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Evidence Briefing: Supporting employment among young people aged 16 years and older

## The problem of youth unemployment

Unemployment amongst young people aged 16-24 is an increasing problem which can have detrimental impacts on health and future employment prospects. Young people experience a range of barriers to employment and have been disproportionately affected by the current economic downturn.



## How much of a problem is youth unemployment?

- An estimated 15.0% of people aged 16-24 in England are 'Not in Education, Employment or Training' (NEET). In the North West 14.0% of young people are NEET<sup>1</sup>.
- The total cost of youth unemployment in England in 2012 has been estimated at £15 billion in benefits claimed, foregone taxes and lost output to the wider economy<sup>2</sup>.
- High youth unemployment rates in the North West are associated with areas that are urban, have high levels of deprivation and have low employment opportunities<sup>3</sup>.
- Several local authority areas in Merseyside and Cheshire contain youth unemployment 'hotspots', where an estimated one in four young people are NEET<sup>2</sup>.
- Youth unemployment disproportionately affects certain groups. This includes young people with disabilities, those from less well-off and less qualified families, teenage mothers and ethnic minorities. Unemployment among these groups further limits their social mobility<sup>2</sup>.

## The impacts of the economic downturn on young people and employment

- Young people have been disproportionately affected by the recession since 2008 as they have had to compete with more qualified and experienced candidates for fewer jobs<sup>3</sup>.
- Public sector cuts have restricted youth services and the government's capacity to help young people NEET move into employment, suggesting the NEET rate among young people is likely to continue to rise<sup>4</sup>.
- Efficiency savings in schools are likely to have an adverse impact on academic outcomes and young people's access to higher education<sup>5</sup>.
- Tax and benefit changes are predicted to increase child poverty, which may in turn have a negative impact on school performance<sup>6</sup>.

## The impact of unemployment on young people

Youth unemployment has been shown to have negative impacts on young people's health and future employment prospects, which may be long-lasting or even permanent<sup>5-7</sup>. Youth unemployment has been associated with:

- Future unemployment.
- Lower earnings.
- Lack of direction and future plans.
- Increased risk of mental ill-health, e.g. low self-esteem, stress, depression.
- Poor physical health, e.g. heart attacks in later life.
- Higher likelihood of involvement in anti-social activity and crime.

These impacts are likely to have associated costs in the future, such as increased benefit claims, reduced taxes paid and the costs of poor health and involvement with the criminal justice system<sup>2</sup>.

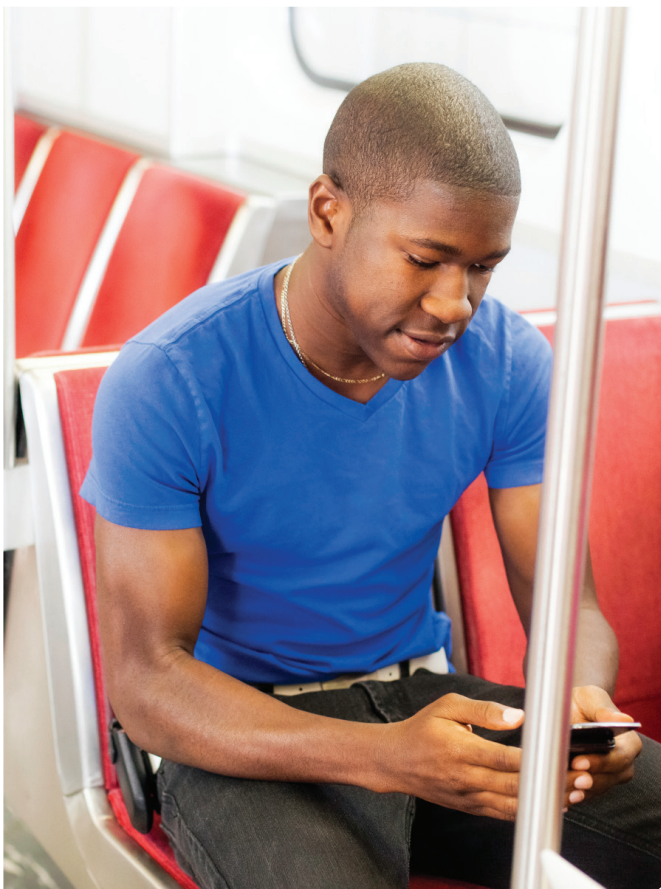


# The problem of youth unemployment

## The importance of access to transport

Lack of access to affordable transport is a barrier for young people accessing education, training and employment. Transport is most likely to be a barrier to young people from lower income families; who are more reliant on public transport and more likely to find it less affordable<sup>8</sup>.

Ideas to improve access to transport for young people include subsidising fares for those seeking employment, in education or non-paid work, and encouraging community transport initiatives. Encouraging cycling or offering incentivised rates for leasing cars and bikes can lead to a reduced reliance on public transport. It is important to consult with young people about transport to ensure that any initiatives will appeal to them and accurately reflect their needs<sup>8, 9</sup>.



