housing so they can save for a deposit, and also have an income stream once they have moved out. Getting a job while in supported housing is more than just about the personal benefits of work. It can unlock the road to independent living, which in turn can empty the space to allow a young person in need to start their own journey in supported housing.

Who we spoke to

We had 272 residents aged 16-24 from 23 YMCAs respond to our survey, living across England and Wales.

Age

The smallest age group represented was those aged 16-17 (7%), as not all YMCAs provide accommodation for this age group. The majority of respondents were aged 18-21 (58%), and a third (33%) were aged 22-24.

Employment status

Around one in eight (13%) respondents were currently in work and 25% in education. Only 2% (five respondents) were in training, so given this sample size this group has not been separated in analysis and instead incorporated into the group in education. Six-in-ten (60%) are not in employment, education or training.

³ Department of Work and Pensions, Supported housing residents to keep more of what they earn under new rules, [6 July 2026](#)

Amongst these age groups, those aged 16-17 were most likely to be in education or training (58%), falling to 32% for 18- to 21-year-olds and 11% for those aged 22-24. While broadly similar proportions of 18-21s and 22-24s were working (15% and 13% respectively), three-quarters (75%) of those aged 22-24 were not in employment or training – compared to half (53%) of those aged 18-21.

Age group	Working	Education or training	NEET
16-17	5%	58%	37%
18-21	15%	32%	53%
22-24	13%	11%	75%
All ages	13%	26%	60%

Length at YMCA

Two-thirds of respondents (65%) had been living at a YMCA for less than a year. A quarter (25%) had lived at YMCA for between one and three years, and 9% had lived at a YMCA for three or more years. This is typical of tenure lengths in supported housing, with contracts typically for two years to help a young person settle and learn the skills to live independently.

Benefits

Four-fifths (83%) of respondents reported being in receipt of Universal Credit, and 62% reported receiving Housing Benefit. While Housing Benefit is typically required for supported housing residents, some will not receive this because of working full-time; others because of their immigration status as an asylum seeker; others may not consider themselves receiving it as it is paid directly to their YMCA.

A fifth (21%) of residents receive personal independent payments (PIP), a health-related benefit to support individuals with disabilities and health conditions to live independently. Seven per cent have a Lower Capability for Work (LCW) status given to them by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), where they have lower requirements in terms of job searches and applications, and 7% receive Lower Capability for Work and Work-Related Activity (LCWRA), which means individuals are not required to look for work.

A further 7% reported not receiving any benefits.

Health conditions

More than half of respondents (56%) reported either having, awaiting a diagnosis of, have a diagnosis or are receiving support for a mental health condition.

More than one in three (37%) reported the same for neurodivergences such as autism or ADHD, and one in six reported a physical health condition.

For those reporting having some form of condition, less than half are in receipt of a health-related benefits (PIP, LCW or LCWRA). Strikingly, of those who report some level of a condition, three-quarters are not in employment, education or training.

	Have condition; in receipt of health-related benefit	Have condition; are NEET
Physical health condition	40%	75%
Mental health condition	37%	74%
Neurodivergences	47%	74%

Education

Around one-sixth (16%) of respondents spent some of their education outside of the standard schooling system, which was constant across all employment and education statuses. Amongst all respondents, 12% attended an Alternative Education school, 7% respectively were homeschooled or attended an online school (not including the Covid-19 pandemic), and 5% attended a pupil referral unit.

While 3% of those in employment left education before turning 16, 17% of those currently in education or training and 18% of those who are NEET left before then.

Qualifications

A quarter (24%) of all respondents have no formal qualifications, although a higher proportion of those who are NEET (29%) had none compared to those currently in education or training (21%) or currently in work (11%). This is higher than the proportion of residents aged 16 and over reporting no qualifications in the 2021 Census (18%).⁴

More than a third had entry-level qualifications (36%), although a fifth (21%) of all respondents only had these.

For GCSE Maths and English at grade 4-9 / A*-C, 36% had Maths and 35% had English, and 28% had both. The group most likely to have both was those in work (38%), followed by those who are NEET (32%), with lowest levels amongst those currently in education or training (15%).

A quarter (25%) of all respondents had Level 3 qualifications – either an Award, Certificate or Diploma, NVQ, Advanced Apprenticeship, T Levels or AS / A Levels.

Work status of parents

Two-thirds (66%) of respondents had at least one parent or carer in work when they were growing up. For those currently in employment or training, 81% had this. A

⁴ Office for National Statistics, [Education, England and Wales: Census 2021](#), 10 January 2023

higher proportion of those who are NEET had neither parent or carer in work growing up (18%) compared to those in work (8%) or in education or training (10%).

This generational worklessness can be difficult for YMCA housing staff to challenge. Some young people have normalised not working and can be viewed as foolish by family members for wanting to do so, or find the prospect of a career or working as unattainable or scary. Young people's key workers try many different ways to highlight that they can improve their lives in comparison to their parents, promote their strengths and how they can perform and thrive in the workplace, but can sometimes be challenging to change their thinking on this.

Volunteering

Almost two-fifths (38%) of respondents have done volunteering for work experience (33% previously and 5% currently). These proportions are fairly similar across those both in work and those who are NEET.

Preparing for work

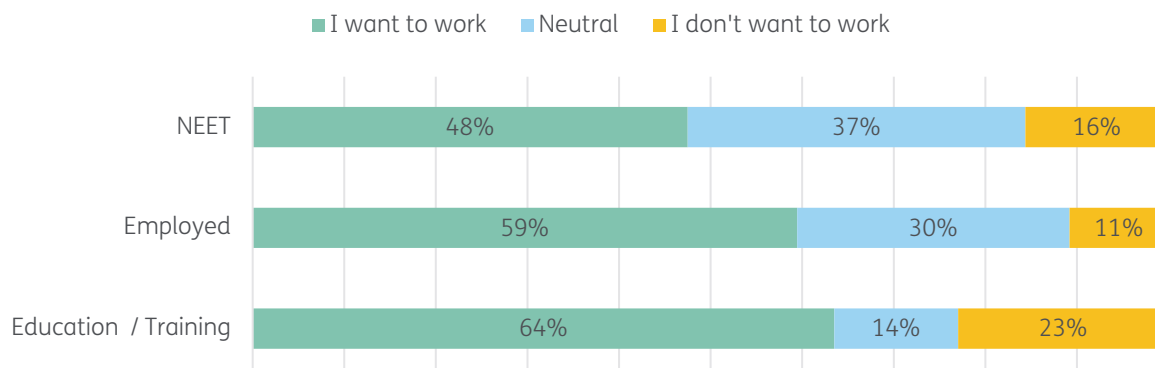
Wanting to work

Around half (48%) of respondents who are NEET want to work, with one in six (16%) expressing that they do not want to work. This rises to 59% of those employed wanting to work, and 64% of those in education and training.

Looking at the one-sixth of NEET respondents who do not want to work, around a third are from households where neither parent worked in their childhood.

What is concerning is that almost a quarter (23%) of those in education do not want to work. Upon finishing their studies, there is a risk of becoming NEET if more is not done to promote the benefits of entering work. Almost all have mental health conditions and do not feel well enough to work. Some had childcare responsibilities, and some were young and in the asylum system.

Which of the following statements best matches your view on working?



n=271

For respondents currently in education, entering the workplace straight after gaining the qualifications they are studying for is far from the desired path.

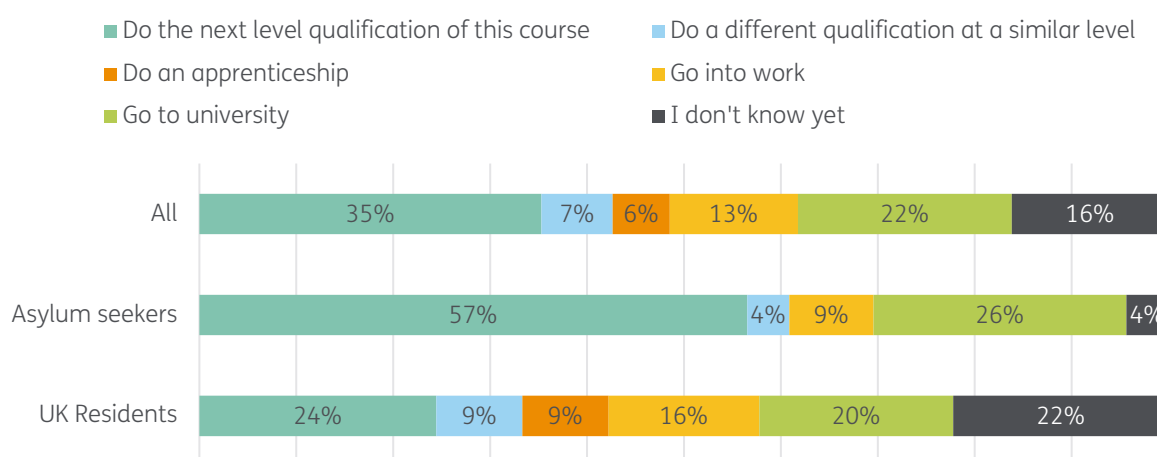
Two-thirds (65%) want to continue their education through either the next level qualification, a different qualification or go to university. Only one in eight (13%) want to go into work, with a further 6% wanting to do an apprenticeship.

There are considerable differences between the hopes of residents who were previously unaccompanied asylum seeking children (UASC) but have aged out of the care system, and those who are not. The large majority (87%) of asylum seekers want to remain in education, which may be due to not having the ability to work until their asylum status has been granted. They also may want the qualifications

they either did not have access to in their home country, or to get qualifications recognised in the UK.

More than a fifth (22%) of those in education that are not seeking asylum do not know what they want to do next. As a young person in supported housing, sometimes working out the next steps can be complicated when contending with the challenges of trying to get the many elements of everyday life ahead, from mental health to where to live next. Education establishments should provide targeted help to students who live in supported housing to help work out what to do next to best prepare themselves for whatever pathway, and ensuring they do not become NEET upon gaining qualifications.

What do you hope to do after you've finished this course?



