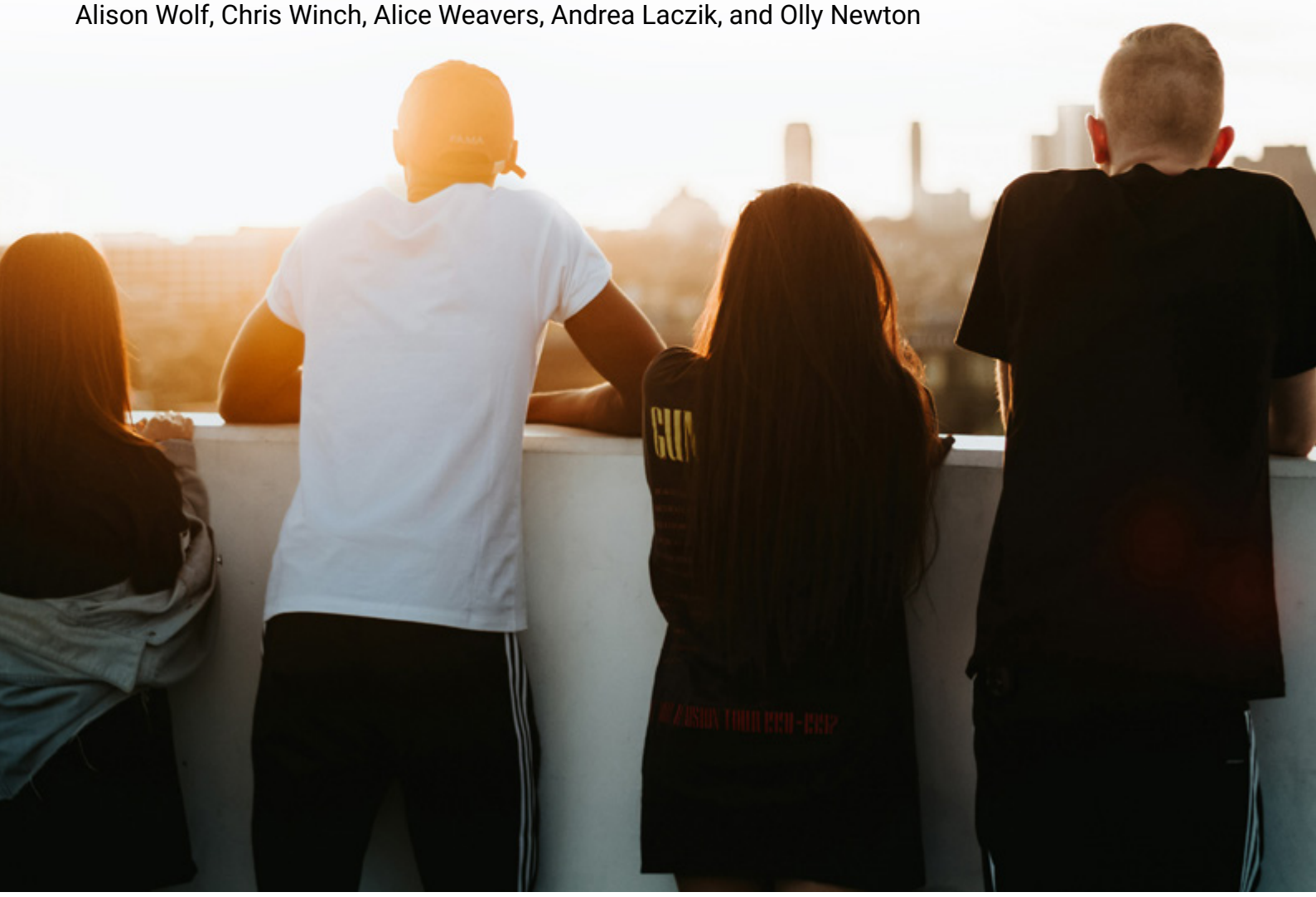
Young Lives, Young Futures

Understanding Opportunities and Challenges in Post-School Transitions in England

Anna Yong, Sharon Gewirtz, Sait Bayrakdar, Rana Khazbak, Meg Maguire, Alison Wolf, Chris Winch, Alice Weavers, Andrea Laczik, and Olly Newton



KING'S College LONDON

UKRI Economic and Social Research Council

EDGE FOUNDATION

Contents

Acknowledgments 4

Executive Summary 5

Chapter 1. Introduction 8

1.1. Research aims 8

1.2. Contextual background 9

1.2.1. Raising the participation age 9

1.2.2. Reforms to vocational and technical education 9

1.2.3. Careers guidance reforms 10

1.2.4. The COVID-19 pandemic 11

1.2.5. Deterioration in the early career labour market 11

1.3. Structure of the report 12

Chapter 2. Data and methods 13

2.1. The Your Life, Your Future survey 13

2.1.1. Sample design and data collection 13

2.1.2. Sample attrition and weighting 14

2.2. Measures 14

2.2.1. Current activity 14

2.2.2. Job quality 15

2.2.3. Wellbeing and subjective outcomes 15

2.3. Analytical approach 16

Chapter 3. Post-school transitions: Activities and destinations of young people 17

3.1. Overview of current activities by wave 17

3.2. Composition of the NEET population 20

3.3. Implications 20

Chapter 4. Transition Pathways from Ages 15-16 to 19-20 23

4.1. Transitions from Year 11 to ages 17-18 23

4.2. Transitions from ages 17-18 to 19-20 24

4.3. Typology of post-16 transition pathways 25

4.4. Implications 26

Chapter 5. Predictors of destinations among young people not entering higher education 28
5.1. Individual characteristics 30
5.2. Family background 31
5.3. Place-based characteristics 31
5.4. Implications 32
Chapter 6. Job quality in apprenticeships and employment 34
6.1. Wages and working hours 34
6.2. Job quality by employment type 36
6.3. Implications 38
Chapter 7. Personal wellbeing and subjective outcomes 41
7.1. Life satisfaction 41
7.2. Sense of purpose 42
7.3. Happiness 42
7.4. Anxiety 43
7.5. Doing what they wanted to be doing 43
7.6. Satisfaction with decisions made at age 16 44
7.7. Implications 44
Chapter 8. Apprenticeship application and success 46
8.1. Descriptive patterns in application and success 46
8.2. Predictors of application and success 47
8.3. Implications 49
Chapter 9. Conclusion 51
9.1. Summary of key findings 51
9.2. Broader implications 52
9.3. Policy considerations 54
9.4. Concluding reflections 59
Appendix A. Measurement of sociodemographic variables 60
Appendix B. Descriptive statistics 61
Appendix C. Predictors of age 19-20 status (Sensitivity analysis using IDACI) 62
References 64

Acknowledgments

We are grateful to the UK Economic and Social Research Council for the funding (under grant number ES/S015752/1) which made this research possible.

We would like to thank all the young people who have so generously given their time to participate in the study.

In addition, we would like to thank: the team from Verian (formerly Kantar Public) for their work on co-developing and implementing the survey, in particular Carrie Harding, Sarah Frankenburg, Hannah Bradbury, Daniel Cavanagh, Dan Holden, Peter Matthews, Alice McGee, John Morris, and Valeria Titkova; the Data Access and Sharing Team at the Department for Education for facilitating access to the sample; Alan Cribb, Carli Lessof and the Young Lives, Young Futures Advisory Panel and Youth Advisory Group members for vital input into the survey design and wider project; Professor Ingrid Schoon for valuable advice on data analysis; our colleagues Charlotte McPherson and Amna Sarwer who were indispensable research team members; and Debs Daborn for her design work.

Any mistakes or omissions are our own.

Executive Summary

Approximately half of young people in England build their futures outside of higher education. For this substantial group, the years between the ages of 16 and 20 represent a critical period during which they must navigate a complex landscape of further education, training, apprenticeships, and employment. Yet robust longitudinal evidence tracking how the most recent cohorts navigate these transitions remains limited—a gap that is particularly consequential given the current pace of change reshaping the youth labour market. The cohort reaching adulthood in the mid-2020s is the first to enter the post-compulsory phase having experienced the full disruption of COVID-19 to their schooling, while also confronting a labour market increasingly characterised by platform work, the automation of routine entry-level tasks, declining apprenticeship availability for under-25s, and the ongoing contraction of sectors that historically provided stable non-graduate employment.

This report addresses this gap by drawing on data from the *Your Life, Your Future survey* (YLYF) to provide a detailed picture of post-school transitions in contemporary England. YLYF is a large-scale longitudinal study following a nationally representative sample of young people born in 2004/05 from the ages of 15-16 through to ages 19-20. The survey, which was carried out over three waves, was conducted as part of the ESRC-funded Young Lives, Young Futures research project. The analysis presented in this report is based on the responses of the 4,295 young people who participated in all three waves of the study.



Key findings

1. A deteriorating non-graduate youth labour market and widespread precarity

By ages 19-20, just over half (52%) of the YLYF cohort had entered higher education. Among those who had not, only a minority had secured apprenticeships (16%) or relatively stable paid work with a permanent contract (23%). Casual and temporary work, including platform work, zero-hour contracts and fixed-term positions, was as prevalent as stable employment (24%), and one in five were classified as not in education, employment or training (NEET). For many young people, the post-compulsory education period does not deliver a smooth transition into secure work. Instead, it channels them into fragmented, insecure employment or exclusion from the labour market altogether.

These patterns mark a sharp deterioration in labour market entry conditions relative to earlier cohorts. Among young people in paid employment at ages 19-20, approximately half were in casual or temporary arrangements. By comparison, an earlier cohort study, whose respondents reached ages 19-20 six years before the YLYF cohort, found that 81% of those in work held permanent positions (Ross et al., 2025). This shift likely reflects the compounding effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, austerity-era retrenchment, technological displacement of routine entry-level tasks, and the growth of platform work. A substantial share of young people are now beginning their careers in conditions of significant precarity, with consequences that research on labour market scarring suggests may persist across their working lives (Arulampalam et al., 2001; Schmillen & Umkehrer, 2017).

2. NEET status is persistent, and mental health is central

Among the YLYF cohort, NEET rates more than doubled between ages 17-18 (4%) and 19-20 (10%). Moreover, NEET status showed striking persistence, with 41% of those who were NEET at ages 17-18 remaining so two years later. This was by far the highest rate of persistence from any prior activity status. This report provides new evidence on the role of mental health in driving this persistence. Among young people who were unable to work due to illness or disability at ages 19-20, over 80% had reported a long-term mental health condition at the age of 15-16, and the proportion of young people who were NEET reporting health-related

barriers to work more than doubled between survey waves. Among young people not in higher education, mental health conditions reported at age 15-16 were independently associated with a higher probability of being NEET at the age of 19-20 and of not continuing in education beyond 16, even after controlling for a wide range of individual and contextual characteristics. These findings position mental health as a central factor shaping post-school transitions, with implications for the integration of mental health protection considerations and mental health provision across education, employment and welfare systems.

3. The composition of the NEET group challenges simplistic assumptions of disengagement

While the risks associated with prolonged disengagement are clear, the majority of young people classified as NEET are actively seeking opportunities, undertaking informal learning and contributing to their families, communities, wider society, and the economy through unpaid care work, volunteering and other forms of civic engagement. Approximately 60% of those classified as NEET at ages 17-18 and 19-20 reported actively looking for education or employment, while a further 11% were engaged in voluntary or unpaid caring work, which, although not formally recognised in labour market statistics as forms of economic activity, constitute essential contributions to maintaining critical social infrastructure. These activities represent meaningful forms of participation that challenge simplistic narratives of inactivity.

4. Apprenticeships deliver on wellbeing, not just employment

At ages 19-20 apprenticeships were associated with the highest reported levels of personal wellbeing among all post-school destinations across several measures, including life satisfaction, sense of purpose and happiness. Young apprentices also reported the strongest alignment between what they were currently doing and their aspirations, and the greatest satisfaction with the education and career decisions they had made at 16. Apprenticeships were also consistently associated with higher job quality than other forms of employment. Pay satisfaction, employee voice, the quality of workplace relationships, and job design (encompassing workload manageability, scope for exercising autonomy and sense of achievement derived from work) were all rated more highly by apprentices than by those in other kinds of employment. These findings indicate that apprenticeships, as well as providing an alternative route into employment, offer a qualitatively distinct experience that supports psychological wellbeing during a formative life stage. The wellbeing advantages of apprenticeships strengthen the case for expanding provision not only on economic grounds and as an investment in young people's futures, but also as a means of enhancing their quality of life in the present.