## Barriers for young people

Young people experience a range of barriers to education, employment and training<sup>10, 11</sup>, including:

- Lower-level or no qualifications.
- Low post-16 aspirations.
- Lack of availability or awareness of education and training opportunities.
- Financial hardship or poor socio-economic background.
- Lack of social capital (the resources one can draw from their relationships with others).

Where unemployment and financial hardship is common in a young person's family, peers or community, the young person may develop low aspirations, poor confidence in their ability to succeed, and a lack of knowledge about what career options are realistic and available. This is known as generational unemployment and suggests that youth unemployment is both a cause and consequence of unemployment as an older adult.



## What works in supporting employment among young people

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The following section contains evidence on approaches that can help to prevent young people from becoming NEET; through improving their aspirations, career prospects and rate of employment. Also included is specific evidence on strategies designed to re-engage young people NEET. This section has been constructed from a review of published research reports, journal articles, literature reviews and guidance documents.



## What works in supporting employment among young people



### Engaging young people at school in post-16 learning

- Individuals form attitudes towards work and careers and make decisions about their futures at a young age, therefore it is important that schools provide their pupils with guidance on educational pathways, training opportunities and careers. Solid aspirations are typically formed from 11-14 years so it is crucial that guidance starts in this period if not earlier<sup>12, 13</sup>.
- Guidance may take the form of careers events, personal advisers and written information and should be high quality, impartial, realistic and personalised<sup>12, 14</sup>. It should be provided throughout secondary school education with clear progression pathways leading to opportunities for further education, employment and training.
- It is important for schools and colleges to work together with businesses, training providers and local authorities in providing and developing guidance, this ensures it is relevant to local opportunities and creates opportunities for work experience<sup>14, 15</sup>. Work experience must be relevant to the young person's interests if it is to have a positive impact.
- Colleges play a key role in retaining young people in education by offering a range of pathways for learning. Education and training provided by colleges needs to be responsive to learners' and employers' needs<sup>16</sup>.
- Involving young people in decision-making about their future is a key enabler to engaging young people in learning<sup>12</sup>.
- Financial incentives can have a positive impact on continued participation in learning<sup>12</sup>. Young people and their families need to be made aware of the financial assistance available to them when making choices<sup>15</sup>.

**“Work experience must be relevant to the young person's interests if it is to have a positive impact”**



## Encouraging participation in extracurricular activities

- Participation in extracurricular activities from a young age has been associated with a range of positive outcomes including: educational aspirations, engagement in further education, academic achievement, general wellbeing and reduced anti-social behaviour<sup>17, 18</sup>.
- Extracurricular activities associated with positive outcomes are typically school-based and structured activities, but community-based activities run by youth or church groups can also be beneficial<sup>19</sup>. For example, The Scout Association has been shown to help young people develop key skills and build relationships<sup>20</sup> and 'myplace' youth centres have successfully engaged young people in positive activities that support their personal and social development<sup>21</sup>.
- Key elements of successful activity programmes include: structure, sustained participation, emphasis on outcomes, well-prepared staff, and strong partnerships between families, schools and other community institutions<sup>18</sup>.
- Contextual factors such as strong relationships with adult significant others and social networks promote the positive outcomes of extracurricular activities<sup>18</sup>.

## Increasing family involvement in young people's education

- Parents are the most influential factor on a child's aspirations. Young people whose parents have higher aspirations and expectations are more likely to have high aspirations for themselves<sup>12, 16</sup>.
- It is important to improve a parent's engagement with their child's learning, to raise parent aspirations and to improve knowledge about the education system; this will enable them to provide high quality and impartial advice. Providing parents with information about their child's progress at school, alongside more general information about parenting and support groups, is predicted to improve parental engagement<sup>12</sup>.



# What works in supporting employment among young people



- Apprentices' experiences of apprenticeships are generally positive and they value the qualifications they receive<sup>23</sup>.
- Outcomes are better for learners who complete their programmes, compared to early leavers. Efforts to maximise completion rates should focus on suitability, management of programmes, provision of support for learners, and outcomes<sup>24</sup>.
- Partnership working between employers and training providers is a crucial element in the delivery of work based learning programmes<sup>25</sup>.
- Colleges play a major role in delivering work based learning programmes; they provide more vocational qualifications than any other sector in the North West<sup>16</sup>.

## Re-engaging young people NEET

It is generally harder to engage with young people once they are NEET. Young people NEET often experience a range of personal challenges and have negative attitudes towards education<sup>26</sup>. Successful strategies for re-engaging young people NEET include:

## Improving opportunities for volunteering

- Evidence suggests that volunteering can have a positive impact on young people's aspirations, commitment to education and career prospects.
- Volunteering enables young people to develop work-related skills, gain useful work experience and make contacts which can result in further learning or employment opportunities<sup>22</sup>.
- It is important to make young people aware of volunteering opportunities and to provide quality and comprehensive support (including financial support) to those undertaking volunteering work<sup>22</sup>.