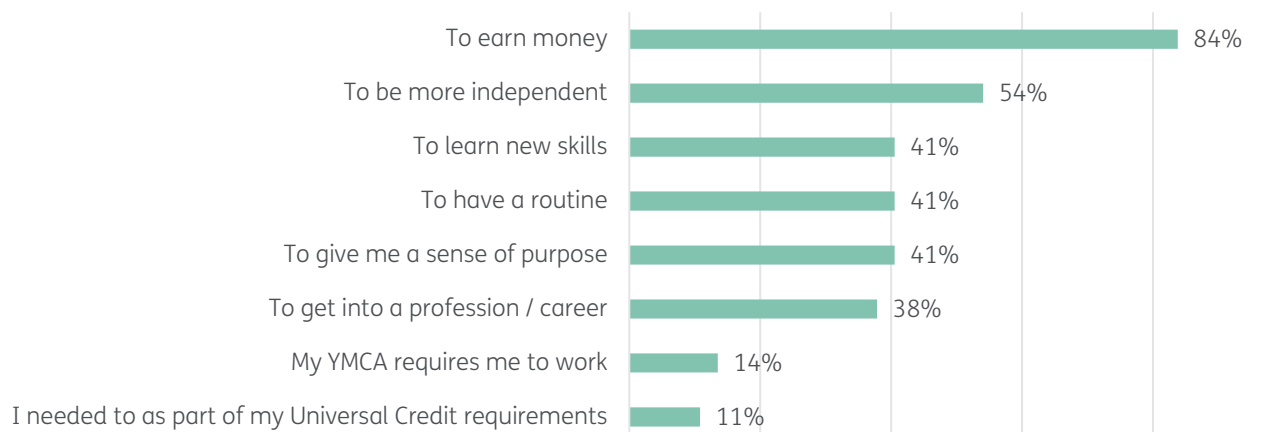
n=68

Motivations for working

Just over half (54%) of those not working or in education are currently looking for work. The biggest motivation for doing so (84%) is earning money. Other significant drivers are on personal development: improving themselves (63%), being more independent (54%) and learning new skills (51%). More than half of respondents (51%) are motivated by filling their time. Living in supported housing whilst not in work or education can have limited structure other than key worker meetings and engagement in skills sessions and enrichment.

These motivations are incredibly similar amongst respondents who are currently in work. Five-in-six (84%) were motivated to start work to earn money, and more than half (54%) to be independent. Only a small amount did so because of Universal Credit requirements or as a stipulation of their YMCA tenancy.

What made you want to start working? (In employment)



n=37

Part-time role preferences

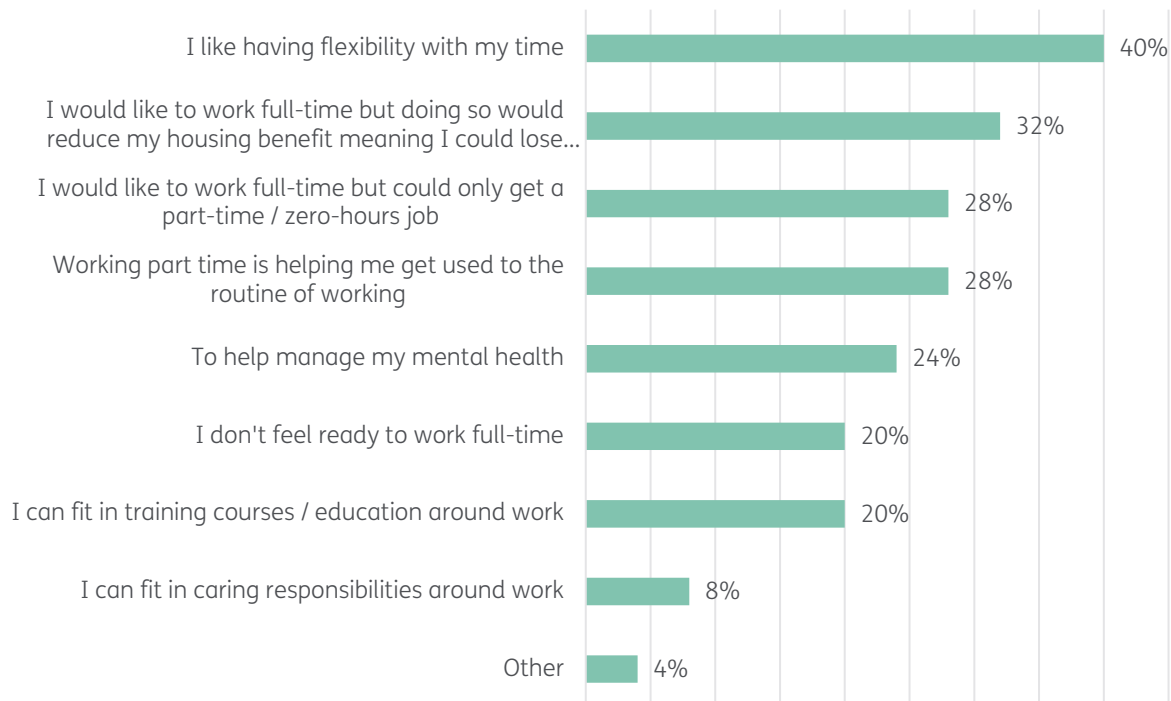
The minority of respondents in employment were working full-time (14%). Those in part time roles were split between those working 15-30 hours per week (19%) and less than 15 hours per week (32%). The final third (35%) of roles were zero-hours contracts.

Although a small sample, more than a quarter (28%) cited that working part-time is helping them get used to the routine of working, and 20% don't feel ready to work full-time. The most frequently-cited reason was having flexibility with their time (40%), followed by wanting to work full-time but doing so would reduce Housing Benefit, leading to losing money (please see "Young people in supported housing" section for a detailed explanation of this).

What is also notable is that for 28% of respondents in work, they would like to work full-time but could only get part-time or zero hours roles. These young people would work longer hours if the economic conditions allowed employers to increase jobs and hours.

Combined, the Housing Benefit taper and inability to find full-time work meant that half of those in work (52%) are underemployed – that is, they would like to work more but are unable to do so because of external factors.

If you are working part-time or on a zero-hours contract, which of the following statements best applies to having these work patterns rather than full-time?



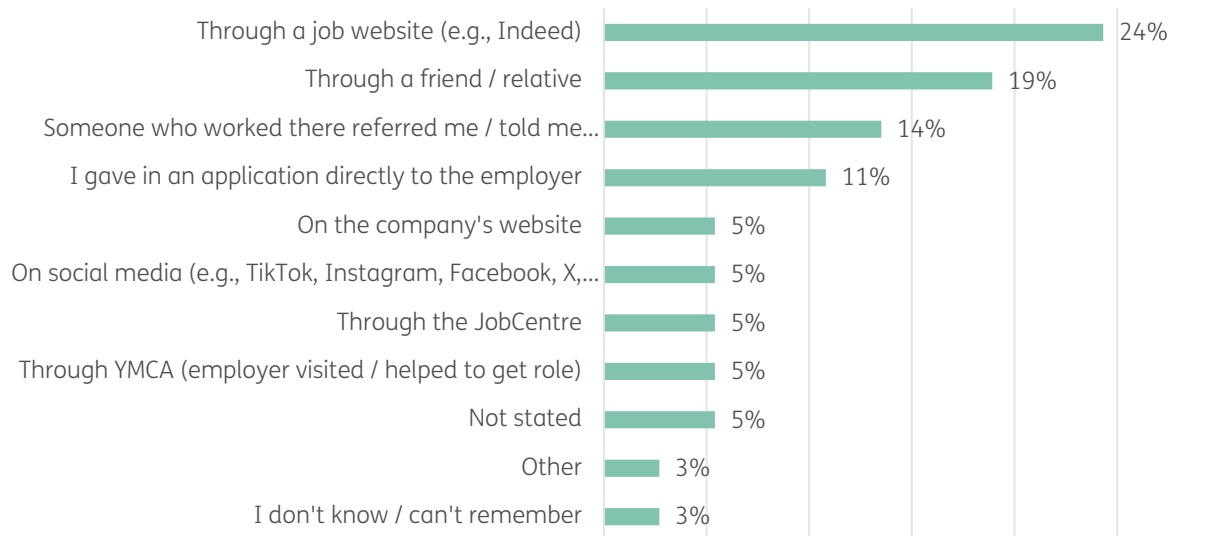
n=25

Jobsearching

A quarter (24%) of those in employment found their job through a job website, one-in-ten gave an application directly to the employer (11%) and 5% found the job on the company's website.

Comparatively, a third found their job through personal connections: either through a friend or relative (19%) or someone who worked there referred them or told them about the role (14%).

How did you find this job?



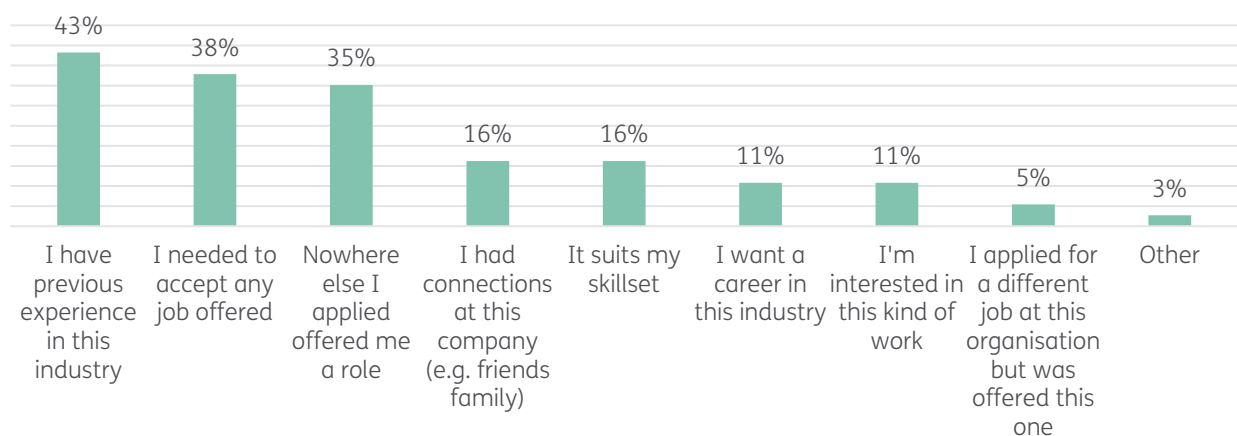
n=37

Choosing a job

The most commonly cited reason for choosing a job was because of previous experience in that industry (43%), an advantage for those who had worked before. Although this is a positive reason for choosing a job, the second and third biggest reasons were somewhat less so: 38% needed to accept any job offered, and 35% were not offered a role by anywhere else they applied. This indicates a lack of autonomy or choice in choosing roles, instead being dictated by necessity.

Only 11% respectively said they chose this job because they want a career in this industry, and that they're interested in this kind of work.

Why did you choose this job?



n=37

The most common type of job held by those in employment was in hospitality, with a third (32%) doing so. A fifth (19%) worked in retail; kitchen, cleaning and warehouse roles were held by 5%. Some respondents worked in more specialised roles, with single respondents working in early years, mechanics, support work and youth work.