5. Demand for apprenticeships far outstrips supply, and access is unequal

Despite these benefits, we found a substantial mismatch between young people's demand for apprenticeships and places available. By ages 19-20, over a quarter of young people had applied for an apprenticeship, a figure that underscores how highly young people value this pathway. Yet only 11% had succeeded in securing one. This gap between aspiration and opportunity is particularly concerning given the ongoing decline in apprenticeship starts among young people under 25, which means the mismatch is likely widening.

Access to apprenticeships is not only constrained but unequally so. Young women were significantly less likely to apply than young men, while young people with the highest GCSE scores were typically channelled away from apprenticeships toward academic routes. Among those who did apply, young people from Asian and Black backgrounds, those born outside the UK and those with multiple special educational needs or disabilities (SEND) were significantly less likely to secure a place, despite applying at comparable rates to their peers. These findings indicate that barriers to apprenticeship participation operate at multiple stages, from aspiration and application through to employer selection, and raise serious concerns about the fairness of recruitment practices.

6. Structural inequalities shape post-school destinations

Post-school destinations among young people who do not enter university are profoundly shaped by structural factors. Parental occupation, gender, ethnicity, migration background, area-based deprivation, SEND status, and mental health all independently predict where young people end up by ages 19-20. Access to higher-level apprenticeships is stratified by social class, with young people from managerial and professional backgrounds significantly more likely to secure Level 4+ places. Young people from minoritised ethnic backgrounds are more likely to persist in education but face substantial barriers to accessing stable employment, with Black young people approximately 24 percentage points less likely to be in stable employment at ages 19-20 than their White peers. These patterns demonstrate that achieving equitable transitions requires attention to structural conditions and cannot solely rely on interventions focused on enhancing individual employability.



Implications for policy

Taken together, these findings point to a post-school transition system that is failing to deliver high-quality outcomes for a substantial proportion of young people. The scale of early career precarity, the persistence of NEET status and the structural patterning of disadvantage by class, gender, ethnicity, geography, and health all indicate that current policy frameworks are insufficient to meet the challenges facing this generation. Several priorities for action emerge from the evidence:

(1) Strengthening vocational pathways, investing in further education and creating more flexibility for learners so that non-academic routes become genuinely high-quality accessible alternatives to academic routes into work.

(2) Addressing NEET persistence through sustained cross-government preventive action that is responsive to the diversity of experience within the NEET category, respects young people's agency and better integrates mental health considerations into education and employment policies and the organisational cultures of schools and workplaces.

(3) Improving employment quality for young workers through measures that strengthen protections against exploitative working arrangements, enhance access to high-quality training and development, provide more scope for young people to exercise autonomy in their work, and support meaningful employee voice.

(4) Expanding apprenticeship provision while addressing inequalities in access to apprenticeship places, ensuring that recruitment practices are transparent, fair and inclusive of young people from all backgrounds.

(5) Tackling social and spatial inequalities through measures that: acknowledge and address the paucity of good quality non-graduate job opportunities; enhance the capacity of further education and training providers in disadvantaged regions; improve transport affordability and connectivity; and enable local and regional authorities to align skills provision with labour market needs in ways that are also responsive to the voices and choices of young people seeking to enter the labour market.

(6) Establishing a national, locally administered careers information, advice and guidance service that is independent of schools and fulfils a genuine brokerage function, informing young people about the full range of opportunities available to them and connecting them with opportunities aligned with their interests and aspirations.

Meeting these priorities will require a shift from approaches centred on individual employability toward structural reforms that address the supply of opportunities, the quality of work and the barriers—economic, geographical, health-related, and discriminatory—that prevent young people from accessing the pathways that would serve them best.

Chapter 1. Introduction

1.1. Research aims

Approximately half of young people in England do not enter higher education after completing their secondary schooling (Department for Education, 2025). For members of this substantial group, the years between the ages of 16 and 20 represent a critical period during which they have to navigate a complex education and employment landscape comprising diverse potential pathways through further education, training and apprenticeships, or direct entry into employment. While post-school transitions have been extensively studied in earlier cohorts, robust longitudinal evidence on the most recent generation of young people remains scarce. This is a significant gap. The cohort now reaching adulthood faces a qualitatively different landscape from their predecessors, shaped by the lasting disruption of COVID-19 to schooling, the expansion of platform work[1] and other forms of insecure employment, declining apprenticeship availability for under-25s, and the continued contraction of sectors that historically provided stable non-graduate employment. Understanding how young people are navigating these changed conditions is essential for enhancing both individual life chances and national economic productivity.

The half of young people who do not progress to university are far from a homogeneous group. They come from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds, pursue different qualifications and live in regions with markedly different labour market conditions (Montacute & Cullinane, 2023; Duckworth et al., 2025). Their post-school trajectories also diverge substantially. Some move into structured programmes that lead to skilled employment, while others encounter fragmented pathways marked by uncertainty and limited progression. For many, routes into further education, training and employment are characterised by complexity, instability and uncertain prospects, with consequences that can shape opportunities and outcomes across the life course (Ross et al., 2025). Understanding what distinguishes these different experiences, and what policy levers might improve them, requires the kind of detailed longitudinal analysis that has until now been unavailable for this cohort.

This report presents findings from the quantitative component of Young Lives, Young Futures, a six-year longitudinal study conducted by researchers at King's College London and the Edge Foundation and funded by the Economic and Social Research Council. The project is investigating how England's post-16 education and training system can better support the school-to-work transitions of young people who do not go to university. Its quantitative strand, Your Life, Your Future (YLYF), is a three-wave survey, which followed a nationally representative cohort of young people born in 2004/05 from the ages of 15-16 to 19-20, tracking their journeys through post-compulsory schooling, further education, training, employment, and/or unemployment into their early years of adulthood. This report draws on data from the 4,295 young people who participated in all three waves, documenting their activities, pathways, experiences, and outcomes as they reached ages 19-20 in the 2024/25 academic year. Analysis of the survey data is complemented by insights from our qualitative research.

The analysis addresses five overarching research questions. First, what education, training and/or employment activities do young people engage in between the ages of 16 and 20, and how do the destinations they reach by early adulthood vary? Second, what pathways do young people follow through this period, and how do earlier choices and circumstances shape subsequent trajectories? Third, what individual, family and place-based factors are associated with different destinations among those who do not enter higher education? Fourth, what is the quality of employment experienced by young people who enter the labour market, and how do wellbeing outcomes vary across different post-school destinations? Finally, who applies for and succeeds in securing apprenticeships, a pathway that typically provides a positive route into employment for young people in terms of well-being outcomes, job satisfaction and, in the case of apprenticeships at Levels 3 and above, future earnings?

In addressing these questions, the report aims to provide a detailed and timely picture of post-school transitions in contemporary England, identifying where young people thrive and where they face challenges, and generating evidence to inform policy and practice aimed at creating more equitable and successful transitions.

[1] Platform work is employment channelled through a digital platform (website or App) that is remunerated on a task-by-task basis.

1.2. Contextual background

The cohort examined in this report navigated their post-school transitions during a distinctive period marked by significant policy reforms, the disruption of the COVID-19 pandemic, and ongoing changes in the youth labour market. Understanding this context is important for interpreting the patterns documented in subsequent chapters.

1.2.1. Raising the participation age

The policy context for post-16 transitions in England was reshaped by the raising of the participation age (RPA), introduced through the Education and Skills Act 2008 and implemented in stages from 2013 (Department for Education, 2024). This legislation requires all young people in England to continue in education or training until their eighteenth birthday, extending the previous school leaving age of 16. Young people can fulfil this requirement through various routes: full-time education in school, college or with a training provider; an apprenticeship or traineeship; or part-time education or training alongside employment or volunteering of at least 20 hours per week.

The RPA policy sought to boost England's education and training performance and national productivity and improve young people's future economic prospects, as those who leave education without qualifications face substantially elevated risks of unemployment and low pay across their working lives. Local authorities were given responsibility for tracking young people's participation and identifying those not engaged in education or training so that support for re-engagement could be targeted appropriately. In practice, however, the policy's reach has been constrained from the outset. No duty was placed on employers to support compliance and the capacity of local authorities to fulfil their duties was eroded by cuts to local authority budgets and the simultaneous expansion of multi-academy trusts and establishment of free schools (Dickson et al., 2025).

A decade on from full implementation, participation rates among 16- to 17-year-olds have remained relatively high, with around 90% in education or apprenticeships in recent years (Department for Education, 2024). Yet, as the data in this report demonstrate, a notable minority remain outside structured education or training. The persistence of this gap between policy intention and practice raises questions about the effectiveness of the tracking of young people's participation and the availability of meaningful support and sufficiently engaging and accessible pathways to retain all young people within some form of education or training.

1.2.2. Reforms to vocational and technical education

The YLYF cohort's post-school transitions coincided with a sustained programme of reform to England's vocational and technical education system, spanning both work- and classroom-based routes. Successive governments sought to raise the quality and status of vocational provision, responding to concerns raised by the Wolf Report (2011) about the limited labour market value of many vocational qualifications and to the Sainsbury Review's (Department for Education, 2016) call to restructure technical education around employer-designed routes.

The first major intervention targeted apprenticeships. In April 2017, the Government introduced the apprenticeship levy, a charge of 0.5% of the annual pay bill of UK employers whose annual pay bill exceeds £3 million, returned in England via digital accounts (topped up by 10%) that can only be spent on approved training and assessment. Intended to raise both the volume and quality of apprenticeships and to reverse a long-term decline in employer investment in training, its early effects were widely judged to run counter to these aims. Total starts fell from 509,000 in 2015/16 to 376,000 in 2017/18 (Powell, 2024), with the steepest declines among young people. Between 2015/16 and 2022/23, starts fell by around 41% for under-19s and 36% for 19- to 24-year-olds (CIPD & Youth Futures Foundation, 2024). Critics argued that the levy, alongside new funding rules favouring higher-level apprenticeships, had incentivised employers to rebadge existing staff training as apprenticeships rather than recruit young entrants (CIPD & Youth Futures Foundation, 2024).

The reform of classroom-based provision centred on T Levels, which are two-year Level 3 technical qualifications combining 80% classroom learning with a mandatory industry placement of at least 315 hours. The first three launched in September 2020, with further pathways phased in annually, reaching 21 by 2025 (Department for Education, 2026). Their introduction was accompanied, from 2021, by a contentious programme of defunding qualifications deemed to overlap with them. Critics argued that withdrawing funding from familiar, widely used pathways such as BTECs would narrow options for students poorly served by A Levels and T Levels, without adequate alternatives in place. Questions were also raised about delivery itself, including providers' capacity to secure sufficient industry placements, and about student retention and the readiness of a further education workforce facing persistent recruitment, retention and pay pressures (Ofsted, 2023; Maris et al., 2024).



Uptake of T Levels has nonetheless remained modest. In 2023, T Level students accounted for only around 1.5% of the 16- to 17-year-old population, compared with 45% taking A or AS Levels and 19% on other Level 3 courses (Lewis & Bolton, 2025). The YLYF cohort were among the first for whom T Levels were theoretically available post-16, though the early stage of rollout meant that very few would have been able to pursue one in practice.

Taken together, these reforms reflect a longstanding ambition to elevate vocational and technical education in England. As the findings of this report demonstrate, however, academic pathways continue to dominate post-16 transitions, and the gap between policy aspiration and lived experience remains wide.

1.2.3. Careers guidance reforms

The provision of careers guidance in England underwent substantial reform during the period relevant to this cohort's transitions. The Education Act 2011 transferred responsibility for careers guidance from local authority Connexions services to individual schools, requiring them to secure access to independent careers guidance for their students. In 2015 the Careers and Enterprise Company was established to offer support with careers guidance to schools and colleges. Their cornerstone is the Gatsby Benchmarks, a framework which became central to government statutory guidance for schools and colleges from 2018.