## Increasing work based learning

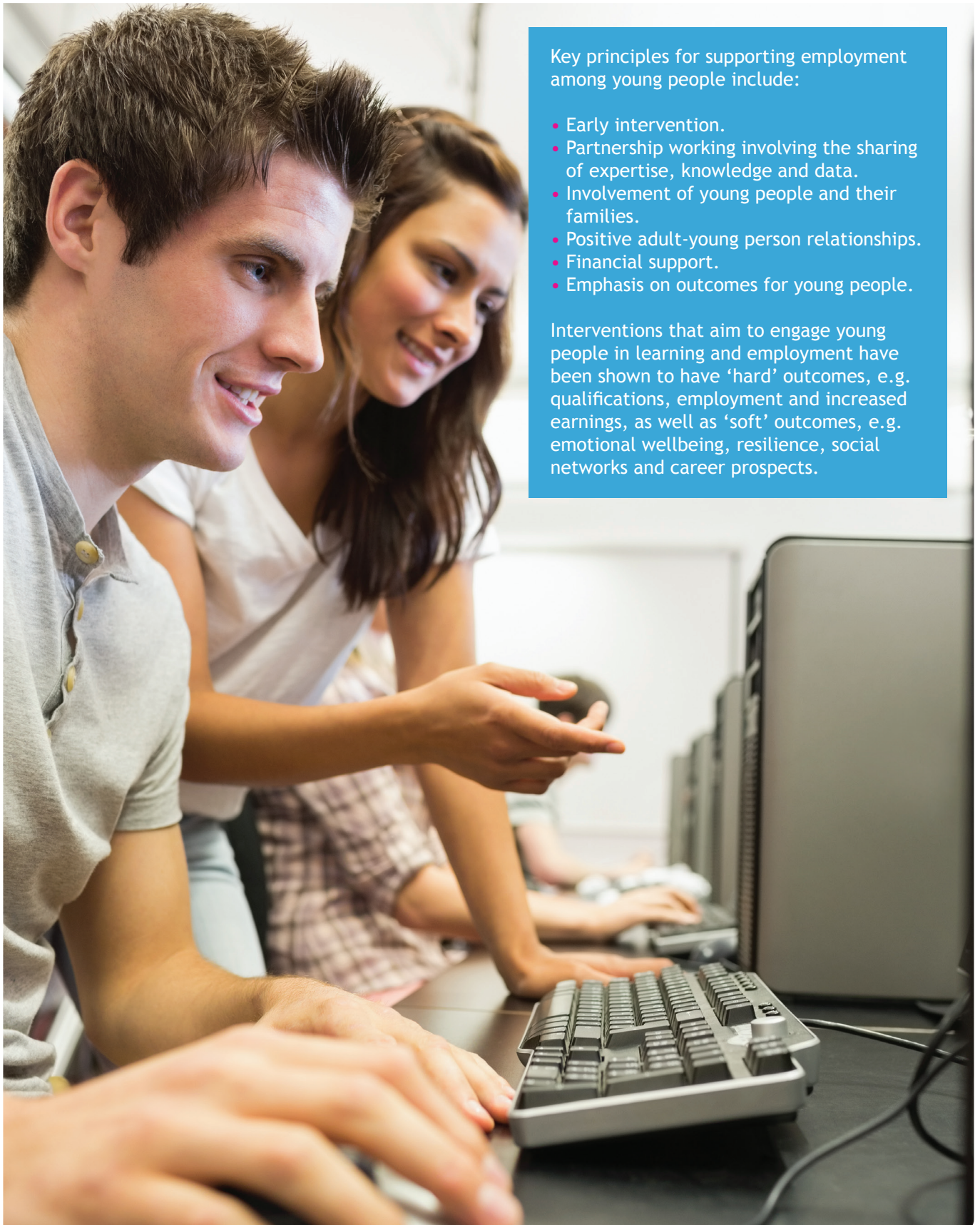
Work based learning generally refers to government-funded work-related education and training for young people, and includes apprenticeships among other forms of learning.

- Work based learning leads to qualifications, further learning, employment, progression and increased wages<sup>23</sup>.

- Intensive support delivered by personal advisers, who work on a one-to-one basis with young people NEET, to identify their needs and aspirations and arrange suitable activities<sup>27</sup>.
- Small allowances and expenses paid to those who participate in learning, to help overcome the financial constraints commonly experienced by young people NEET<sup>27</sup>.
- Partnership working between Jobcentre Plus and local colleges to engage people who are unemployed in education and training<sup>28</sup>.
- 'Non-formal learning' which generally takes place in relaxed settings and has an element of structure and planning; aims to help young people to develop attitudes, behaviours and skills necessary for learning and employment<sup>29</sup>. Community organisations have successfully re-engaged young people through the introduction of informal activities that are of interest to young people<sup>30</sup>.



## Conclusion - key points



Key principles for supporting employment among young people include:

- Early intervention.
- Partnership working involving the sharing of expertise, knowledge and data.
- Involvement of young people and their families.
- Positive adult-young person relationships.
- Financial support.
- Emphasis on outcomes for young people.

Interventions that aim to engage young people in learning and employment have been shown to have 'hard' outcomes, e.g. qualifications, employment and increased earnings, as well as 'soft' outcomes, e.g. emotional wellbeing, resilience, social networks and career prospects.

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