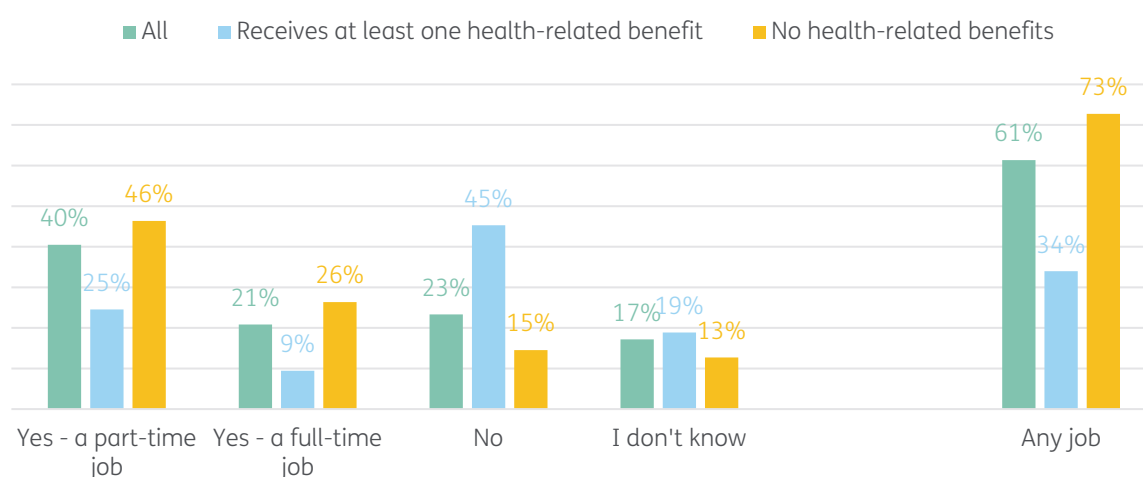
Wanting – and ability – to work

Three-in-five (61%) respondents who were NEET would like to have a job at the moment, split between 40% wanting a part-time job and 21% wanting a full-time job. A quarter (23%) did not want a job.

The proportion of respondents who would like to have a job differed amongst those that were in receipt of some kind of health-related benefit (PIP, LCW or LCWRA) and those not. Almost three-quarters of those not in receipt of a health-related benefit would like either a part-time or full-time job. The desire to work is there, but as will be discussed later in this report, the opportunities and ability to do so are not always so allowing.

Comparatively, only 36% of those respondents who receive a health-related benefit would like to have a job (25% part-time, 9% full-time) and almost half (45%) would not like to.

Would you like to have a job at the moment?



n=163

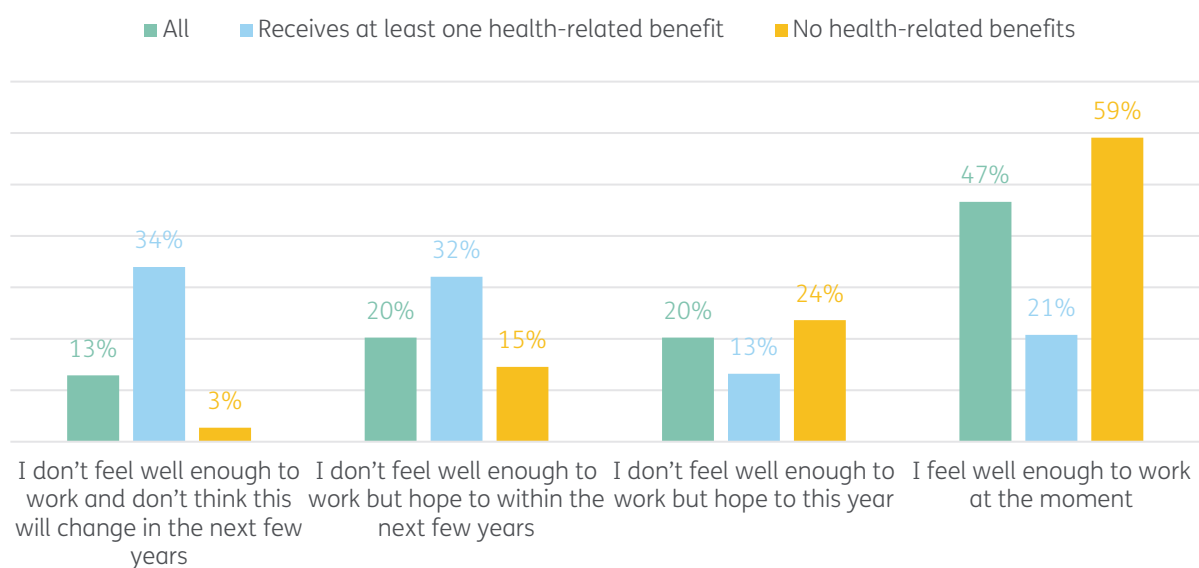
PIP payments can be used to support additional daily living costs that come with health conditions and disabilities, but also can be used to supplement the additional costs of working for claimants. LCW and LCWRA however are for those who are assessed as their health limiting their ability to work. Changes introduced in April 2026 means new claimants get lower payments, and there are currently

consultations as part of the Government's Timms Review that may stop under-22s from applying for this benefit.

For young people in supported housing in receipt of these benefits, it is not as simple as whether they would like to work – it is how able they feel to do so.

Three-fifths (59%) of respondents not receiving health-related benefits feel well enough to work at the moment, compared to just a fifth (21%) of those who receive health-related benefits. While the majority of those not receiving health-related benefits who don't feel well enough to work at the moment hope they will be able to do so this year (24%), the majority of those not well enough to work at the moment in receipt of health-related benefits do not think this will change in the next few years (34%). This is a high proportion of those on benefits that have no hope in their health improving to the point of working, or envision how a job could be adapted to fit to their needs or condition. To help those furthest away from work to enter the workplace, interventions must involve personal support alongside access to healthcare to look after the whole person rather than their employment statistical value.

Which of the following best describes how you feel?



n=163

Barriers to work

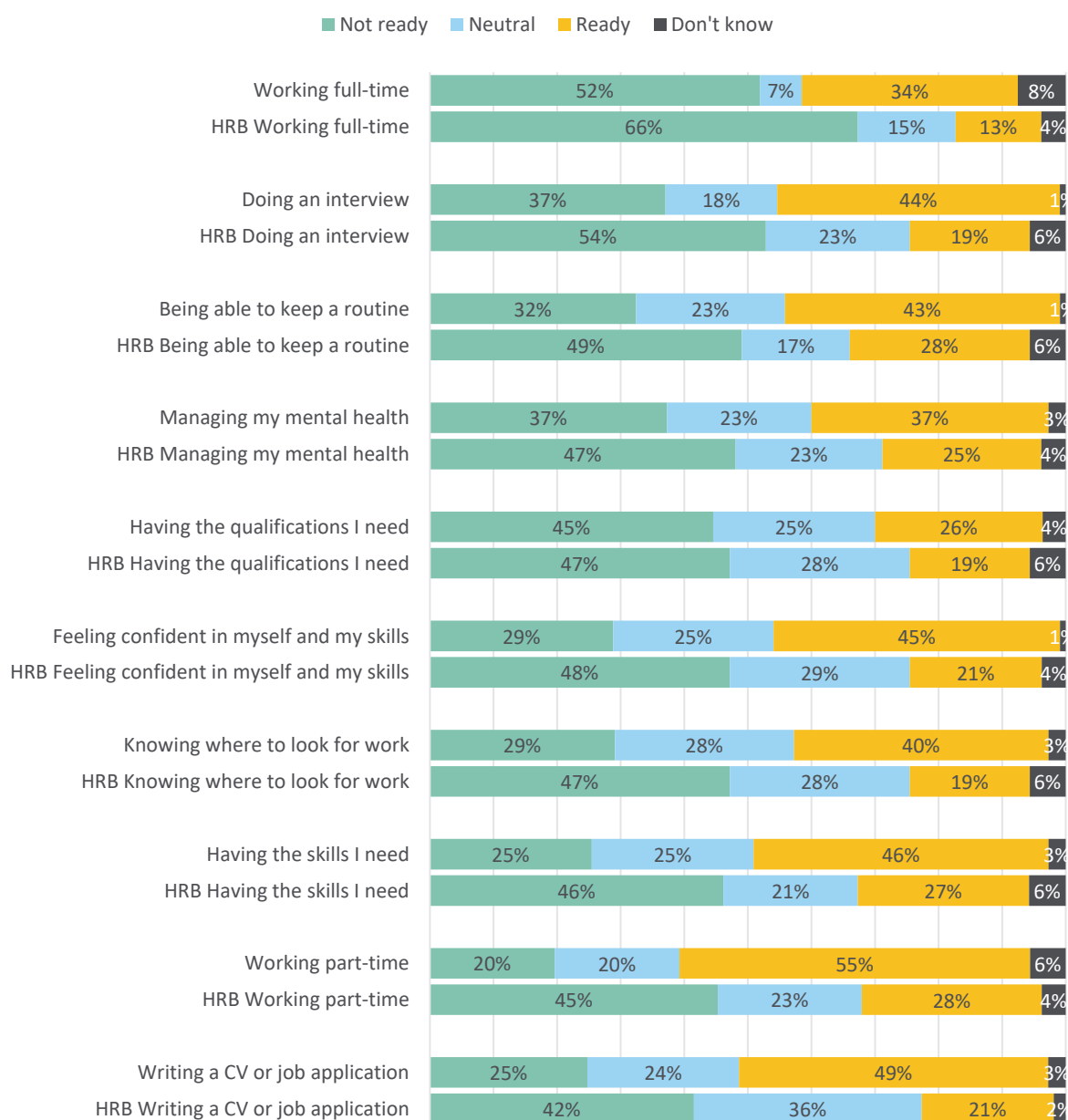
Readiness to work

Respondents were asked to rate their readiness to enter employment based on their abilities, qualifications, skills and knowledge to do so. Two-thirds (66%) of respondents receiving health-related benefits (HRB) did not feel ready to work full time, compared to two-fifths of those not receiving health-related benefits (No HRB). Comparatively, more than half of those not receiving health-related benefits felt ready to work part-time, compared to just 28% of those on health-related benefits.

Whilst a higher proportion of respondents not receiving health-related benefits were more ready across the various elements below than those who do receive these, it is notable that even within this group, less than half feel ready in the steps required to get a job. This falls to around a quarter of those receiving health related benefits feeling ready. This reflects the need for the employability and careers help offered in supported housing. It is not as easy as getting a job: the stages to get there for young people in supported housing can sometimes be a significant hurdle.

A similar proportion of both groups did not feel ready in terms of the qualifications they need, whereas more of those on health related benefits did not feel ready across all other aspects. This gap in readiness between these two groups indicate the extra support that those on health related benefits who are able to work will need, across many different aspects of their own self-belief and employability skills.

How ready do you feel to enter employment in the following areas?



n=161

Qualifications needed

Two-fifths (42%) of respondents not in employment, education or training reported needing qualifications they don't already have to get into employment. Within this group, half (48%) needed by GCSE Maths and 42% needed GCSE English, and 19% needed other GCSEs. Combined, a fifth (23%) of all NEET respondents not in employment, education or training need either GCSE Maths or GCSE English to get a job.

While a fifth (20%) of those needing qualifications required entry-level qualifications, one-in-six (17%) cited a university degree as the qualification they needed to get into employment.

The biggest challenge those needing qualifications to enter work felt about being able to achieve these was their mental health, as stated by just under half (45%) of all respondents. YMCA staff explained that the mental health need within their housing provision has greatly increased over the last several years, particularly since the Covid-19 pandemic. This is affecting residents' ability to develop and enter independence, and access to support and treatment will need to be improved to give them the best chance to take the next steps towards moving into employment.