The eight Gatsby Benchmarks set expectations across a range of dimensions comprising a stable careers programme, learning from career and labour market information, addressing the needs of each student, linking curriculum learning to careers, encounters with employers and employees, experiences of workplaces, encounters with further and higher education, and personal guidance from trained careers advisers (The Gatsby Charitable Foundation, 2024). Schools and colleges are expected to use these benchmarks to shape their careers provision, with the Careers and Enterprise Company supporting implementation across the country. The DfE's 2025 statutory guidance reinforced expectations that every student should experience multiple encounters with employers and technical education providers, and that schools should target support towards disadvantaged learners.

However, despite the good intentions behind these reforms, concerns persist about the funding, quality and consistency of careers guidance available to young people. The volume of funding available for careers guidance decreased substantially following the demise of Connexions

(Department for Education, 2022), and research consistently identifies significant variation in provision across schools and colleges, with some young people, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds or with additional needs, receiving more limited access to impartial advice from professionally trained careers advisers (Hughes, 2017; Moote & Archer, 2018; Holt-White et al., 2022; Yarde et al., 2023). The findings of this report, documenting substantial inequalities in post-school destinations by social background, prior attainment and other characteristics, reinforce the importance of effective guidance in supporting young people to navigate an increasingly complex transitions landscape.

1.2.4. The COVID-19 pandemic

The cohort examined in this report experienced their schooling and post-school transitions against the backdrop of unprecedented disruption from the COVID-19 pandemic. With the onset of lockdown in March 2020, as a means of reducing the spread of the virus, schools in England were closed to all students except key workers' children and those deemed vulnerable. The YLYF cohort, who were in Year 10 at the time, were largely taught online by their teachers and were expected to study independently. Schools in England typically take a long summer break from mid-July to early September. In 2020, this break coincided with the gradual easing of lockdown restrictions. As a result, most students were able to return to school in September 2020, although their return took place under modified arrangements designed to reduce transmission of the virus, including limits on unnecessary mixing, physical distancing and, in some settings, the requirement to wear face coverings (Elliott, 2021).



Research has documented the multidimensional impacts of the pandemic on young people's education, including delayed academic progress and skill acquisition and loss of motivation, with particularly adverse effects on students from disadvantaged backgrounds who were less likely to be able to access the support, quiet space, devices, and internet connection needed for home learning (Cullinane et al., 2022; Green et al., 2022; Tuckett et al., 2022). The shift to remote learning was especially challenging for students on vocational courses, which often depend on practical, hands-on activities and work-based learning that cannot easily be replicated online (Blundell et al., 2022). Young people's access to work experience, employer encounters and other activities supporting career exploration was severely curtailed during lockdown periods (The Careers & Enterprise Company, 2020). Mental health and wellbeing also deteriorated significantly, with lasting consequences that continue to shape young people's engagement with education and employment (Vizard et al., 2020; McCurdy & Murphy, 2024).

1.2.5. Deterioration in the early career labour market

Young people entering the labour market in the 2020s face structural challenges that have been intensifying over a longer period. Significant among these is a trend towards more precarious employment among young workers, characterised by temporary contracts, zero-hour arrangements, self-employment, and gig economy work that offer limited security, training opportunities and progression prospects (Creach, 2023). By 2022, approximately 3.9 million people in the UK were in insecure employment, an increase of over 700,000 since 2011, with young workers disproportionately affected (TUC, 2023).

At the same time there has been a weakening of traditional pathways into skilled, stable employment and a decline in the availability of apprenticeships for young people under 25 (Bocock et al., 2025; TUC, 2025). Historically, manufacturing and construction were major sources of good jobs for young workers because of their reliance on skilled labour and in-house training (Yates, 2023; Crowley, 2024), but the contraction of the manufacturing industry and shifts in the labour model of the construction sector have contributed to a significant decline in apprenticeship and employment opportunities for young people in these sectors. Skills England (2025) identifies construction as one of the sectors facing the most acute skills shortages, the roots of which can be traced back to the move away from direct employment as the dominant labour model in construction work in the 1980s, towards subcontracting and

self-employment – a trend that has undermined the capacity of the industry to take on apprentices (Gospel, 2021). While local authorities and other public sector organisations once served as major employers of construction apprentices, the privatisation of previously publicly provided services and the shift towards the use of subcontractors by organisations that have remained in the public sector mean that this route into apprenticeships and stable employment for young people has largely disappeared (Toner, 2008).

In more recent years, the declining availability of secure non-graduate entry-level positions for young people has been exacerbated by the displacement of routine, entry-level tasks as a corollary of automation and by the growth of platform work (Bocock et al., 2025; TUC, 2025).

Although there is growing recognition that employment opportunities and conditions for young workers have worsened, robust longitudinal evidence documenting the scale and nature of this deterioration has been limited, a gap that is addressed in this report.

The deterioration in early career employment quality matters not only because of its immediate effects on young people's social and economic wellbeing but also because first jobs can have lasting effects on subsequent trajectories. Research on labour market scarring suggests that early experiences of unemployment and precarious work can have persistent implications for earnings, employment stability and career progression (Arulampalam et al., 2001; Schmillen & Umkehrer, 2017). While some of these effects may be buffered by parental co-residence, particularly for lower-educated young adults who are most likely to experience unemployment and precarious work but also most likely to remain in the parental home, the consequences are more severe for those living independently, for whom scarring effects on net incomes and expenditures are significant and persistent (Cribb et al., 2017). Young people who begin their working lives in insecure, low-quality jobs may find themselves trapped in cycles of precarity, with limited opportunities to acquire the skills, experience and occupational networks that support progression into stable, higher quality work.

The findings of this report, documenting significantly increased rates of casual and temporary employment among young people entering the labour market, should be understood against this broader context of structural change in the youth labour market. The deterioration in employment quality compared with earlier cohorts, examined in detail in subsequent chapters, raises pressing questions about the adequacy of current policy frameworks to address the challenges currently facing young workers.

1.3. Structure of the report

The remainder of this report is organised as follows.

Chapter 2 describes the data and methods employed in the analysis, providing details of the *Your Life, Your Future* survey design, sample characteristics, measurement approaches, and analytical strategy.

Chapter 3 examines what education, training and employment activities young people engage in between the ages of 15-16 and 19-20, documenting the distribution of destinations at each survey wave and the composition of key groups such as those classified as NEET.

Chapter 4 traces the pathways young people follow through this period, examining how earlier choices and circumstances shape subsequent trajectories and identifying the most common transition sequences.

Chapter 5 investigates the predictors of destinations among young people who do not progress to higher education, assessing how individual characteristics, family background and place-based characteristics are associated with different outcomes.

Chapter 6 examines the quality of employment experienced by young people in apprenticeships and paid work, comparing conditions across different employment types and identifying factors associated with better and worse job quality.

Chapter 7 assesses the personal wellbeing of and subjective outcomes for young people across different post-school destinations, examining life satisfaction, happiness, anxiety, and evaluations of current circumstances and past decisions.

Chapter 8 examines apprenticeship participation, assessing the extent of demand among young people, the characteristics associated with applying for an apprenticeship and the factors that predict success in securing an apprenticeship among those who apply.

Chapter 9 concludes by synthesising the key findings, reflecting on their broader significance and considering their implications for policy and practice aimed at supporting more equitable and successful post-school transitions.

Chapter 2. Data and methods

2.1. The *Your Life, Your Future* survey

This analysis draws on data from the *Your Life, Your Future* (YLYF) survey, the quantitative component of the Young Lives, Young Futures research project. The YLYF survey, which was commissioned to the research organisation Verian (formerly Kantar Public) to co-develop and deliver, is a large-scale online panel study documenting four key dimensions of young people's post-compulsory transitions. First, the survey captures young people's values and aspirations and how these evolve as they move through the end of compulsory education and into post-compulsory education, training, employment, unemployment, and/or other destinations. Second, it records their post-16 decision-making, including pathways into further and higher education, training, employment, and/or unemployment. Third, it examines their experiences in and out of education and employment, including their perceptions of programme and employment quality and the resources and support available to them. Fourth, it tracks young people's wellbeing, happiness and experiences of unfair treatment in education and work.

2.1.1. Sample design and data collection

The survey follows a cohort of young people born in 2004/05, beginning when participants were aged 15-16 and in Year 11 at schools in England during the 2020/21 academic year. Data collection occurred across three waves. The first wave was conducted between May and August 2021, prior to participants receiving their GCSE results, achieving a sample of 11,232 respondents. The second wave took place between November 2022 and April 2023, when participants were aged 17-18, yielding 6,149 respondents. The third and final wave was undertaken between September 2024 and January 2025, when participants had reached age 19-20, with 4,295 respondents. Table 1 summarises the data collection timeline.

To achieve a nationally representative sample, the initial sample was drawn from the National Pupil Database (NPD), which contains records for all students in state-funded schools and alternative provision in England. The sampling frame comprised all 581,196 Year 11 students enrolled in the 2020/21 academic year whose records are held by the NPD. The survey therefore excludes students who were attending independent schools, schools outside England and those educated outside the formal school system (such as home-educated children) at the time the sample was drawn. During the sampling process, some ethnic minority groups were deliberately oversampled to ensure adequate representation for subgroup analyses.

Table 1. YLYF survey timeline by wave

Wave	Fieldwork dates	Academic year	Age	Achieved sample[2]
1	May 2021 – August 2021	2020/21	15-16	11,232
2	November 2022 – April 2023	2022/23	17-18	6,149
3	September 2024 – January 2025	2024/25	19-20	4,295

[2] The sample includes respondents recruited at both the pilot and main stages and those who participated only partially in the survey. In the first wave, 463 participants were recruited for the pilot and 10,769 for the main stage.

2.1.2. Sample attrition and weighting

As is common in longitudinal surveys, YLYF experienced substantial attrition across waves. The sample declined from 11,232 at Wave 1 to 6,149 at Wave 2 (a retention rate of 55%) and further to 4,295 at Wave 3 (38% of the original sample). The present analysis focuses on the 4,295 respondents who participated in all three waves, enabling examination of complete post-school transition trajectories between the ages of 15-16 and 19-20.

To address potential bias arising from both the stratified sampling design at Wave 1 and differential non-response at subsequent waves, sampling weights were constructed and applied to all analyses presented in this report. The weighting procedure addressed these sources of bias sequentially. Wave 1 weights adjusted for unequal sampling probabilities and initial non-response. Wave 2 weights built on the Wave 1 weights with an additional adjustment for differential attrition between Waves 1 and 2. Wave 3 weights were derived analogously, taking the Wave 2 weights and applying a further adjustment for attrition between Waves 2 and 3. At each stage, a ridge logistic regression was used to estimate the probability of survey completion as a function of a wide range of observed characteristics, including demographic factors (e.g., gender, ethnicity, age, migration background), family and household circumstances (e.g., region, parental background, housing tenure, household composition), health and wellbeing, leisure activities, and education, employment and future plans. The inverse of these estimated probabilities was then applied as the basis for the survey weights, giving greater weight to respondents with a lower predicted probability of completion and thereby correcting for the under-representation of harder-to-reach groups. The resulting weighted sample can be considered broadly representative of the population of young people in state-funded schools in England.

2.2. Measures

2.2.1. Current activity

At each wave, participants reported what they were doing at the time of the survey. Their activities were grouped into four broad categories: in education; in an apprenticeship; in paid work; and not in education, employment or training (NEET). Within these categories, further distinctions were made based on the type and level of qualifications being pursued and on specific employment characteristics.

Educational qualifications were classified as 'academic' (e.g., GCSEs, A-Levels, International Baccalaureate), 'vocational' (e.g., BTECs, NVQs, T-Levels), or 'mixed' (studying both academic and vocational qualifications simultaneously), with levels ranging from Entry Level to Level 6. Qualifications at Level 4 or above were classified as 'higher education'. Apprenticeships were also distinguished by level, ranging from Level 2 to Level 6. For participants in paid employment, those working under a casual arrangement or any non-permanent contract (e.g., fixed-term or seasonal work) were classified as being in 'casual/temporary work', while those on non-casual/temporary contracts were classified as being in 'relatively stable paid work'.[3] In cases where the sample size for an activity was too small (e.g. Level 2 and Level 3 apprenticeships), activities were aggregated. Table 2 presents the activity classifications used at each wave.[4]

[3] Although a contract without a fixed end-date and with guaranteed hours suggests some degree of job stability, we classify these roles as 'relatively stable paid work' to acknowledge that young people may still experience insecurities not captured by contract type alone.

[4] These activity classifications necessarily simplify young people's lived experiences. In practice, many young people experience churn between activities over time and may engage in more than one activity simultaneously. While this churn and overlap are highly significant in policy and practice terms, as well as for understanding intersecting inequalities, they cannot be fully captured by mutually exclusive categories at each wave. These issues are more extensively explored in the project's qualitative analysis (see, for example, Khazbak et al., 2026).

Table 2. Current activity classification at each wave

Wave	Activities
Wave 1 (Age 15-16)	– Academic qualification (Level 0-2) – Vocational qualification (Level 0-2) – Mixed qualification (Level 0-2) – Education (Level/qual not stated)
Wave 2 (Age 17-18)	– Academic qualification (Level 3) – Vocational qualification (Level 3) – Mixed qualification (Level 3) – Level 0-2 qualifications – Education (Level/qual not stated) – Apprenticeship (all levels) – Paid work (all types) – NEET
Wave 3 (Age 19-20)	– Higher education (Level 4 or above) – Further education (Level 3 or below) – Education (Level/qual not stated) – Apprenticeship (Level 2-3) – Apprenticeship (Level 4 or above) – Apprenticeship (Level not stated) – Relatively stable paid work – Casual/temporary paid work – NEET

Because participants could report multiple concurrent activities and the Wave 2 questionnaire did not identify a main activity, a hierarchical prioritisation scheme was applied to assign each participant to a single activity category. Apprenticeship was given the highest priority given its policy significance; any participant reporting an apprenticeship was classified in this category regardless of other concurrent activities. Education was prioritised next, such that participants reporting both education and paid work were classified as being in education. Paid work included only those reporting paid employment as their sole economic activity, with no concurrent participation in apprenticeships or formal education. Finally, as per the standard definitions used by the Office for National Statistics (ONS, 2025b), participants were classified as NEET if they did not report being in paid work or any form of education or training, while cases of transitional status, i.e. waiting for a course or job to start, were included in education or paid work respectively.

To validate this classification approach, Wave 3 activities assigned using these prioritisation rules were compared to participant-reported main activities. The classifications we assigned and participants' own classifications of their main activity showed substantial agreement. However, participants were somewhat more likely to report voluntary work, looking after home/family, being ill or disabled, or looking for work—activities that fall into the NEET classification—as their main activities even when they were also engaged in education or paid employment. This may have been because they saw these education or paid employment activities as transient or less important or because they were spending less time on them.

2.2.2. Job quality

Job quality was assessed for participants in employment (including apprenticeships) across five dimensions, drawing where possible on the CIPD's *Good Work Index* (CIPD, 2025). The job quality indices included in the analysis are pay, working hours, job design and the nature of work, relationships at work, and employee voice. All indices were normalised to range from 0 to 100 to facilitate comparison across dimensions.

Pay was measured using reported hourly wages and satisfaction with payment. Working hours captured weekly hours worked. Job design and the nature of work comprised three components: workload manageability; scope for exercising autonomy at work; and sense of achievement derived from work. Workplace relationships assessed the quality of the social environment through items on supportiveness of colleagues, respect for diversity and experiences of unfair treatment or bullying in the workplace. Finally, employee voice measured the extent to which participants felt listened to by their managers.

2.2.3. Wellbeing and subjective outcomes

Personal wellbeing was assessed using the ONS4 measures, the standard framework and questions employed by the Office for National Statistics for measuring subjective wellbeing in the United Kingdom (ONS, 2025a). This framework comprises four dimensions: life satisfaction; the extent to which respondents feel that the things they do in their lives are worthwhile; self-reported happiness; and self-reported anxiety. Happiness measures positive affect, specifically how happy respondents felt the previous day. Anxiety measures negative affect, specifically how anxious respondents felt the previous day.

Each dimension is measured on a scale from 0 to 10. For life satisfaction, the extent to which respondents felt that the things they were doing in their lives were worthwhile and happiness, scores are conventionally categorised as

low (0-4), medium (5-6), high (7-8), or very high (9-10). For anxiety, where higher scores indicate poorer wellbeing, the categories are: very low (0-1), low (2-3), medium (4-5), and high (6-10).

In addition to these established wellbeing measures, two further subjective measures were used. The first assessed the extent to which young people felt they were currently doing what they wanted to do, capturing alignment between current circumstances and personal aspirations. The second measured satisfaction with education and career-related decisions made at age 16, providing insight into how young people evaluate their past choices in light of their current situations.

2.3. Analytical approach

The analysis proceeded in four stages. First, descriptive analyses examined overall patterns in post-school transitions and the distribution of destinations at age 19-20. These analyses document the prevalence of different pathways and provide context for the subsequent multivariate modelling.

Second, the predictors of destinations at age 19-20 among young people who did not enter higher education were examined using multinomial logistic regression. This approach is appropriate when the outcome variable comprises multiple unordered categories, as is the case with activity destinations. Following previous literature on predictors of post-school pathways (e.g., Ross et al., 2025) and preliminary qualitative findings from the Young Lives, Young Futures project, three domains of potential predictors were examined. Individual characteristics comprised gender, ethnicity, migration status, self-reported GCSE results (the average score of English language and maths), sexual orientation, special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) status, mental health difficulties while at school, and experiences of unfair treatment or bullying at school. Family background factors comprised parental social class (measured using the five-category National Statistics Socio-economic Classification [ONS, 2020]), parental education (whether either parent held a university degree), and eligibility for free school meals (FSM). Place-based characteristics comprised Government Office Region and the Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) decile (see Appendix A and Appendix B for the detailed measurement and descriptive statistics of these variables).



Third, job quality and wellbeing outcomes associated with different post-school destinations were examined using ordinary least squares (OLS) regression models. These models included the three domains of individual, family and place-based characteristics as covariates to control for potential confounding—that is, to isolate the association between destination type and outcomes from pre-existing differences between young people who follow different pathways.

Finally, two separate logistic regression models were estimated to examine the factors associated with applying for and securing apprenticeships. The first modelled the probability of having ever applied for an apprenticeship among the full Wave 3 sample, capturing the individual, family and contextual characteristics associated with entry into the apprenticeship application process. The second modelled the probability of having secured an apprenticeship, conditional on having applied. By restricting the second model to applicants only, the analysis separates the factors shaping who enters the applicant pool from those that influence selection outcomes, allowing barriers at each stage to be identified independently.

Missingness caused by item non-response was addressed with multiple imputation with chained equations. Analyses were conducted for each imputed dataset and the results were combined following Rubin's rules (Rubin, 1987; Little & Rubin, 2002).

Chapter 3. Post-school transitions: Activities and destinations of young people

This chapter examines the activities and destinations of young people as they move from their last year of compulsory full-time education through the post-compulsory period, from Year 11 (ages 15-16) through to ages 19-20. The descriptive analysis traces how the cohort's engagement with education, training and employment changes across the three survey waves, documenting both aggregate patterns and the composition of key groups such as those classified as not being in education, employment or training (NEET).

3.1. Overview of current activities by wave

Table 3 presents the distribution of current activities at each survey wave and Figure 1 illustrates the distribution of activities at Wave 2 and Wave 3, highlighting the shift in the balance between education, employment and other destinations as young people age.

At ages 15-16, when all participants were in Year 11, over 80% were pursuing academic qualifications. Approximately 14% were studying a combination of academic and vocational qualifications, while only around 3% were pursuing vocational qualifications exclusively.

At ages 17-18, the vast majority of young people (85%) were still in some form of education. Academic Level 3 pathways were the most common route, with nearly half (48%) of the cohort pursuing A-levels or equivalent academic qualifications. Vocational and mixed programmes at Level 3 were considerably less prevalent, accounting for 13% and 12% respectively. Meanwhile, a notable minority (7.5%) were studying at Levels 0-2 at this age.[5] The composition of this group differed markedly from the cohort as a whole: the majority were pursuing vocational (52%) or mixed (30%) qualifications rather than purely academic programmes (18%). This pattern suggests that vocational programmes play an important role in supporting continued participation among young people studying at Level 2 post-16.

Beyond education, 5% of 17-18-year-olds had entered apprenticeships and 4% were in paid work. The small proportion entering paid employment at this age is notable in itself, reflecting not only the raising of the participation age but also a long-term contraction of the youth labour market that has left few opportunities for direct entry into employment at 16 or 17. A further 4% were classified as NEET.



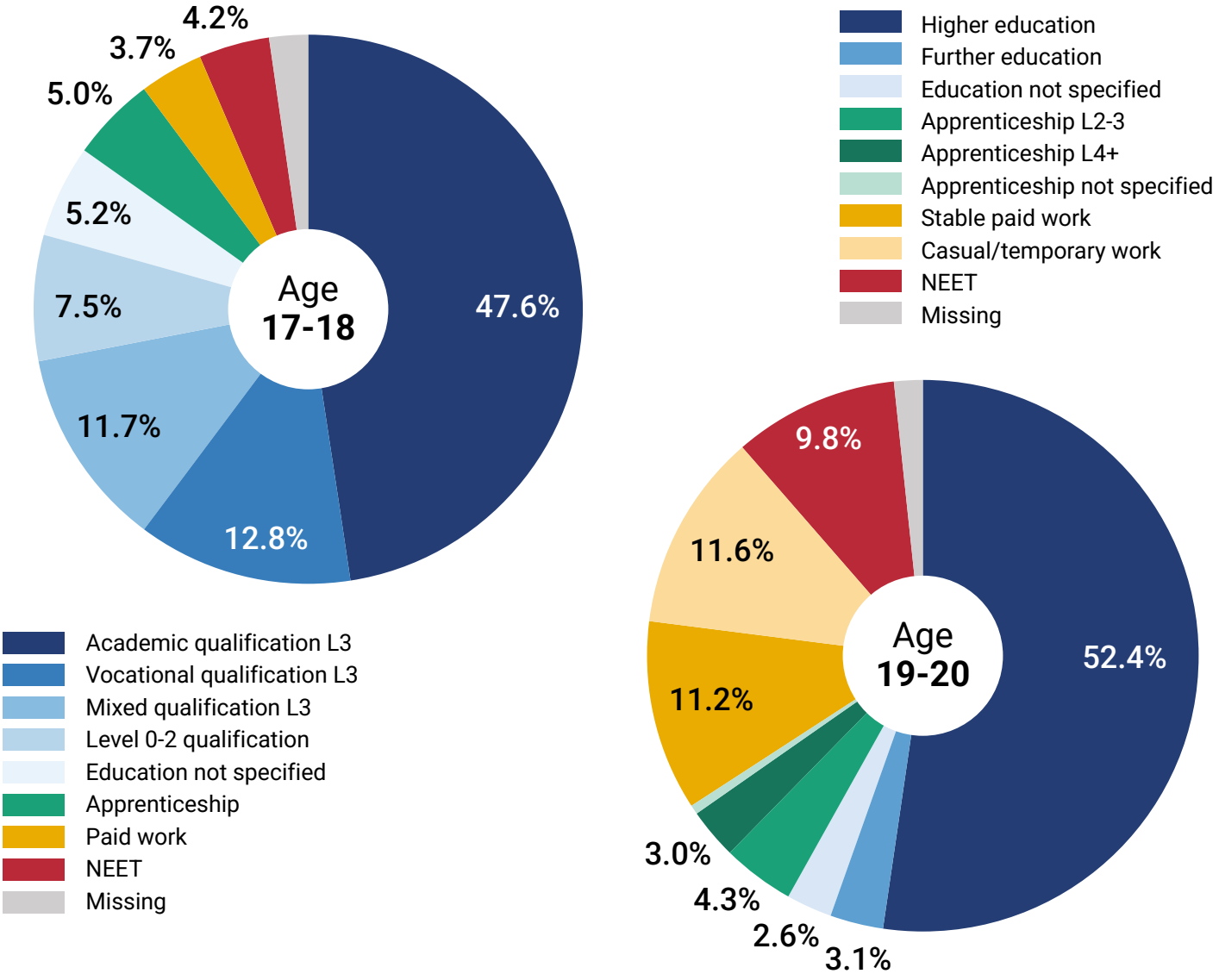
[5] Some of these students would have been resitting GCSE Maths and/or English either on their own or alongside other subjects in response to England's resit policy which requires students who do not achieve a Grade 4 (standard pass) in Maths and English to continue studying them until they pass or reach the age of 18. Students resitting GCSE Maths and/or English alongside a Level 3 programme are classified as Level 3 in this report.