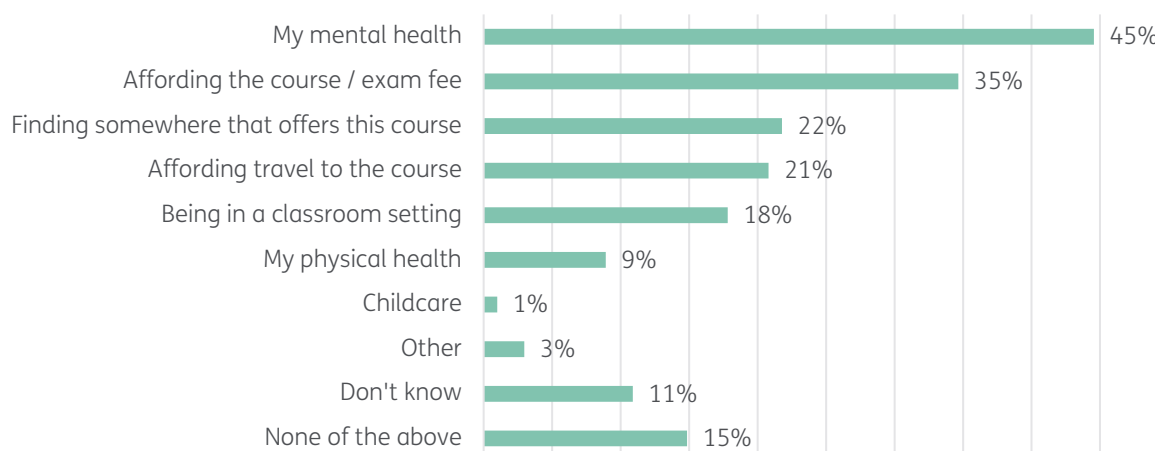
What is also a significant challenge is affording the course or exam fee to enter employment, with a third (35%) citing this. Residents who are older than 19 may be able to access GCSEs in Maths and English through the Adult Skills Fund, or certain Level 2 or 3 qualifications. However, this does not necessarily cover more targeted qualifications young people need to get into work. Housing staff and transition coaches said that residents wanting to get into construction cannot step on a building site without the relevant Health, Safety & Environment certifications, or go into security work without a Security Industry Authority (SIA) licence. There is no funding available for these industry-specific certifications, shutting young people out of viable career paths.

More than a sixth (18%) of those needing qualifications felt that being in a classroom setting was a challenge. YMCA staff backed this up, as often the young people they work with have had negative experiences within the traditional schooling system, and can find this environment challenging to learn in. Better adaptability for those who exited the schooling system because of its set-up and structure could help more young people get the qualifications they need.

For some young people that had EHCPs in place while at school to support their learning, these expire when they leave school. YMCA staff lamented how this meant young people who didn't get the qualifications they needed first time around have to go through the lengthy process of reapplying, rather than it being reignited when re-entering education.

One fifth of respondents cited affording travel as a challenge to be able to achieve qualifications. As young people typically on Universal Credit and without family financial support, the travel to and from their school or college each day can quickly add up. Discounted or free public transport for young people studying in supported housing could help make gaining the skills they need more attainable.

If you need any qualifications, what are your biggest challenges in being able to achieve this?



n=150

Leaving previous jobs

For the young people that responded to our survey, almost three-quarters (73%) of those who are not in employment, education or training currently had previously had a job. While this could be due in some part to those who engaged with the survey, this does indicate that those who are NEET have experience of being in a workplace. These were often not long-term jobs: 63% of those who previously worked held them for a year or less, including 36% that held their job for less than six months.

The most common reasons why respondents lost these jobs were their mental health affecting their ability to work (25%) and working making their mental health worse (17%). Combined, a third (33%) cited their mental health as a reason why they left their job. Other common reasons why young people left their jobs were because of the workplace and relationships within it: 13% cited an unfriendly work environment, and 11% said their employer was unable to cater to their needs. Further issues were contractual or based on business needs – either they were fired or made redundant, or it was a temporary role that ended (both 13%).

Why did you leave this job?



n=118

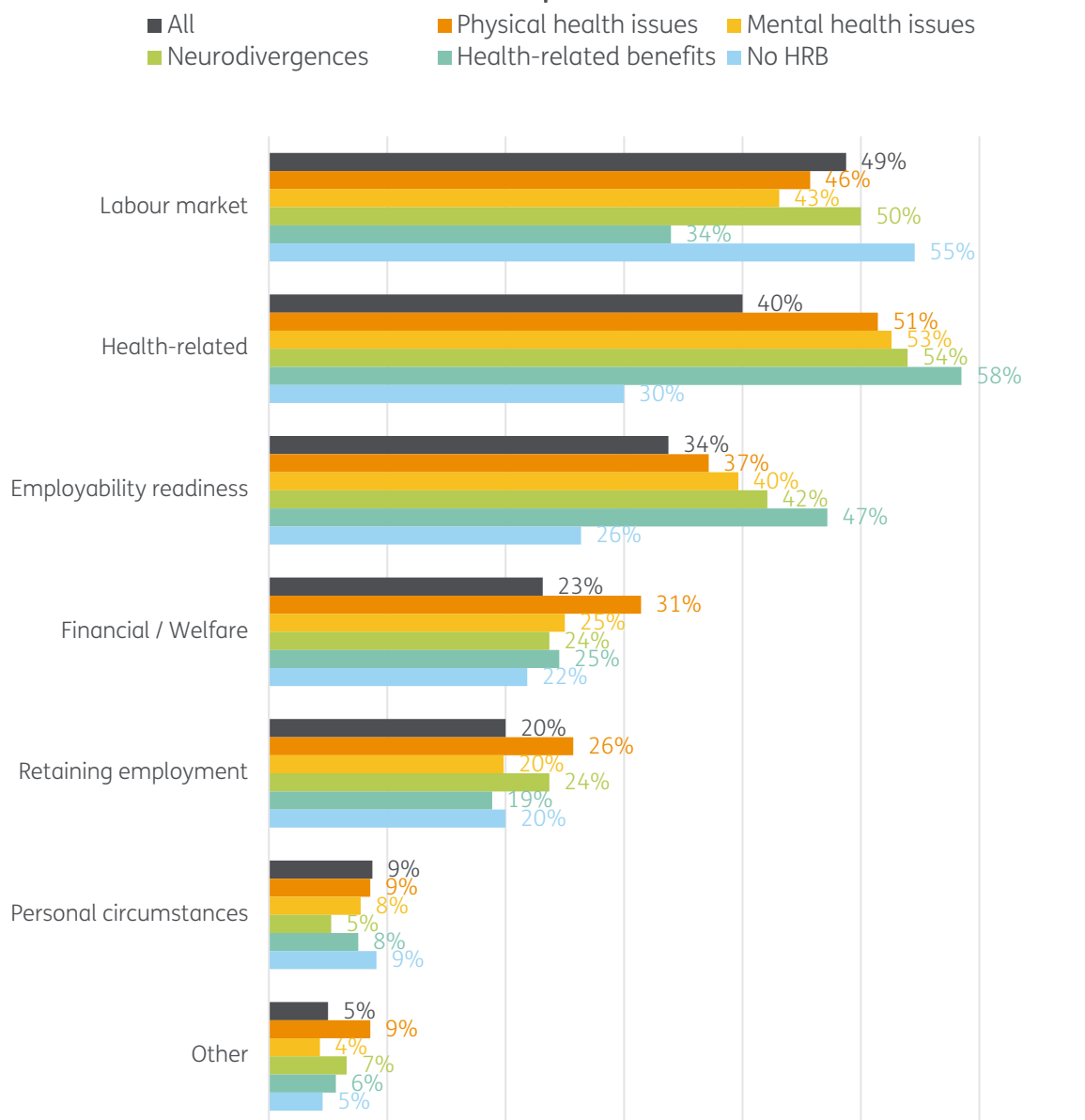
These are valid reasons to leave a job, many of which the young person would have had little to no control over. Some of these, however, may have been preventable, if the right support was either there for the young person from their employer to help them stay in their job, or if they could access the mental health support they needed. Once a young person is in work, they cannot be considered as scratched off from the NEET count. Instead those with existing challenges must be helped to remain in work.

Challenges to entering employment

Respondents were asked to select all barriers they felt were stopping them from starting work from a list of options. The top reason selected by a third (34%) of those not in employment, education or training was that their mental health prevented them from working, followed by one in five selecting that there were not many jobs in their area (22%) and that they can't find a job that they want (20%).

To provide a better overview of broader themes presenting as barriers, options were grouped to see what collectively was the biggest barrier, and how this varied by the reported health conditions of respondents and claiming of health disabilities.

What is stopping you from starting work? (Grouped responses)



n=161

Labour market

Almost half (49%) of respondents cited labour market issues (There are not many job opportunities in my area; I can't find a job that I want; There are not many job opportunities that suit my needs; I am applying but have not got a job; There is limited / no public transport to the main places where jobs are). This swung from 59% for those not receiving health-related benefits and 34% for those on health-related benefits.

This may seem counterintuitive, as it could be assumed that this group may find it difficult to find a job that suits their needs, but it is likely that this group is not as

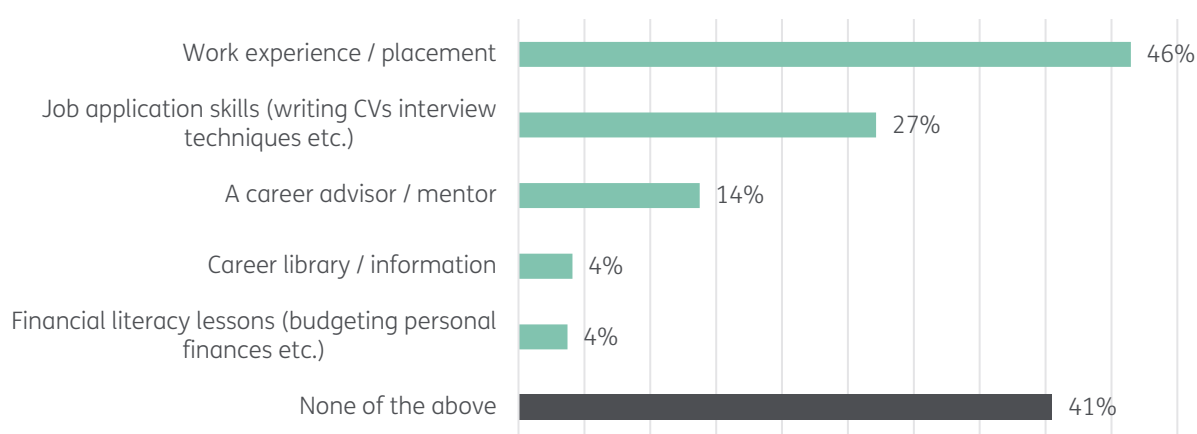
engaged in the job-searching process, and so labour market considerations are not as strong.

For those not on health-related benefits, and more likely to be applying for jobs, the biggest issues were there not being many job opportunities in their area and not being able to find a job they want (25% and 23%). These broadly are elements outside of residents' control, and more dependent on the labour market in their area.