Table 3. Current activity at each wave

	Unweighted (N)	Weighted (%)
Wave 1 (Year 11; ages 15-16)		
Academic qualification (L0-2)	3592	81.73
Vocational qualification (L0-2)	96	3.04
Mixed qualification (L0-2)	562	13.53
Education (Level/qual not stated)	45	1.69
Total	4295	100.00
Wave 2 (Ages 17-18)		
Academic qualification (L3)	2526	47.63
Vocational qualification (L3)	496	12.76
Mixed qualification (L3)	510	11.71
Level 0-2 qualifications	172	7.45
Education (Level/qual not stated)	164	5.23
Apprenticeship (all levels)	146	4.98
Paid work (all types)	93	3.68
NEET	127	4.17
Missing	61	2.39
Total	4295	100.00
Wave 3 (Ages 19-20)		
Higher education (inc. vocational HE)	2803	52.36
Further education (Academic/vocational)	111	3.14
Education (Level/qual not stated)	104	2.59
Apprenticeship (L2-3)	137	4.27
Apprenticeship (L4+)	112	2.99
Apprenticeship (Level not stated)	19	0.51
Relatively stable paid work	300	11.15
Casual/temporary paid work	361	11.56
NEET	288	9.75
Missing	60	1.66
Total	4295	100.00

Note: Relatively stable paid work includes being self-employed and working in the family business. Casual/temporary paid work includes any non-permanent positions (e.g., platform work, fixed-term positions). Transitional statuses (waiting for a course to start, waiting for a job to start) are not included in the NEET category.

Figure 1. Current activity at Wave 2 and Wave 3



By ages 19-20, young people's activities had become considerably more diverse. Just over half (52%) had transitioned into higher education, with a small proportion (approximately 1%) enrolled in vocational higher education programmes such as Higher National Certificates, Higher National Diplomas, or NVQ Level 4 and above. A further 3% remained in further education at Level 3 or below; among this group, half were pursuing Level 3 academic qualifications, a quarter were studying Level 0-2 academic programmes, and the remainder were engaged in vocational or mixed qualifications.

Apprenticeship participation had grown modestly to 8%, with roughly equal numbers at Levels 2-3 (4%) and Level 4 or above (3%). Nearly a quarter (23%) of young people were in paid employment, though the nature of this employment varied considerably. Approximately half of those in work held relatively stable positions, while the other half were engaged in casual or temporary arrangements such as platform work, zero-hour contracts or fixed-term positions.

The proportion classified as NEET had more than doubled, rising from 4% at ages 17-18 (Wave 2) to 10% at ages 19-20 (Wave 3), indicating that the end of compulsory participation represents a significant point of vulnerability in young people's trajectories.

3.2. Composition of the NEET population

To indicate the circumstances of young people outside education, training and paid employment, Table 4 presents the composition of the NEET group at each wave, disaggregated by gender.

Table 4. Current activity among young people classified as NEET

	Wave 2/Ages 17-18 (%)			Wave 3/Ages 19-20 (%)		
	Total	**Male**	**Female**	**Total**	**Male**	**Female**
Looking for work and/or education	60.1	58.9	61.7	58.0	64.6+	46.9+
Voluntary work; looking after home/family	10.9	8.7	13.8	11.3	10.8	12.1
Ill or disabled and unable to work	4.5	3.7	5.5	9.6	7.1	13.9
Travelling, taking a break, something else	20.1	24.4	14.7	18.7	16.9	21.7
Not looking for work, education, or training	4.4	4.4	4.3	2.4	0.7+	5.4+
N	**175**	**77**	**98**	**276**	**130**	**146**

Note: Since the respondents were allowed to provide multiple statuses, a prioritising rule is applied in the order of looking for work/education, voluntary work/unpaid caring responsibilities, ill or disabled, travel/break/other, and then not looking for work/education. The Wave 2 sample includes those who did not participate in the Wave 3 survey. Cases with missing gender information or identifying as non-binary are excluded due to small sample sizes. + represents a significant gender difference at the 90% level.

Several notable patterns emerge from the data. First, gender differences in job search behaviour were evident at ages 19-20. Young men were significantly more likely than young women to be actively seeking employment or education (65% versus 47%). These differences may reflect gendered patterns in caring responsibilities, though further investigation would be needed to establish the underlying mechanisms.

Second, the proportion of 'NEET' young people reporting illness or disability that prevented them from working more than doubled between waves, rising from 4.5% to 9.6%. Among those who were unable to work due to health reasons at ages 19-20, over 80% had, at age 15-16, reported a mental health condition that had lasted, or was expected to last, for at least 12 months.

3.3. Implications

(1) The youth labour market has contracted and work transitions are characterised by precarity.

The small proportion of 17-18-year-olds in paid work (4%) reflects a long-term structural shift. Direct entry into employment at ages 16-17, once a relatively common route for young people leaving school (Crawford et al., 2011), has become increasingly marginal. This trend may have been driven by both demand- and supply-side factors: declining employer demand for young workers in sectors that historically provided entry-level employment, alongside the raising of the participation age and the subsequent expansion of post-16 education. While the near disappearance of full-time employment for under-18s is partly a consequence of increased educational participation, it raises questions about what options are available to those for whom continued full-time education is not appropriate or sustainable, whether due to health difficulties, disengagement from formal learning or financial pressures. Ensuring that all young people have access to meaningful and accessible pathways, including supported routes back into education and training for those who have disengaged, remains a significant challenge.

By ages 19-20, the share of young people in paid employment had increased to 23%, yet approximately half were engaged in casual or non-permanent roles (e.g., platform work, temporary or fixed-term contracts). Although young employees are generally more likely than older workers to be in insecure jobs, this proportion is still striking, particularly when compared to an earlier cohort participating in a similar longitudinal study (LSYPE2) who reached ages

19-20 six years earlier, in 2018/19. Ross et al. (2025) report that among LSYPE2 participants who were in paid work at that age, 81% were in permanent positions. This points to a marked increase in job instability in this six-year period. Several interlinked developments appear to have driven this shift. The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted education and post-16 transitions, severely weakening the youth labour market and eroding stable entry-level opportunities. Simultaneously, employer responses to technological developments, and rapid automation, have displaced routine, entry-level tasks. These factors have been compounded by a broader trend toward the casualisation of employment that extends well beyond the youth labour market, affecting workers across age groups, sectors and seniority levels, as employers have increasingly favoured flexible staffing arrangements (Creach, 2023; TUC, 2023). Consequently, an increasing share of young people are beginning their careers in temporary, casual or otherwise precarious jobs. While some may value the flexibility these arrangements provide, they carry significant costs, such as unstable incomes, limited access to sick pay or training and poorer job quality (see details in Chapter 6). Taken together, these findings signal a weakening of school-to-work transitions and greater vulnerability among early-career workers and highlight the urgency of strengthening vocational pathways and improving job quality to ensure young people's wellbeing and more stable, sustainable youth employment in a changing labour market.

(2) Academic pathways dominate, while vocational routes remain less common.

At ages 17-18, nearly half of young people were following academic Level 3 pathways, while vocational and mixed programmes were considerably less common, reflecting England's enduring academic bias. A smaller group remained in Level 0-2 education, most of whom were enrolled in vocational or mixed qualifications, highlighting the important role these pathways can play in supporting continued participation during the compulsory participation period. The weighting towards academic qualifications at ages 17-18 continues into higher education. While over half of young people transitioned to higher education study, within this group uptake of vocational higher education (1%) and Level 4+ apprenticeships (3%) remained very low. These patterns highlight a substantial gap between current practice and the Government's target that at least 10% of young people pursue higher technical courses or higher apprenticeships by 2040. Apprenticeships more broadly, despite significant policy emphasis, remain a minority route. Only 5% of 17/18-year-olds and 8% of 19/20-year-olds had started an apprenticeship at any level.

(3) Motivated but constrained: understanding rising NEET rates.

The increase in NEET rates from 4% at ages 17-18 to 10% at ages 19-20 indicates that the transition out of compulsory participation is a critical point of vulnerability. Without adequate post-16 support, some young people risk falling out of both education and employment altogether. However, the composition of the NEET group suggests that many remain motivated and engaged in meaningful activities. Approximately 60% reported actively looking for education or employment, while a further 11% were engaged in voluntary or unpaid caring work, which, although not formally recognised in labour market statistics, constitute essential contributions to maintaining the social infrastructure upon which society's wellbeing and the economy depend (Collins, 2023). This pattern supports earlier findings, such as those from the Wolf Report (Wolf, 2011), which argued that young people's NEET status should not be equated with apathy or disengagement. Instead, it often reflects young people's continuous efforts to support their families and/or seek education or work opportunities better aligned with their life goals, alongside barriers such as limited local opportunities, financial constraints or skills mismatches. Understanding NEET status through this perspective emphasises the need for greater societal recognition of the value of the unpaid work, including care work, that many young people are engaged in, accessible re-engagement routes, tailored guidance, and targeted support to facilitate young people's transitions into adult life in ways that are responsive to their values about worthwhile life courses.

(4) Health-related challenges are a significant factor shaping post-16 transitions.

The high rates of young people reporting being unable to work because of illness or disability (almost 10% of all young people classified as NEET at age 19-20) indicates that health barriers are a significant factor shaping post-16 transitions. Among those unable to work due to ill health or disability at age 19-20, over 80% had reported a mental health condition lasting at least 12 months at age 15-16. This pattern is consistent with a recent analysis of ONS data, which finds that mental health difficulties are emerging as a substantial barrier to labour market participation among young people more broadly (Diniz & Murphy, 2025). Together, these findings indicate the central role of mental health as a barrier to engagement in education and employment.

In considering how these barriers can be dismantled, it is important to recognise the bidirectional nature of the relationship between mental health and participation in

education and employment. Our analysis of wellbeing presented later in this report (Chapter 7) demonstrates that poor quality employment as well as unemployment is associated with deteriorating mental health. Similarly, our project's qualitative findings, reported elsewhere, reveal that both school environments characterised by high-stakes exam pressure and unfair treatment and oppressive workplace cultures can themselves contribute to mental ill health among young people (McPherson et al., 2023; Young Lives, Young Futures, 2025a). In other words, young people are not simply being prevented from accessing education and work because of pre-existing mental health conditions or bringing pre-existing mental health conditions into education and work: these settings can actively harm their mental wellbeing.

Addressing these challenges therefore requires a dual approach. First, closer integration between mental health provision and education/employment services is needed, including interventions that combine therapeutic support, flexible learning and gradual re-entry into work. Expanding early access to mental health care, workplace adjustments and supported employment schemes are also required to help dismantle the mental health-related barriers that can result in long-term exclusion from opportunity. Second, as we have argued elsewhere (Young Lives, Young Futures, 2024, 2025a, 2026), policy attention must also focus on transforming school and workplace cultures to prevent them from generating or exacerbating mental ill health among students and young workers.



Chapter 4. Transition Pathways from Ages 15-16 to 19-20

While the previous chapter documented young people's activities at each survey wave, this chapter examines the pathways they follow between these points, tracing how earlier choices and circumstances shape subsequent destinations. Understanding these transition sequences is essential for identifying where young people's trajectories diverge and where policy interventions might most effectively contribute to creating conditions and opportunities that enable positive progression.

4.1. Transitions from Year 11 to ages 17-18

Figure 2 illustrates the flow of young people from their Year 11 (ages 15-16) qualifications onto their activities at ages 17-18. The dominant pattern is one of continued academic progression, though the data reveal important variations by prior qualification type.

Among young people who had pursued academic Level 2 qualifications in Year 11, just over half (51%) progressed to academic Level 3 qualifications such as A-levels. A further quarter moved onto vocational (12%) or mixed (11%) Level 3 programmes. Small but notable minorities entered apprenticeships (4%), moved directly into paid work (4%) or became NEET (4%).

Transition patterns differed for those who had followed vocational or mixed programmes at Level 2. These young people were considerably less likely to progress to academic Level 3 qualifications (34%) and more likely to continue with vocational (15%) or mixed (17%) programmes. They were also somewhat more likely to enter apprenticeships (7%), though rates of entry into paid work (4%) and NEET status (3%) were similar to those of their academically oriented peers.