When asked what type of job they would like to have at the moment, or type of industry they would like to work in, the range of answers given by all respondents not in work, employment or training was broad. Some were more technical career paths like electrician, carpentry or mechanics, others included agriculture, youth work and music.

The top two types of jobs young people would like to have are in retail and hospitality, reflecting the trend seen amongst those in employment. Significantly, a quarter (27%) of those not in employment don't know the type of work they want to do, meanwhile a small group (7%) would like any job offered. Young people may benefit from more career guidance on the opportunities available to them in the present, and what line of work they may like to be in more long-term and what they'd need to do to get there. This is something few respondents had at school, with only one in eight (14%) seeing a career advisor and 4% accessing a career library or information.

Did you have any of the following types of work experience or careers advice when you were at school?

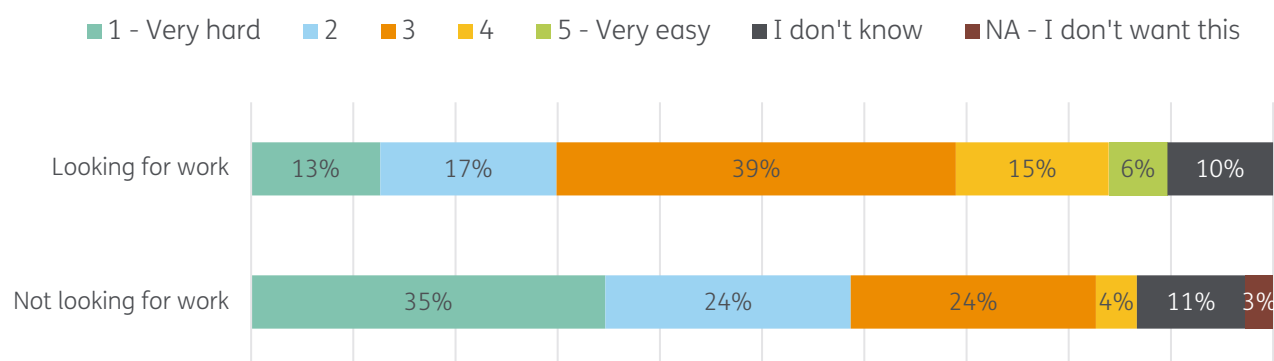


n=269

While there is some indecision and uncertainty amongst what those out of work want to do, there is little available that meets the skill level of young people in supported housing, and less still that sparks an interest.

Respondents who are NEET were also asked how easy they thought it would be to get the type of job they want at the moment. Three-in-ten (30%) of those looking for work thought this would be hard, rising to 59% amongst those not looking for work. While only 21% of those looking for work thought this was easy, this fell to 4% amongst those looking for work. Those not looking for work may not be in the place to be able to consider taking on work, and so the prospect of finding the type of job that would suit them can seem particularly difficult. For those actively looking for work, more think it is hard than easy.

How easy do you think it would be to get the type of job you want at the moment?



n=163

Health conditions

Two-in-five (40%) of all of those who were NEET selected health-related reasons (My physical health prevents me from working; Working will make my illness/condition worse; My physical health prevents me from working). This response varied greatly between those not in receipt of health-related benefits (30%), those with physical health, mental health and neurodivergences (52%, 53%, 54%) and those on health-related benefits (58%). The selection of health-related reasons amongst those with conditions and those on benefits as a key barrier for getting into work may be expected, but the fact that this is affecting many of those who do not receive the extra support of health-related benefits is indicative of the wraparound health needs for many of those in supported housing. YMCA housing staff have repeatedly noted the growth in prevalence and severity of mental health conditions amongst young residents in recent years, and accordingly more may need better access to healthcare or coaching on management of their wellbeing to enter the workplace, even if on the surface they may not seem to qualify for these allowances from the JobCentre.

Employability readiness

A third (34%) of NEET respondents selected reasons relating to their employability (I don't feel ready to work; I don't know what type of job I want; I don't have either the skills experience or qualifications I need for work; I need more support or advice in order to move into work). The top reason amongst these was not feeling ready to

work, as selected by 26% of those on health-related benefits and only 5% of those not receiving health-related benefits. This gap between the two groups was also apparent in terms of not having the skills, experience or qualifications to enter work (8% and 17% respectively).

Comparatively, a higher proportion of those not in receipt of health-related benefits (14%) selected that they don't know what type of job they want, compared to those receiving health-related benefits (9%). This is again likely to being more engaged in the job-searching process and considering the work they want to do, while some of those on health-related benefits have become detached from these considerations.

Financial and welfare

A quarter (23%) of respondents cited financial or welfare-based barriers to work (If I got a job I would get less money in benefits [including Housing Benefit]; I worry about losing my health benefits [PIP / limited work capability]; If I lost my job I would have to re-apply for health benefits).

A fifth (21%) of respondents not on health-related benefits cited losing money in benefits, as Housing Benefit is tapered at a rate of 65% when working more than around 12 hours a week. If a resident takes a zero-hours job which can vary week to week, one week of full-time hours or increased hours for seasonal work can unknowingly lead to a young person accruing rent debt as their Housing Benefit has been removed.

Retaining employment

A fifth (20%) of respondents cited reasons relating to retaining employment (I worry I would not be able to keep a job / I would be fired; I do not think an employer would be flexible / adapt to my needs) with concerns of staying in work once in a job.

The concern about keeping a job or being fired was most acutely felt amongst respondents with neurodivergences (20%), with the same group also reporting that they did not think an employer would be flexible or adapt to their needs (11%).

This is also the lived experience of some respondents, as 13% of those who previously worked were fired or made redundant. Although greater protections for workers against unfair dismissal will be enacted from 2027 as part of the Employment Rights Act 2025, however employees could still be dismissed through capability or redundancy.

Other barriers

There are some residents with personal circumstances that mean they are not able to work at the moment. This fell into two groups: those who were pregnant or had

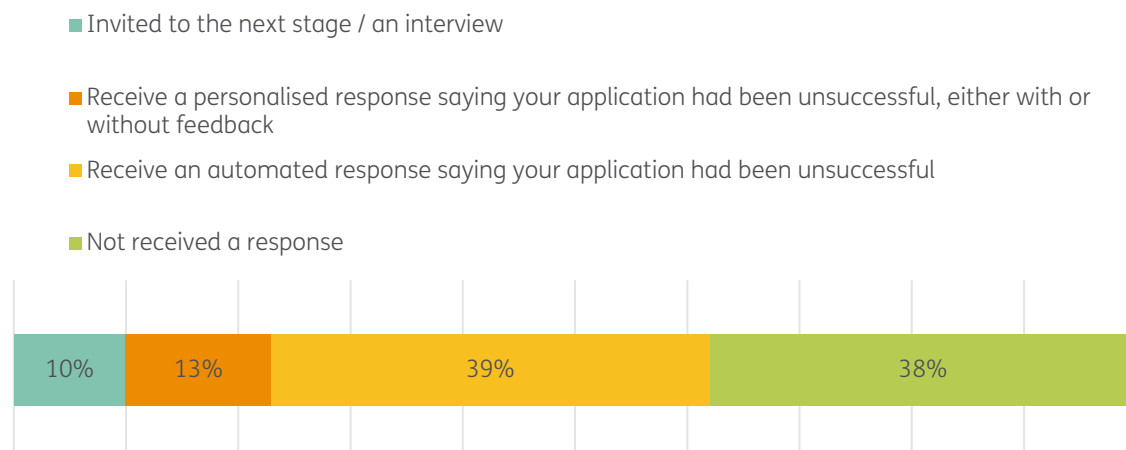
young children, or those whose immigration status meant they did not have the ability to legally work in the UK. For the former, only those who earn over a threshold dependent on age qualify for 30 funded hours of childcare, making it harder for low-income parents to afford nursery fees. For the latter, they are unable to work until their asylum claim has been accepted, meaning they have free time and drive to work but no legal way in which to do so.

Applying for jobs

Many residents in supported housing are actively applying for work but are having limited success. Amongst the NEET respondents, a third (32%) gave counts of the number of jobs they've applied for in the last month and what type of response they received. On average, they sent 20 applications per month.

Out of all these job applications, only a tenth (10%) resulted in an interview. The rest of the applications were unsuccessful, with one in eight (13%) receiving a personalised response. More significantly, two-fifths (39%) received an automated response that they had been unsuccessful. A further two-fifths (38%) did not receive any response.

Out of the job applications you have submitted in the last month, how many of those did you receive the following responses?



n=53

The number of job vacancies nationally have fallen since 2022, yet at the same time the number of people unemployed has been gently creeping upwards.⁵ Digital application processes and AI have made it easier for individuals to apply for jobs, and employers do not always have the capacity to send individualised responses.

⁵ House of Commons Library, [UK labour market statistics](#), 21 July 2026

For those looking for work, however, this lack of steer or guidance for future applications can be demoralising and can foster a feeling of futility.

JobCentres

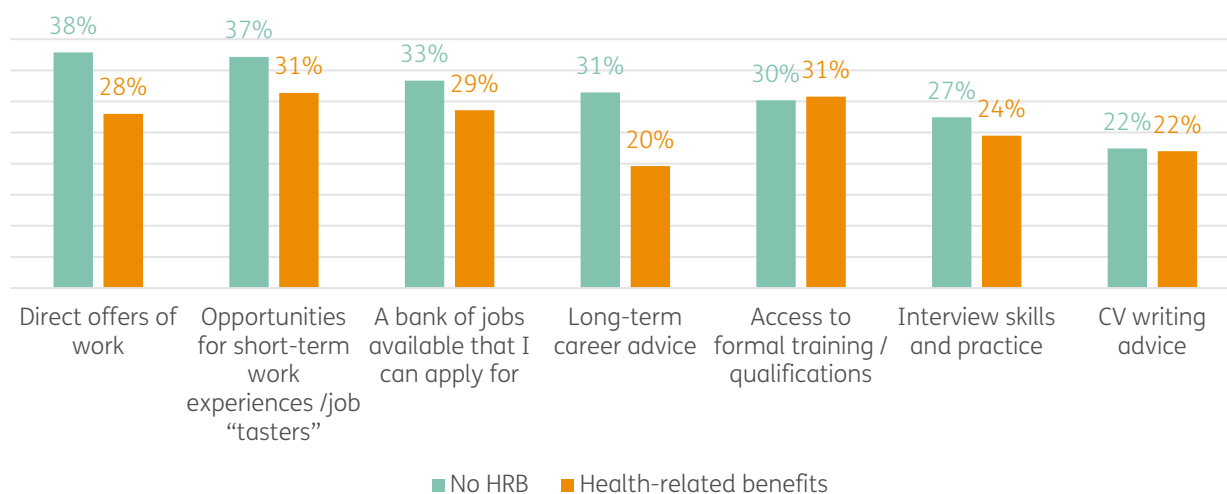
Unless they have been assessed as having a lower capability for work or work-related activity, Universal Credit requirements are typically required to be in communication with their local JobCentre and can have targets for job applications to complete else have their benefits sanctioned.