These patterns suggest a degree of continuity in post-16 transitions. Young people who follow vocational or mixed programmes at Level 2 are more likely to continue along these routes, while academic pathways tend to reproduce themselves. Whether this reflects the direct influence of prior qualifications on subsequent options, or a more stable orientation toward vocational or academic learning that shapes choices at both stages, cannot be determined from these data alone. In either case, the patterns indicate that trajectories begin to diverge early in secondary education, reinforcing the importance of ensuring that young people have access to high-quality information and guidance before these initial choices are made.

Figure 2. Transition from ages 15-16 to ages 17-18



Note: 'Education with unspecified qualifications/levels' and missing data are excluded for simplicity.

4.2. Transitions from ages 17-18 to 19-20

The transition from ages 17-18 to 19-20 marks a critical juncture as young people move beyond compulsory participation and face a wider array of possible destinations. Figure 3 presents the overall flow of these transitions.

The type of Level 3 qualification pursued at ages 17-18 was associated with subsequent destinations. Among those who had followed academic Level 3 programmes, three-quarters transitioned to higher education. Rates of progression to higher education were lower, though still substantial, for those with vocational or mixed Level 3 qualifications, at 52% and 56% respectively. These findings confirm that while the academic route remains the primary pathway to university, vocational and mixed qualifications also serve as viable routes to higher education for a majority of those who pursue them.

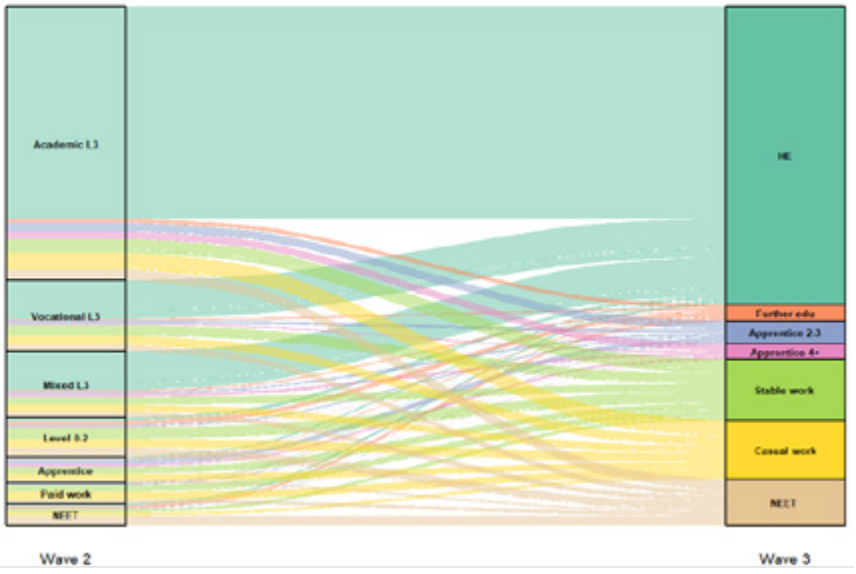
Among the 46% of young people who did not enter higher education by ages 19-20, destinations were diverse. Approximately one in six were in apprenticeships, while similar proportions were in relatively stable paid work (23%) and casual or temporary employment (24%). A further 12% were in further education or programmes with unspecified levels, and one in five were classified as NEET.

Pathways into apprenticeships and stable employment

Young people in apprenticeships at ages 19-20 had arrived via varied pathways. The majority had completed Level 3 qualifications at ages 17-18, indicating that apprenticeships increasingly serve as a post-Level 3 destination rather than solely as an alternative to academic study. However, a substantial minority (29%) had entered apprenticeships directly following Level 2 qualifications, often having participated in apprenticeships previously. This diversity of entry routes suggests that apprenticeships can accommodate young people at different stages of their educational journeys.

The routes into relatively stable paid work were similarly diverse. Among those in relatively stable paid work at ages 19-20, nearly half had completed Level 3 qualifications at ages 17-18, and one in ten had participated in apprenticeships beforehand. However, a third had entered relatively stable employment directly following Level 2 qualifications—often through prior work experience or after a period of delayed or unspecified education. These patterns suggest multiple viable routes into stable employment, and caution against an assumption that progression to Level 3 or beyond is the only pathway to positive labour market outcomes. At the same time, Level 3 attainment and structured training do appear to facilitate access to stable work and to offer greater protection against precarious employment, suggesting that the aim should be to expand opportunities at all levels rather than to narrow the routes that are valued and supported.

Figure 3. Transition from ages 17-18 to 19-20 (All)



Note: 'Education with unspecified qualifications/levels' and missing data are excluded for simplicity.

Uneven outcomes for those entering work early

The outcomes at ages 19-20 for young people who were in apprenticeships at ages 17-18 were mixed. Over a quarter progressed within the apprenticeship system: 17% remained at similar levels, 9% advanced to higher-level apprenticeships, and 3% were in apprenticeships where the level was not specified in the survey response. A further 23% transitioned to relatively stable paid work, suggesting successful labour market entry, and 14% went on to further or higher education. However, outcomes were less positive for others: 22% moved into casual or temporary roles and 9% became NEET.[6] These findings indicate that while apprenticeships can support progression into skilled employment or further education and training, they do not guarantee positive outcomes for all participants.

Young people who at ages 17-18 were in paid work that did not involve doing an apprenticeship showed considerable persistence in employment, with two-thirds remaining in work two years later. However, the quality of this employment was often poor: only 31% were in stable positions, while 35% were in casual or temporary roles. Very few transitioned into further or higher education or apprenticeships, suggesting that early entry into employment may foreclose access to further learning opportunities. Strikingly, 17% of those who had been in non-apprentice paid work at ages 17-18 were NEET by ages 19-20—the highest rate of NEET transition from any activity other than prior NEET status itself.

The prevalence of casual and temporary work among non-higher education destinations is notable. Young people who had not completed Level 3 qualifications by ages 17-18 were particularly likely to find themselves in precarious employment: 23% of those who had been in lower level or unspecified education and 35% of those who had been in non-apprentice paid work at ages 17-18 were in casual or temporary roles two years later. By contrast, only 6% of those who had completed academic Level 3 qualifications were in such positions, suggesting that qualification attainment provides meaningful protection against precarious employment.

The persistence of NEET status

NEET status showed considerable persistence across waves. Among young people who were NEET at ages 17-18, 41% remained NEET two years later—by far the highest rate of persistence from any prior activity. Those who had been in delayed or unspecified education at ages 17-18 faced the next highest risk of NEET status at ages 19-20, at 19%. The equivalent proportion for those who had completed academic Level 3 qualifications at 17-18 was 4%, reinforcing the finding that sustained engagement with structured education protects against subsequent disengagement, at least in the short term.

4.3. Typology of post-16 transition pathways

To provide a summary view of the diverse pathways young people follow, Table 5 offers an exploratory typology that groups these sequences into broader pathway categories. Just over half of young people (50.5%) transitioned to higher education, whether through the traditional academic route (35.9%) or alternative pathways (14.6%). Approximately one in ten (10.6%) followed an apprenticeship pathway, representing moderate but meaningful participation in structured work-based training. A further 19% entered employment directly: 11.1% after completing Level 3 qualifications and 7.9% without reaching this threshold. The remaining young people either continued in further education below higher education level (2.8%) or fell into the limited participation category (8.0%), characterised primarily by NEET status.

[6] Responses are missing for 2%. Percentages add up to 99% due to rounding.

Table 5. Types of post-16 transitions

#	Transition type	%	Description
1	Traditional higher education route	35.88	Pursues academic Level 3 qualifications (typically A levels) at ages 17-18, followed by progression to higher education at ages 19-20.
2	Alternative higher education route	14.58	Enters higher education through non-traditional pathways such as vocational or mixed Level 3 qualifications or apprenticeships; also includes cases where direct entry to higher education is interrupted by delayed education, employment or being NEET.
3	Apprenticeship pathway	10.63	Participates in an apprenticeship at ages 17-18 and/or 19-20, with learning primarily through work-based training. Those who entered higher education at ages 19-20 are excluded.
4	Level 3 to employment pathway	11.09	Participates in academic, vocational or mixed Level 3 qualifications at ages 17-18 and then transitions into paid employment rather than higher education or apprenticeships at ages 19-20.
5	Direct-to-work pathway	7.90	Enters paid employment either at ages 17-18 or 19-20 without participating in an apprenticeship or a Level 3 qualification.
6	Further education (non-HE)	2.81	In further education (Level 0-3) at ages 19-20, without having participated in employment or apprenticeships at ages 17-18.
7	Limited participation	8.03	Not engaged in education, paid employment or training at ages 19-20, with no prior work or apprenticeship participation at ages 17-18.
8	Unclassified/missing data	9.08	Cases where transitions cannot be determined due to incomplete, missing or unclear qualification or activity data.

4.4. Implications

(1) Transitions to higher education are more diverse than the traditional academic route.

Around 15% of young people reached higher education by ages 19-20 through vocational or mixed pathways rather than traditional academic routes (typically, A-Levels). The vast majority of this group (95%) were enrolled in academic higher education programmes. Such transitions reflect the flexibility and permeability of the English education system, enabling learners to access academic higher education through non-traditional routes. However, this pattern also points to structural challenges within the vocational education and training system. Some young people may be pushed into higher education due to limited job opportunities, lower employer demand for vocational qualifications or perceptions of weaker labour market returns. In such cases, continued study may reflect a lack of viable employment alternatives rather than a deliberate educational choice. This highlights potential misalignments between vocational provision, employer demand and local economic conditions.

(2) Apprenticeships remain a minority and uneven pathway.

By ages 19-20, apprenticeships attracted young people from diverse backgrounds. Roughly half of apprentices had completed Level 3 qualifications, while many entered directly from Level 2 qualifications or from work. Our analysis shows that participation in apprenticeships at ages 17-18 can support progression to higher-level apprenticeships, further training or stable employment in the following years. However, positive transitions are not guaranteed. A significant share of young apprentices later moved into casual or temporary roles (22%) or became NEET (9%) at ages 19-20. These outcomes suggest that apprenticeships are not yet a consistently reliable route to secure or sustained progression. More rigorous monitoring of apprenticeship quality, improving progression pathways within apprenticeship frameworks, enhancing post-



apprenticeship support, and/or introducing a job guarantee for apprentices who complete their qualification would help ensure that these programmes more consistently fulfil their potential as high-quality alternatives to academic routes.

(3) Multiple routes lead to stable employment.

Positive labour market outcomes are not confined to those who progress to Level 3 or beyond. A non-trivial proportion of young people secured stable employment with Level 2 qualifications, and those who entered non-apprentice paid work early often remained employed, though casual and temporary roles were common among this group. Completing Level 3 qualifications, whether academic, vocational or mixed, does appear to offer additional protection against precarious employment, opening pathways not only to higher education but also to higher-level apprenticeships and more structured employment opportunities. Apprenticeship experience at Level 2-3 similarly increases the likelihood of securing further apprenticeships and/or stable employment. These findings suggest that policy should both strengthen the quality and availability of employment accessible with Level 2 qualifications and ensure that clear progression routes exist for those who wish to advance further, rather than treating higher-level qualifications as the sole measure of a successful transition.

(4) NEET status is persistent.

Nearly half of those who were NEET at 17-18 remained so two years later, indicating that time spent out of education, training or paid work can become prolonged without timely support. As noted earlier, many young people categorised as NEET continue to seek paid work or education, engage in unpaid work or are unable to work due to health or other constraints. Thus, the persistence of NEET status further emphasises the structural barriers faced by vulnerable young people, including limited local employment opportunities, financial barriers, health-related challenges, employment inflexibilities and lack of alternative care options which force young carers to choose between learning, earning and caring. It also illustrates the cumulative disadvantage of early disengagement from the labour market, as prolonged periods out of education or paid work can reduce employability and weaken social networks. These findings suggest the need for sustained investment in proactive interventions to prevent temporary NEET spells from solidifying into long-term exclusion, such as, tailored guidance and training, increasing the availability of apprenticeships and good quality work, accessible mental health and social support, and targeted interventions to improve access to education, training and employment opportunities for young carers.