More than half of respondents not in receipt of health-related benefits (53%) go to the JobCentre at least a few times a month, compared to 10% of those on health-related benefits. On the other end of the spectrum, 10% of those not receiving health-related benefits and 41% of those that do receive these never go to the JobCentre.

When respondents currently in work were asked where they found their job, only 5% of those got theirs through the JobCentre, often finding these instead through applications or connections.

Those not in employment would like the JobCentre to do more on this front: 38% of those not receiving health-related benefits would like direct offers of work from the JobCentre, and 28% of those receiving health-related benefits. Slightly more of those on health-related benefits would like opportunities for short-term work experience tasters and access to formal training and qualifications (31% respectively). The latter had similar favourability amongst those not receiving health-related benefits. It should be noted that 29% of those on health-related benefits and 34% of those not already identified that this was something the JobCentre offered.

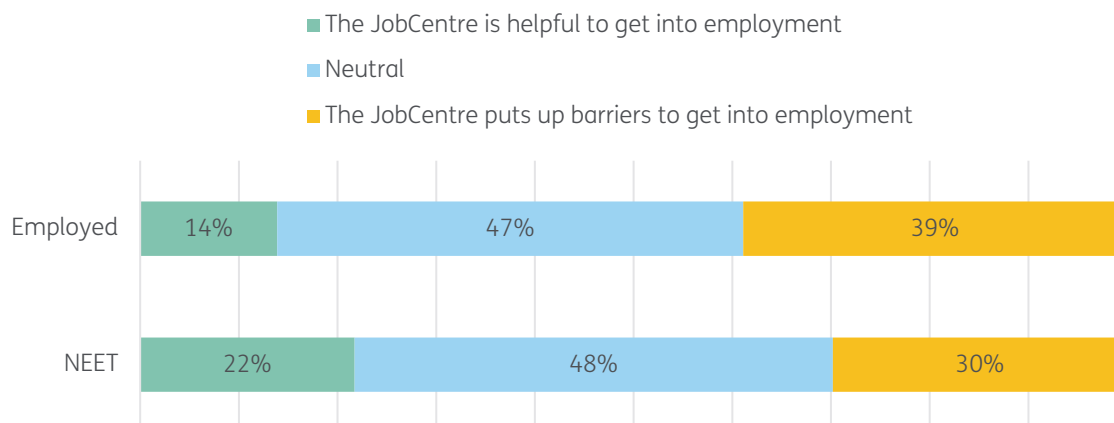
I would like the JobCentre to offer this



n=160

Both those in employment and not were asked their perception of the JobCentre. More of both groups felt that the JobCentre puts up barriers to get into employment, with the proportion higher amongst those currently employed (39%) than those NEET (30%). Only 22% of Neet respondents thought the JobCentre was helpful to get into employment, compared to just 14% of those in work.

Which of the following statements best matches your view on the JobCentre?



n=161

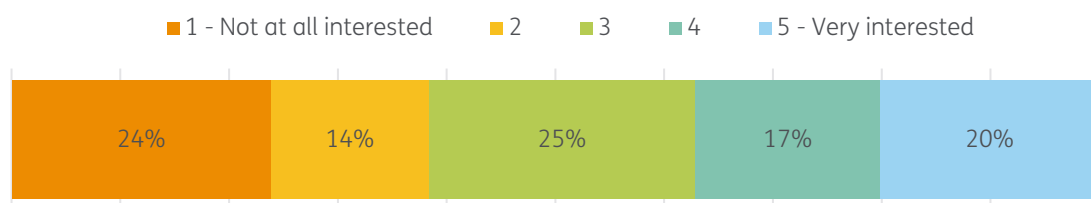
In previous YMCA research, residents have been fairly mixed in their descriptions of experiences with the JobCentre. On the positive side, residents have expressed appreciation for supportive work coaches with understanding of their needs and worries. For others, it could be a daunting and scary place, cited as patronising and condescending.

Apprenticeships

Apprenticeships provide an opportunity to work alongside gaining a qualification, which can be particularly advantageous for those not suited to traditional academic settings or who excel more in practical or vocational settings.

For NEET respondents, interest in starting an apprenticeship was fairly mixed: a quarter (24%) were not at all interested, and a fifth were very interested (20%).

How interested are you in starting an apprenticeship?



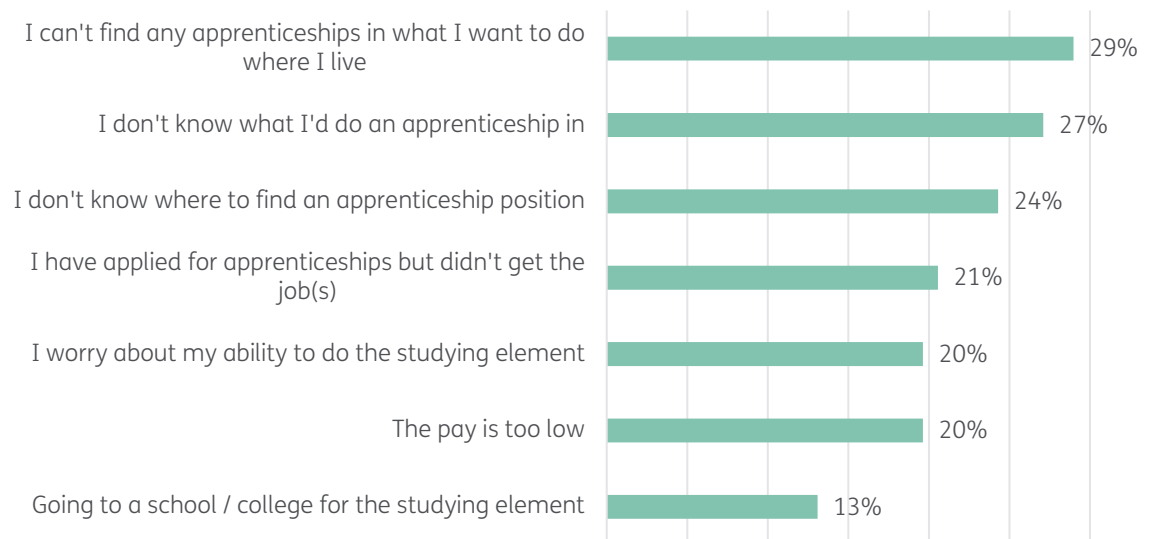
n=159

The biggest barrier young people who are interested in starting an apprenticeship face is not being able to find one where they live (29%). Although employers running apprenticeships for young people receive financial assistance from the Government for doing so, recruiting an apprentice to train comes with more time and financial investments for businesses than hiring a ready-to-go employee. The Government has increased the financial incentive for companies to recruit apprenticeships, but as of yet these changes have not led to an increase in opportunities available, as felt by those looking.

Closely behind, a quarter (27%) didn't know what they would do an apprenticeship in. The scope of apprenticeship offerings can be broad, and for those who are uncertain about their future may not know what is available, moreover what they may want a career in.

A quarter of respondents (26%) gave a response based on the studying side of an apprenticeship: either that they worried about their ability to do it, or that they would need to attend a school or college for this part of it. As mentioned previously in this section, the classroom setting for learning may have been challenging to some young people while at school, and for others who may have low or no qualifications, they may not have the confidence in their ability to study.

If you are interested in starting an apprenticeship, what is preventing you from starting one?



n=107

Enablers to work

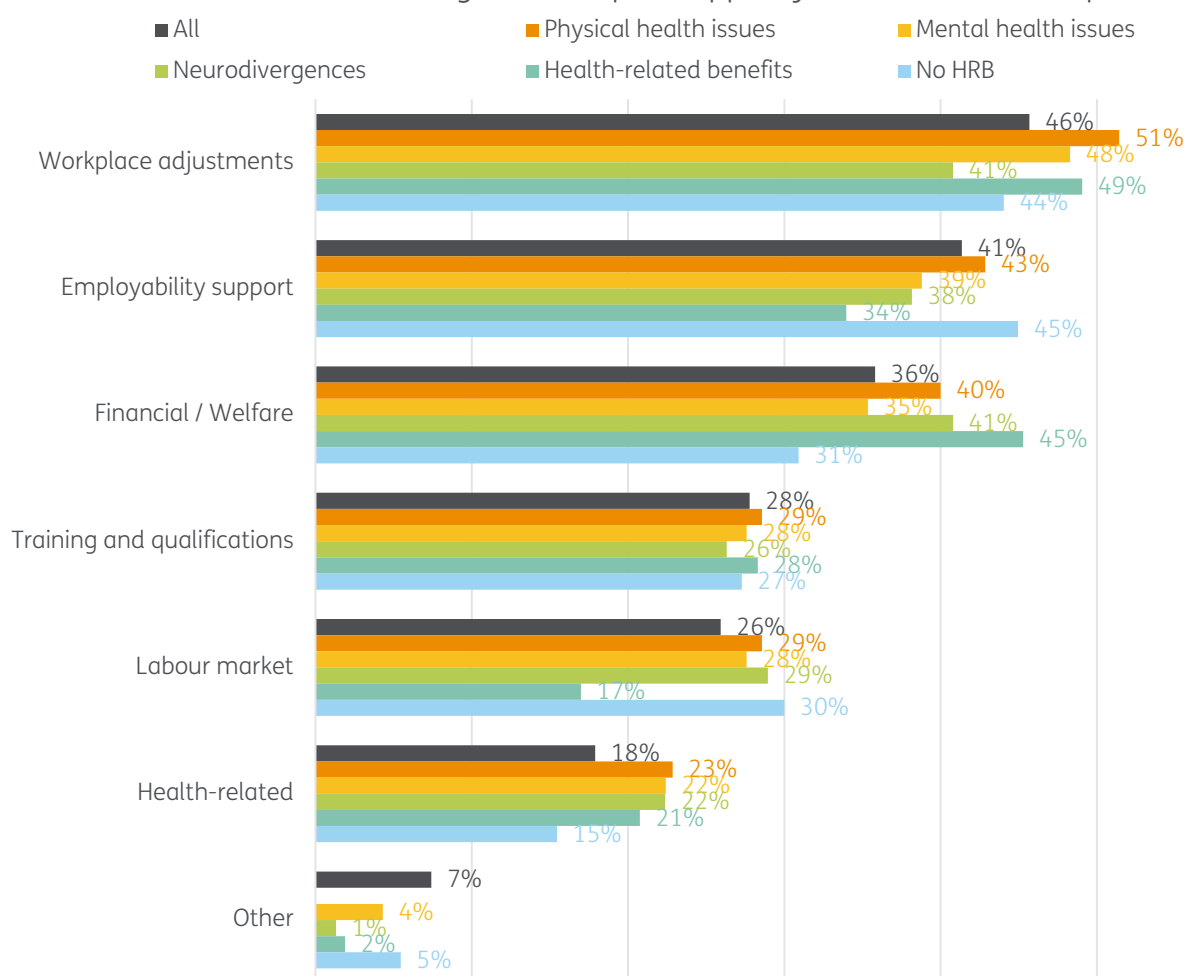
Help wanted and needed

As well as the challenges they faced to get into employment, we asked respondents what the interventions would be that would help support them into work.

The most-wanted intervention amongst those not in employment, education or training was their Housing Benefit not being affected when they earn money, as selected by a third (32%). Secondly, a quarter of respondents wanted help with finding a suitable job (27%).

As with barriers to work, the responses have been grouped to give an overview of the areas of support young people are looking for, and also has been split by reported health conditions and receipt of health-related benefits.

Which of the following could help to support you into work? (Grouped)



n=162

Workplace adjustments

Almost half (46%) of all NEET respondents felt workplace adjustments could help support them into work (Employers understanding my needs before starting a job with them; Starting on part-time hours to get used the routine of working; Opportunities for flexible working [work from home or flexible start times]). This rose to half amongst those with physical health conditions (51%) and those on health-related benefits (49%). Even amongst those not on health-related benefits, 44% wanted workplace adjustments: these are not always because of health but consideration from employers that those in supported housing are contending with much more than just starting work. Some will be getting used to routines and turning up every day, others are working through trauma.

The joint-most wanted option among the choices in this group was employers understanding their needs before starting work (23%; 30% amongst those with neurodivergences and on health-related benefits respectively). Those with neurodivergences in particular may have certain stressors or need extra support with certain tasks that employers may not be used to. Some young people may not feel comfortable advocating for themselves for their needs, especially if they have been through a long job search, or fear it may come with being seen as too difficult to keep in employment. They may also not be aware of or able to request for reasonable adjustments under the Equality Act 2010, or understand what could be plausible as part of this.

This requires not only the empathy and understanding of employers, but also the time and resource to help support these young people through challenges they may face day-to-day in the workplace. A third-party work coach that could manage adjustment requests, join a young person in meetings when needed or help a young person with challenges once they are in work could make the difference to a young person trying to retain a job.

The latter two enablers are more dependent on what the job itself is and an employer's flexibility with staffing. Flexible start times and work patterns could be beneficial for young people whose mental health challenges may have made leaving the house difficult one morning, but equally may be difficult for an employer to offer when certain staff numbers are required for a shift. Where possible and if reasonable, these are increasingly common benefits offered to staff in the corporate world that would be welcomed by those in entry-level and manual positions.

Employability support

Two-fifths (41%) of all NEET respondents wanted some form of employability support (Help with finding a suitable job, Help with my CV job applications and interviews, More time with a dedicated work coach), the most strongly desired amongst those not in receipt of health-related benefits (45%). As discussed in the Barriers section, as the group that is most likely to be applying for jobs at the

moment, they are more aware of the areas where they could do with additional support.

The area most in demand was help with finding a suitable job (27%), while more time with a dedicated work coach was the least wanted (4%). This does indicate a discrepancy as help with finding a suitable job would seem to be something that a work coach should be able to support with, but may not actually be what young people are experiencing, or work coaches may be offering unsuitable jobs. This may also be echoed in respondents' sentiment towards the JobCentre which is seen as a barrier to getting into work.

Young people in supported housing want more targeted and personalised help to find a job that works for them, rather than just any job. Work coaches at JobCentres should make sure that the work they do with young people in sessions are the most appropriate for the stage they are at, and help secure the best direct offers of work that could help those in their workload.

Financial and welfare

There were two benefits-based selections (My Housing Benefit not being affected when I earn money; Being able to keep my disability benefits if a job doesn't work out) that a third (36%) of young people wanted.

The majority of this was driven by the Housing Benefit tapering, as discussed in previous sections. The details of the Housing Benefit disregard the Government will introduce in October 2026 should encourage young people in supported housing into taking the jobs and hours they would like to work, without the financial penalty for receiving the support they need to live independently in the future.

Keeping disability benefits if a job doesn't work out was a concern for 15% of those on health-related benefits. This may seem comparatively small, but would only financially affect those on lower capability for work-related activity payments. That being said, some respondents on PIP fear that they may lose their benefits if they took up employment, as the Right to Try work for disability benefits claimants was only introduced in April.⁶

Training and qualifications

Three-tenths of respondents wanted help with training and qualifications (Getting GCSEs in Maths and English, Access to gain qualifications [BTECs, T Levels, Apprenticeships]; Entry-level training that feeds into a job [i.e. construction, trades etc.]). This support was consistent across both those with and without health-related benefits.

⁶ Department for Work and Pensions, [Right to Try: summary](#), 20 April 2026

As discussed in the Barriers sections, respondents in supported housing may typically have lower levels of qualification than the general population, and have particular difficulties in gaining these, from the cost of courses to the ability to study in a classroom setting.

Young people may not know where or how they can access GCSE, Level 2 or Level 3 qualifications through the Adult Skills Fund or Free Courses for Jobs. Or these funded places for older learners may have been filled, as there are local caps on funding these courses, meaning colleges are closing their books on applicants. These courses may not also be delivered in a way that young people in supported housing feel able to take part in them, or have the confidence that they will be able to pass.

Labour market

For some young people in supported housing, the local labour market where they live is not conducive for getting into employment, with 26% thinking changes here could help them into work (More job opportunities in my area; Better / more reliable public transport in my area).

Increased job opportunities in a local area (as favoured by 23% of respondents, rising to 30% for those not receiving health-related benefits) will be driven by growth, as demand for products and services means employers recruit more staff to meet this need. The job market for young people will be bolstered by more investment in local industries and places across the country, that will feed into everyday services requiring a bigger workforce.

As described in Milburn's initial report, the typical jobs for young people entering the labour market have come off the market in recent years, with the decline in high street shops and replacements of checkouts with self-service reducing retail personnel. Especially in the case of devolution, regional growth plans should include how jobs will be created not only in specialist sectors, but the entry-level roles that young people rely on to kickstart their careers.

Better transport in a local area had less demand (7%) but may be due to young people not feeling the consequences of a suboptimal public transport system for working until they need to use it. For example, until they need to return home from a shift at a warehouse in unsocial hours, or get to work on time in a rural setting with an infrequent bus service, the importance of improved local transport may not be as prescient.

Health-related

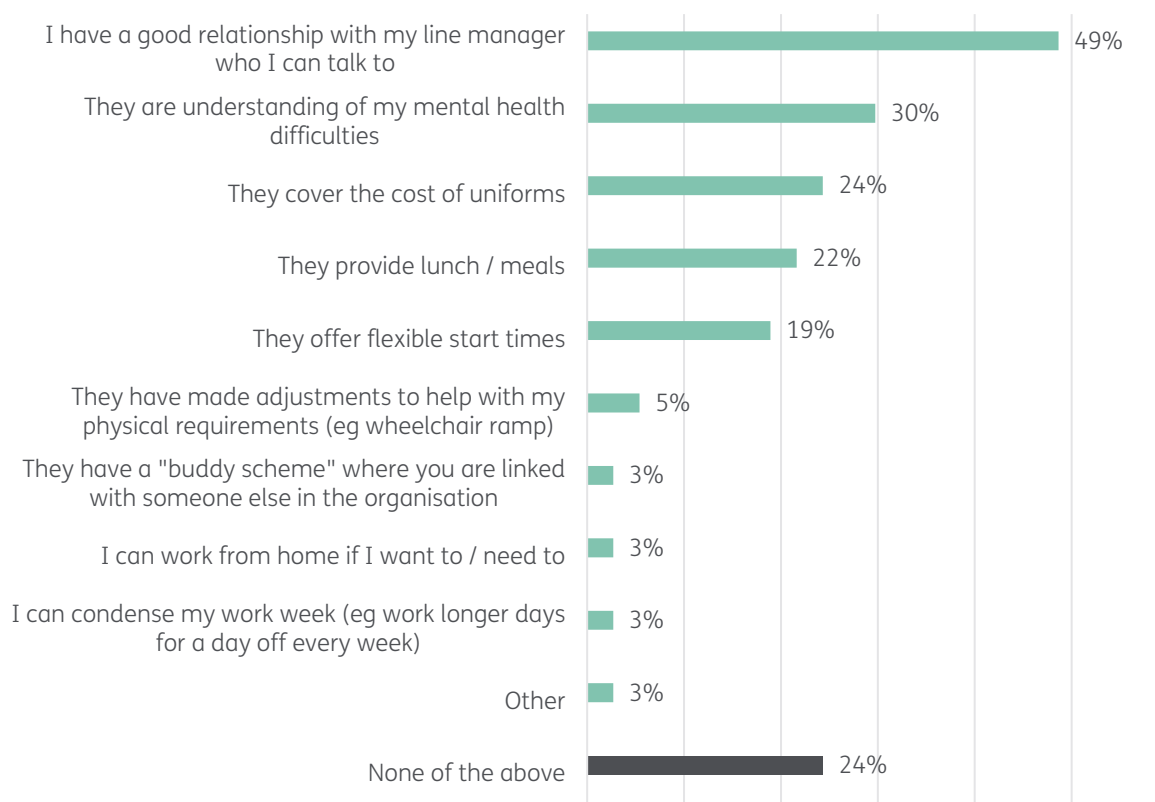
One-in-six (18%) respondents felt health-related support could help them into work (Access to talking therapies; Access to medical treatment), rising to one-in-five among those who have health-related benefits, or health conditions (21-23%).

For many young people in supported housing, the conversation around entering work must be in consideration with their mental health and the support they receive for this. This is often more than general low mood and can range from severe anxiety to leave the house to mood swings and suicidality. Health services need to respond to this need with accessible treatments and ongoing support to give young people the care they need to be able to take the next steps in their lives.

Successful supports

As well as the hypothetical help that NEET respondents may need, respondents who were in employment were asked about what their employer does or had done to help them stay in their job.

What does your employer do, or have they done, to help you to be able to stay in your job?



n=37

Manager relationships

The most common employer action, as chosen by half of respondents in work, was having a good relationship with a line manager who they could talk to (49%). This

was equally reflected in the second-highest support, with three-in-ten citing their employer being understanding of their mental health difficulties.

This indicates an important element of levers currently being pulled by Government to get young people into work. In June 2026 it launched the Youth Jobs Grant Scheme, which provides financial inducements to firms that recruit a young person who has been out of work for at least six months. This incentivisation is welcomed but may not come with the adequate training for managers to provide the additional support that those previously further from work may need. Within these schemes must come upskilling to managers who may not have worked with young people with personal challenges in such a hands-on way before.

One-in-five respondents had flexible start times offered by their employer. This is particularly notable as most respondents were in shift-based work, and highlights the benefits of employers changing standard ways of working to allow young people to best thrive in the workplace.

Helping with costs

The majority of respondents in work were doing so part-time, so may not have significant take-home pay, as well as their Universal Credit payments being tapered alongside their earnings reducing the amount in their pockets at the end of the month. Especially when starting work and before getting paid, the extra costs of having a job can quickly mount up, including transport, uniforms and meals out of the house.

Having employers pay for some of these was beneficial to more than a fifth of respondents. If workers require uniforms, employers should aim to cover the cost of these where possible, or if unable to, provide discounts to employees in receipt of welfare support prior to joining.