Chapter 5. Predictors of destinations among young people not entering higher education

The previous chapters documented the diverse pathways young people follow after compulsory education and the destinations they reach by ages 19-20. This chapter examines the factors that shape these outcomes, focusing specifically on the 46% of young people who did not move on to higher education. Understanding what predicts different destinations among this group is essential for identifying where inequalities emerge and where policy interventions might most effectively promote equitable transitions. The analysis is based on the responses of the 1,328 participants who had not entered higher education by ages 19-20.[7]

It is important to note here that the socio-demographic composition of this non-higher-education group reflects large differences in rates of progression to higher education. For example, young people from minoritised ethnic backgrounds progress to higher education at considerably higher rates than their White peers (Crawford & Greaves, 2015; Martin, 2025). The associations reported in this chapter should therefore be interpreted accordingly: they describe patterns within a subpopulation whose composition differs from that of the national population as a whole.

Table 6 presents the results of a multinomial logistic regression, which estimates how each characteristic is associated with the likelihood of being in each of the destination categories at ages 19-20. To make the results easier to interpret, they are reported as average marginal effects. Each figure shows the difference in the probability of being in a given destination associated with a particular characteristic, holding all other characteristics in the model constant. Multiplying a figure by 100 gives this difference in percentage points. For categorical characteristics such as gender, ethnicity, or region, each estimate is expressed relative to a reference group, shown in brackets in the table. For the one continuous measure, the IMD decile, the estimate refers to the change in probability associated with a one-decile move towards a less deprived area.



[7] Cases with missing in current activity at Wave 3 or missing in education qualification level are excluded as it is not possible to determine whether they entered university or followed other routes.

Table 6. Predictors of age 19-20 status among non-HE youth: Multinomial logit average marginal effect estimates

	Further education	Apprenticeship Level 2-3	Apprenticeship Level 4+	Relatively stable paid work	Casual/ Temporary work	NEET
Female (ref: Male)	0.008 (0.020)	-0.022 (0.020)	-0.008 (0.019)	0.045 (0.030)	0.059+ (0.032)	-0.071* (0.031)
Social class (ref: Mng/Prof)						
Intermediate	0.030 (0.037)	0.013 (0.040)	-0.049* (0.024)	0.099+ (0.052)	-0.035 (0.044)	-0.072 (0.045)
Small employer	0.019 (0.031)	0.017 (0.049)	-0.059* (0.025)	-0.063 (0.054)	0.046 (0.067)	0.019 (0.068)
Lower supervisory/ Technical	0.015 (0.027)	-0.008 (0.032)	-0.010 (0.030)	-0.016 (0.045)	0.033 (0.050)	-0.028 (0.048)
Semi-routine/Routine	0.028 (0.034)	-0.059* (0.027)	-0.047+ (0.025)	0.023 (0.059)	0.005 (0.060)	0.033 (0.048)
Ethnicity (ref: White)						
Asian	0.083* (0.034)	0.041 (0.052)	0.013 (0.024)	-0.176*** (0.034)	-0.031 (0.045)	0.068 (0.047)
Black	0.122+ (0.063)	0.027 (0.043)	0.056 (0.043)	-0.241*** (0.033)	-0.074 (0.053)	0.044 (0.056)
Mixed/other	0.125** (0.045)	-0.002 (0.040)	-0.006 (0.023)	-0.159*** (0.039)	-0.068 (0.043)	0.106+ (0.056)
Born outside UK (ref: UK born)	0.013 (0.028)	-0.063** (0.022)	-0.002 (0.031)	-0.023 (0.054)	0.050 (0.062)	0.031 (0.052)
GCSE (ref: below 4)						
4 to below 7	-0.004 (0.029)	0.077*** (0.022)	0.030 (0.023)	0.023 (0.049)	-0.022 (0.051)	-0.113+ (0.048)
7 or above	-0.037 (0.031)	0.078** (0.030)	0.098** (0.033)	-0.004 (0.060)	-0.069 (0.064)	-0.074 (0.071)
SEND (ref: No SEND)						
1 SEND	0.014 (0.025)	0.016 (0.025)	-0.022 (0.018)	-0.058 (0.039)	-0.036 (0.037)	0.086* (0.033)
2+ SEND	0.035 (0.043)	-0.057* (0.026)	-0.043 (0.029)	-0.087 (0.055)	-0.042 (0.066)	0.203** (0.073)
Mental health difficulties	-0.036+ (0.020)	0.006 (0.026)	-0.014 (0.021)	-0.006 (0.033)	-0.021 (0.036)	0.071+ (0.038)
Experience of unfair treatment or bullying	0.003 (0.020)	-0.016 (0.021)	0.004 (0.017)	-0.025 (0.031)	-0.032 (0.031)	0.060* (0.031)
Heterosexual (ref: LGB)	-0.011 (0.028)	0.019 (0.025)	0.021 (0.022)	0.065+ (0.035)	-0.029 (0.043)	-0.066 (0.044)
Region (ref: North)						
Midlands	-0.035 (0.028)	-0.025 (0.029)	0.015 (0.030)	-0.039 (0.039)	0.103* (0.045)	-0.028 (0.043)
East	-0.049 (0.033)	-0.029 (0.036)	-0.034 (0.029)	0.118* (0.053)	0.058 (0.051)	-0.071 (0.053)
London	-0.062* (0.027)	-0.055* (0.027)	-0.004 (0.028)	0.057 (0.061)	0.127* (0.053)	-0.068 (0.050)
South	-0.037 (0.028)	0.010 (0.032)	-0.031 (0.024)	0.097* (0.041)	0.073+ (0.040)	-0.129** (0.041)
IMD decile	0.001 (0.003)	0.002 (0.004)	0.009** (0.003)	-0.002 (0.006)	0.004 (0.006)	-0.010+ (0.005)
N=1328						

*Note: While the outcome variable (Wave 3 status) includes all seven categories except for HE, only six types are reported in the table for simplicity (apprenticeship level not stated is not reported). Standard errors in parentheses. + p< 0.1, * p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p< 0.001.*

5.1. Individual characteristics

Young women were 7.1 percentage points less likely than young men to be NEET, suggesting greater success in avoiding complete labour market exclusion. However, they were also 5.9 percentage points more likely to be in casual or temporary work. This combination indicates that while young women may be more effective at maintaining some form of labour market attachment, they are more likely to do so through insecure employment arrangements.

Substantial ethnic differences emerged in the likelihood of different destinations. Compared with their White peers, young people from Asian, Black and Mixed/Other ethnic backgrounds were between 8.3 and 12.5 percentage points more likely to be in further education (at Level 3 and below) at ages 19-20. This pattern may reflect both higher educational aspirations among those from minoritised ethnicities and strategic responses to anticipated labour market barriers.

The counterpart to this educational persistence was a lower probability of being in relatively stable paid work. White young people were between 15.9 and 24.1 percentage points more likely to be in stable employment than their peers from other ethnic groups, with the gap largest for Black young people. These disparities likely reflect multiple factors, including discrimination in hiring and differences in social networks and access to employment opportunities.

Young people from Mixed/Other ethnic backgrounds faced a particularly elevated risk of NEET status, being 10.6 percentage points more likely than White young people to be in this category. This finding highlights the heterogeneity of experiences across broadly defined ethnic categories and suggests that young people with mixed heritage may face distinctive challenges in navigating post-school transitions.

Migration background is significantly associated with a lower probability of participating in Level 2-3 apprenticeships. Young people born outside the UK are 6.3 percentage points less likely to undertake Level 2-3 apprenticeships than those born in the UK.

GCSE results emerged as a powerful predictor of destinations, even among young people who did not progress to higher education. Those with average GCSE scores below grade 4 were 7.7 percentage points less likely to be in Level 2-3 apprenticeships than those with scores of 4 to below 7, and 7.8 percentage points less likely than those with scores of 7 or above. The gradient was steeper still for Level 4+ apprenticeships: young people with high GCSE scores (7+) were 9.8 percentage points more likely to access these higher-level programmes than those with scores below 4. Lower prior attainment was also associated with elevated NEET risk. Young people with GCSE scores below 4 were 11.3 percentage points more likely to be NEET than those with scores of 4 to below 7. These patterns suggest that academic performance continues to shape opportunities and outcomes well beyond the point of formal qualification, stratifying access to training and increasing vulnerability to labour market exclusion among lower attaining young people.

Young people with SEND faced substantial disadvantages across multiple outcomes. Those with two or more SEND conditions were 5.7 percentage points less likely to be in Level 2-3 apprenticeships than their peers without SEND. Young people with SEND were also more likely to be NEET. Having one SEND condition was associated with an 8.6 percentage point higher probability of being NEET, while having two or more conditions increased this likelihood by 20.3 percentage points relative to those without SEND. These findings indicate persistent barriers to inclusion in both training and employment systems for young people with additional needs.

Mental health difficulties and experiences of unfair treatment or bullying at school were also both associated with poorer outcomes. Having a mental health condition lasting at least 12 months at the age of 15-16 reduced the probability of being in further education at age 19-20 by 3.6 percentage points and increased the probability of being NEET by 7.1 percentage points. Similarly, having experienced unfair treatment or bullying at school was associated with a 6.0 percentage point higher probability of NEET status. These findings suggest that emotional wellbeing during and beyond young people's teenage years can have lasting consequences for their subsequent educational and occupational trajectories. Difficulties that emerge or intensify while young people are at school may disrupt their engagement with education and training, creating vulnerabilities that persist into early adulthood.

5.2. Family background[8]

Social class, measured through parental occupation, showed clear associations with access to apprenticeships, particularly at higher levels. Young people with parents in Managerial/Professional occupations were 4.9 percentage points more likely than those with parents in Intermediate occupations and 5.9 percentage points more likely than those with parents in Small Employer/Own account occupations to access Level 4+ apprenticeships. At the other end of the occupational spectrum, those with parents in Semi-routine/Routine occupations were 5.9 percentage points less likely to be in Level 2-3 apprenticeships and 4.7 percentage points less likely to be in Level 4+ apprenticeships than their peers whose parents are in Managerial/Professional occupations. The finding that higher-level apprenticeships—which typically offer better progression prospects and higher earnings potential—are disproportionately accessed by young people from more socio-economically privileged backgrounds suggests that these programmes may be reinforcing rather than disrupting existing patterns of intergenerational inequality.

5.3. Place-based characteristics

Marked place-based differences emerged in young people's destinations. Those living in London were 6.2 percentage points less likely to be in further education and 5.5 percentage points less likely to take up Level 2-3 apprenticeships than their peers in the North. By contrast, young people in the East and South were 11.8 and 9.7 percentage points more likely, respectively, to be in relatively stable paid work compared with those in the North.

The geography of precarious employment also varied. Young people in the North were between 7.3 and 12.7 percentage points less likely to be in casual or temporary work than their peers in the Midlands, London and the South. This pattern may reflect differences in local labour market structures, with London and other southern regions offering more opportunities in sectors characterised by more precarious employment arrangements.

NEET risk also showed the clearest regional gradient: young people in the South were 12.9 percentage points less likely to be NEET than those in the North, likely reflecting stronger labour market conditions and a greater availability and accessibility of opportunities in southern regions.

The level of deprivation in young people's local areas, as measured by the Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD), was associated with their destinations, independently of individual and family characteristics.[9] The IMD ranks neighbourhoods in England into 10 equal groups (deciles) from most deprived (Decile 1) to least deprived (Decile 10), based on an overall deprivation score combining various factors like income, employment, health, and living environment. Each decile increase in the Index of Multiple Deprivation (moving toward less deprived areas) was associated with a 0.9 percentage point increase in the probability of taking up Level 4+ apprenticeships. Extrapolating across the full range of deprivation, this implies that young people in the most deprived areas were approximately 9 percentage points less likely to access higher-level apprenticeships than those in the least deprived areas.

Area-based deprivation was also associated with NEET risk, with each decile increase corresponding to a 1.0 percentage point lower probability of being NEET. Young people in the most deprived areas were thus roughly 10 percentage points more likely to be NEET than those in the least deprived areas. These spatial patterns highlight how local economic conditions, infrastructure and social circumstances shape the opportunities available to young people, independently of their individual characteristics.

[8] Due to the relatively small sample size of the non-HE group (N = 1328) and the limited number of cases within each category, only parental occupation is included as a family background indicator.

[9] The IMD captures multiple dimensions of local-area deprivation, including employment and education domains that may overlap conceptually with the outcome measures examined in this analysis. To address potential circularity, a sensitivity analysis was conducted using the Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index (IDACI), which focuses specifically on income deprivation among families with children and is less directly related to the outcomes under study. The results remain substantively unchanged, although the association with the probability of being classified as NEET falls just outside the threshold of statistical significance. While this attenuation may reflect low statistical power, caution is warranted when interpreting the NEET results. See Appendix C for details.