The next steps

Employment is an integral part of personal development for residents in supported housing, and the benefits it brings can lead them towards independent living. While the survey was only sent to current residents of supported housing, getting into work interplays with moving on into their own accommodation. Employment not only equips young people with essential life skills and responsibilities, and the money earned can unlock a deposit to live independently.

Unfortunately, this is easier said than done. The tapering of Housing Benefit means residents are deterred from working more hours, and even if they do, they may lose additional earnings. Residents are in a catch-22: they can't move out until they work more hours to afford it, and they can't work more hours otherwise they would lose more money.

To ensure young residents of supported housing can flourish in employment, they need available affordable housing to move into once they are ready to move on. Housing workers explained that those in supported housing are seldom high priority for council housing, and that private rents across the country have rocketed since the Covid-19 pandemic. The government has a target to build 300,000 affordable homes within the next ten years:⁷ young people in supported housing will not be able to thrive in employment without genuinely affordable options.

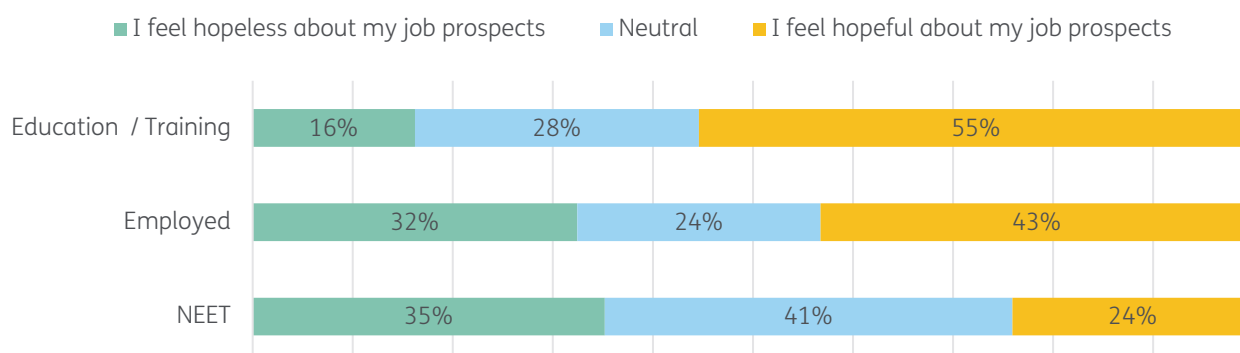
Employment will only be sustainable if it is accessible where people live once they move on, with further out-of-town developments needing reliable public transport to shift workers who may need to get into the city or to industrial sites on outskirts. Housing managers and progression coaches told us that it is not just a job that young people need, it is the entire housing and transportation infrastructure that surrounds this to make work and independence suitable in the long-term.

⁷ Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government, [Delivering a decade of renewal for social and affordable housing](#), 28 January 2026

Conclusion

As it stands, young people in supported housing that are not in employment, education or training do not hold much hope for the future. While a quarter (24%) feel hopeful about their job prospects, a third feel hopeless about them (35%).

Which of the following statements best matches your view on working?



n=271

This has the potential to change. For respondents currently in employment, 43% feel hopeful about their job prospects. And for those in education, gaining the qualifications they need for the workplace, more than half (56%) feel hopeful about their job prospects.

There is a lot of trepidation and uncertainty that comes with the prospect of working for many young people in supported housing. The routine of getting to a job every day on time can be a significant shift in normality. They fear entering debt through a catch in the benefits system, or they're still working out the best ways to manage their mental health alongside all of life's requirements. Some are worn down after dozens, hundreds of answered job applications. Some may be the first in their families to work; others may be reminded of the qualifications they tried to achieve but could not do so.

The majority of those in supported housing have gone through trauma, instability or challenges that their peers may not have. Success in the workplace may require extra care and adjustment from employers to give a fair chance for those who have been disadvantaged to enter the workplace and see the benefits that employment can bring to their wellbeing and personal development.

Some young residents in supported housing don't know what job they want or what the future may hold. But for many there is an ambition for their career and for what they could achieve. They just need to be given the support to take - and secure - the first few steps to getting there.

Recommendations

These different experiences, positions and circumstances must be taken into account, as young people will accordingly benefit from different interventions to aid them along the path to employability.

Findings from the survey suggest five groups of supported housing residents with specialised recommendations for each:

Group 1: When work feels out of reach

This is a fairly small group, but amongst them are different reasons why they may not want to work. Some have mental or physical health conditions that will be exacerbated by work, others are parents to young children, some are young and in the asylum system. A third are from families where neither parent nor carer worked when they were growing up. More than half have worked before.

Barriers to work

Some have severe mental health challenges where entering work will have a dangerous impact on their wellbeing. Others have become disenfranchised by the job-searching experience with little success. Their previous experience in the workplace ended negatively (making mental health worse, an unfriendly environment) or was short-term.

Recommendations

Positive role models – Give young people access to people who can provide guidance, broaden their horizons and demonstrate the opportunities employment can create.

Peer employment mentors – Connect young people with someone who has recently been in a similar position – including former supported-housing residents who have moved into employment and independence.

Trusted engagement outside the Jobcentre – Commission youth workers and trusted voluntary and community organisations to engage young people who are furthest from employment. The initial relationship does not always need to be explicitly about getting a job. As in good youth work, activities such as sport, creative programmes or volunteering can provide the route through which trust, confidence and aspiration are built.

Group 2 - When health is holding someone back

They are on health-related benefits (PIP, LCW, LCWRA). They do not feel well enough to work and do not think this will change in the next few years. They are not considering how difficult it might be to get a job as they are removed from the process. They predominantly have mental health conditions, some have neurodivergences and a smaller group have physical health conditions.

Barriers to work

They worry that working will make their mental or physical health worse, or that this prevents them from being able to work. They feel less confident in themselves and their skills when it comes to entering work. They are less likely to feel ready to keep a routine, write a CV or do a job interview. They perceive trying to find a job they may want at the moment as very hard. They are more likely to worry about being able to retain work once in it, either through employers not being able to adapt to their needs, or being fired.

Recommendations

Low-risk exposure to work – Expand volunteering, work tasters and supported work-experience placements. These can build experience while also reducing anxiety about entering a workplace and allowing young people to discover what they are capable of without immediately risking their financial security.

Faster and more appropriate health support – Employment policy cannot succeed if young people are waiting months for the treatment that would enable them to participate. Reducing waiting times, ensuring sufficient duration and intensity of treatment, expanding community mental-health provision and making better use of social prescribing should be viewed as part of the employment response.

Jobs designed to accommodate health needs – Support employers to offer flexible starts, gradual increases in hours and reasonable workplace adjustments. Government should explore whether additional financial support for adjustments could remove perceived costs and risks for employers recruiting young people with more complex needs.

In-work progression coaching – Support should not end on the first day of employment. Young people who need it should have access to a work or progression coach who can help them navigate workplace problems, adjustments and relationships with employers, and ultimately help them stay in work.

A genuine Right to Try – Young people receiving health-related benefits should be able to test whether employment works for them without fearing that an unsuccessful attempt will leave them without the support they previously relied upon.

Group 3: A step or two away

They need either GCSE qualifications or more industry-specific courses. They want to work but don't know what type of job they want. They would consider apprenticeships but don't know what's available in their area, or what they would do an apprenticeship in.

Barriers to work

They are less certain about what type of job they want not only today, but are unsure about what career they would like to have more long-term. Affording the cost of the course or exam fee they need to do can prevent them from getting these qualifications. Some struggled in the classroom during education and worry about returning to gain the qualifications they need.

Recommendations

Remove unnecessary qualification barriers – Review entry requirements for courses and apprenticeships and expand genuinely accessible entry-level provision for young people who are not yet ready for Level 2 or Level 3 study.

Remove the financial barrier to qualifications – Young people receiving Universal Credit should have free access to qualifications where these would materially improve their employment prospects. Government could also explore a training guarantee or repayable training bond for courses not covered by existing provision, with repayment beginning only once someone is earning.

Rapid-access employment qualifications – Jobcentres should maintain access to commonly required local qualifications and certificates – for example health and safety or sector-specific entry requirements – so a young person can be booked quickly rather than navigating providers and discretionary funding each time a vacancy arises.

Careers guidance connected to the real labour market – Young people need meaningful exposure to different occupations and advice based on actual local opportunities, rather than simply information about possible careers.

Link qualifications directly to jobs – Government should work with employers to create qualification-to-interview pathways, where completing an agreed course or certificate guarantees a young person an interview or work trial.

Group 4: Ready to work, but locked out

They are engaged in the job search process. They're applying for roles but are unsuccessful. They either know what they want to do, or will take whatever's available. They have not always found the JobCentre useful in their searches for work.

Barriers to work

They are sending out plenty of job applications but are seldom receiving feedback if unsuccessful. They are held back by their local labour market, with not many opportunities in their area or finding a job that they want.

Recommendations

Direct employment opportunities – Create a bank of genuinely entry-level roles which do not require previous experience or unnecessary qualifications and into which eligible young people can be directly referred. These opportunities should reduce reliance on automated recruitment and repeated online applications, instead offering a guaranteed interview, work trial or other direct route to an employer, stopping people applying for 100s of jobs and never hearing back.

Incentivise employers to create opportunities – Learn from programmes such as Kickstart and provide targeted incentives for employers that recruit young people who have been out of work for a sustained period. Support should encourage genuine additional jobs and sustainable employment rather than short-term placements alone.

Make Jobcentres employment brokers – Work coaches should be able to connect young people directly to real vacancies and employers, not simply support them to make more applications. Success should be measured by whether the right young person reaches the right opportunity.

Group 5: In work, but unable to progress

They are currently in work, typically on a part-time or zero-hours contract. They would like to work more hours but are currently unable to. Some took the job they have because they needed to accept any job offered, or were not offered a role by anywhere else they applied.

Barriers to work

They are prevented from working more because of a 65% taper on Housing Benefit when working more than 12 hours per week, where full-time hours could lead to barely any of their salary in their pocket – or sometimes getting into debt. Some would like to work full-time but could only get a part-time or zero-hours job. For others, looking after young children as a single parent can make it difficult to work more hours

Recommendations

Make additional hours pay – Reform the interaction between earnings and Housing Benefit for supported-housing residents so that taking additional hours cannot leave someone financially worse off. Young people should be able to see clearly what they will gain before agreeing to additional work.

Provide in-work progression support – Employment support should continue for young people who want more hours, a more secure contract or a better-paid job. The objective should be progression from limited employment towards financial independence. This may also open up part time, low hours work, which could benefit more people unable to work full time.

Remove childcare barriers before work begins – Explore extending childcare support to prospective workers where childcare is required to attend interviews, training, work experience or begin employment. Support that only becomes available after someone has secured work can itself become a barrier to getting there.

Create the jobs young people need – Ultimately, employment programmes cannot compensate for a shortage of vacancies or hours. National and local growth strategies should consider how investment translates into accessible entry-level jobs and progression opportunities for young people.

For more information, please contact:

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