5.4. Implications

(1) Gendered pathways into work.

The finding that young women are more likely to enter casual or temporary work but less likely to become NEET suggests gendered patterns of labour market engagement. While young women may be more successful at avoiding complete labour market exclusion, they more often occupy insecure or lower quality employment. This finding reflects a more general trend of women being over-represented in insecure work because of gendered expectations, occupational segregation and caring responsibilities, although this gender gap is most pronounced for younger women (Florisson and Gable, 2022; Florisson, 2024). This would suggest that efforts to promote equitable school-to-work transitions should address the gender stereotyping that feeds occupational segregation, the quality and stability of early employment and the needs of unpaid carers (APPG for Young Carers & Adult Carers, 2026), not only participation rates.

(2) Class-based inequalities in apprenticeships.

Strong social-class gradients in apprenticeship participation (especially at higher levels) underline persistent class-based inequalities in access to high-quality training. Young people from Managerial/Professional backgrounds are better positioned to access Level 4+ apprenticeships, which are often linked to more lucrative and secure careers. Meanwhile, those from Semi-Routine/Routine backgrounds are likely to struggle to access even lower-level apprenticeships, reinforcing existing intergenerational class stratification. There is a need to widen access to apprenticeships for working-class youth through targeted recruitment, information and guidance and employer engagement.

(3) Ethnic disparities and educational persistence.

Young people from minoritised ethnic backgrounds are more likely to remain in further education but less likely to be in stable paid work than their White peers. This may reflect differences in both educational aspirations and barriers to labour market entry, including discrimination and differences in local opportunity structures (Amo-Afful et al., 2026; Florisson, 2026). Policies that improve employment opportunities and address discriminatory employment practices are essential, as continued education does not automatically translate into equitable employment outcomes. The elevated NEET risk among Mixed/Other groups also highlights the need for a more nuanced understanding of the distinctive experiences of young people from mixed-heritage backgrounds.

(4) Migration background and access to apprenticeships.

The finding that young people with a migration background are less likely to enter Level 2-3 apprenticeships than those born in the UK indicates that vocational pathways are not equally accessible across migration statuses. This suggests

that rather than functioning as an inclusive alternative to academic routes, apprenticeships may be reproducing migration-related inequalities. The analysis of predictors of apprenticeship application and success in Chapter 8 shows that young people born outside the UK are no less likely to apply for apprenticeships than their UK-born peers but are less likely to secure one. As we go on to discuss in more detail in that chapter, this divergence between application and success suggests that barriers may operate at the point of recruitment rather than through differences in aspirations or engagement and raises the possibility of directly or indirectly discriminatory selection practices. Alongside targeted outreach and improved careers guidance, policies aimed at improving employer recruitment practices are therefore needed to ensure that apprenticeship pathways function as genuine opportunities for young people from migrant backgrounds.

(5) Academic performance and apprenticeship stratification.

GCSE attainment is a powerful predictor of post-education outcomes. Students with low GCSE attainment are less likely to secure Level 2-3 or Level 4+ apprenticeships and more likely to become NEET. High attainers at GCSE, conversely, dominate higher-level apprenticeship opportunities. Apprenticeships appear to be functioning as a stratified system that mirrors academic attainment hierarchies. Reforming Level 2 qualifications to ensure that all young people can access a broader and more balanced curriculum could help to mitigate these disparities, providing pathways that better prepare learners for a range of post-school options. Such reforms must also address the economic and social barriers, as well as the challenges faced by learners with SEND, that can limit attainment and reduce the opportunities available to young people at school.

(6) SEND and labour market exclusion.

Young people with SEND are substantially disadvantaged across multiple outcomes: they are less likely to undertake apprenticeships, and much more likely to become NEET. This highlights persistent barriers to inclusion in both training and employment systems and the need for policies to strengthen inclusion practices in schools, colleges, training provision, and employment, and ensure the implementation of reasonable adjustments, tailored careers guidance and supported employment schemes.

(7) Mental health and bullying as risk factors.

Poor mental health and experiences of unfair treatment and bullying at school are associated with a higher likelihood of a young person becoming NEET and a lower likelihood of their continuing in education. Emotional wellbeing at secondary school age has long-term consequences for young people's educational and occupational trajectories. Additionally, our qualitative findings reported elsewhere (McPherson et al., 2023) suggest that the organisational cultures of schools, shaped by high-stakes accountability pressures and overcrowded curricula, can themselves be detrimental to students' mental wellbeing and allow bullying to go unchecked. Accountability and curriculum reforms designed to reduce the pressure placed on young people, build more inclusive school cultures and free up resources to enable a greater focus on pastoral care and anti-bullying interventions in schools are therefore critical (Young Lives, Young Futures, 2024). Investment in school-based mental health support, early counselling and better access to mental health provision outside of school can also mitigate the risks of poor mental health at school fuelling longer-term mental health challenges and labour market disadvantage.

(8) Regional inequalities and area-based deprivation.

Young people's school-to-work transitions are characterised by marked differences by region and area-based deprivation. Young people in the East and South are more likely to be in education, training or stable paid employment, while those in London and the Midlands face more limited apprenticeship opportunities and are more likely to engage in casual/temporary work. More localised area-based deprivation also reduces young people's apprenticeship opportunities and increases their risk of not being in education, training or paid employment. These geographical contexts strongly condition opportunities for young people, reflecting how local labour markets, infrastructures and social conditions influence transition pathways. Place-based policies, including investment in local economic infrastructures in areas of high deprivation and the development of apprenticeship programmes aligned with local economic development strategies, are crucial for redressing regional disparities.

(9) Structural barriers versus individual choices.

The patterns reported in this chapter are powerful reminders of the fact that, while education policy emphasises 'choice' at 16-18, in practice young people's options are deeply embedded in structural inequalities related to gender, class, ethnicity, geography, education, and mental health. Thus, interventions focusing only on 'individual employability' are insufficient: structural reforms in education, labour markets, health and welfare are needed to enable more equitable transitions.

Chapter 6. Job quality in apprenticeships and employment

The previous chapters documented the pathways young people follow after compulsory education and the factors that shape their destinations at age 19-20. This chapter turns to the quality of employment experienced by those who were in the labour market at age 19-20, examining whether different types of work offer comparable conditions or whether the nature of early employment varies significantly across employment arrangements. Understanding job quality is essential because the conditions young people encounter in their first jobs are not only important in terms of their present wellbeing but because they can also shape their longer-term wellbeing, development and work trajectories. The analysis is based on the responses of 929 survey participants whose current activities at ages 19-20 were classified as apprenticeships, relatively stable paid work or casual/temporary work.

6.1. Wages and working hours

Table 7 presents descriptive statistics on self-reported hourly wages and weekly working hours by employment type, providing context for the subsequent multivariate analyses.

Table 7. Self-reported hourly wage and working hours, by employment type

	Hourly wage			
	Median	**Mean**	**< National Living Wage (%)**	**< National Minimum Wage (%)**
Apprenticeship Level 2-3	10.26	17.44	61.74	28.10
Apprenticeship Level 4+	11.50	15.36	49.53	8.58
Relatively stable paid work	10.62	11.04	65.48	14.24
Casual/temporary work	11.13	11.06	56.94	11.0

	Working hours		
	Median	**Mean**	**< 35 hours (%)**
Apprenticeship Level 2-3	37	29.61	41.30
Apprenticeship Level 4+	37	33.69	27.01
Relatively stable paid work	37	34.95	34.70
Casual/temporary work	30	29.26	57.11

Note: The National Living Wage (age 21 and over) was £11.44 per hour and the National Minimum Wage (ages 18-20) was £8.60 per hour in 2024.

Low pay is pervasive among young workers regardless of employment type. Approximately 60% earn below the National Living Wage, with the proportion ranging from just under half of Level 4+ apprentices to nearly two-thirds of those in stable paid work. 15% of young workers earn below even the National Minimum Wage for their age group. This proportion is particularly high among Level 2-3 apprentices, over a quarter of whom (28%) earn below the Minimum Wage. This pattern reflects the statutory apprenticeship rate (£6.40 per hour as of 2024), which applies to first-year apprentices and falls well below the standard Minimum Wage, reflecting the policy assumption that apprentices are students as well as employees and therefore not undertaking a 'full' job while training.

The distribution of wages among apprentices is also highly skewed, as would be expected in a regulated apprenticeship system where pay is structured to reflect training status rather than full productivity. Mean hourly wages substantially exceed median wages for both Level 2-3 and Level 4+ apprentices, indicating that while a small number of apprentices earn relatively high wages, the majority remain clustered at lower pay levels. This pattern is consistent with apprenticeship models internationally, where lower initial pay is typically accepted on the basis of the training status of apprentices and expected earnings growth commensurate with increasing productivity. The finding reported later in this chapter that apprenticeships score relatively well on pay satisfaction as a dimension of job quality likely reflects these conditions: apprentices appear to evaluate their pay not solely in terms of current earnings but in relation to the training they receive and their expectations of future progression.

Working hour patterns also vary by employment type. Median weekly hours cluster around 37 for most categories, reflecting typical full-time arrangements. However, mean hours are noticeably lower for Level 2-3 apprentices (29.6 hours) and casual workers (29.3 hours), whereas Level 4+ apprentices have mean hours close to the standard full-time level. Among casual and temporary workers, over half (57%) work fewer than 35 hours per week. The lower mean hours among apprentices require careful interpretation. For apprentices at all levels, at least 20% of their time is required to be devoted to off-the-job training, which may reduce reported working hours relative to other employment types. That this reduction is more pronounced for Level 2-3 apprentices than for those at Level 4+ likely reflects differences in how off-the-job training is structured and reported across levels, as well as other factors such as the sectoral distribution of apprenticeships and the proportion working part-time. Lower mean hours for apprentices are therefore not directly comparable to those of casual or temporary workers.





6.2. Job quality by employment type

Table 8 presents results from ordinary least squares regression models examining the association between employment type and different dimensions of job quality, controlling for sociodemographic characteristics, regional and local area-based factors and occupational sector. Casual and temporary work serves as the reference category, allowing assessment of how other employment types compare to this baseline.

Apprenticeships consistently deliver higher job quality than casual or temporary employment across multiple dimensions. Both Level 2-3 and Level 4+ apprenticeships are associated with substantially higher pay quality, scoring approximately 7 points higher on the normalised index than casual work. This advantage reflects not only wages but also satisfaction with pay, suggesting that apprentices perceive their remuneration as fairer relative to their expectations and the training they receive.

The benefits of apprenticeships extend well beyond pay. Job design quality—an indicator encompassing workload manageability, scope for exercising autonomy in the job and sense of achievement derived from the work—is 10.2 points higher for Level 2-3 apprentices and nearly 6.4 points higher for Level 4+ apprentices compared with casual workers. Workplace relationships show a similar pattern, with apprentices reporting better collegial support and more respect for diversity in their workplaces. The largest gaps emerge for employee voice: apprentices score between 11.1 and 11.7 points higher than casual workers on feeling listened to by managers, likely reflecting the structured mentoring and supervision that characterises apprenticeship programmes. These findings indicate that apprenticeships offer qualitatively different employment experiences, providing developmental environments that support young people's integration into the workplace.

Relatively stable paid work occupies an intermediate position in job quality. Compared with casual or temporary employment, stable work is associated with modestly higher pay quality (approximately 2.1 points) and somewhat better job design (approximately 3.1 points). The most pronounced difference is in working hours: those in stable employment work relatively more hours per week on average, reflecting greater access to full-time positions and the income stability this provides. However, the advantages of stable paid work over casual employment are less consistent than those of apprenticeships. Differences in workplace relationships and employee voice are not statistically significant, suggesting that relatively stable employment, while offering greater job security, does not necessarily provide the supportive developmental environment that characterises apprenticeships. Moreover, the longer hours worked by those in stable employment are potentially experienced as a marker of worse job quality by those who would prefer to work fewer hours if money was not an issue.

Table 8. Predictors of job quality: OLS regression result

	(1) Pay	(2) Hours	(3) Design	(4) Relationships	(5) Voice
Job type (ref: Casual/temp work)					
Apprenticeship L2-3	7.48*** (2.11)	-3.82 (2.58)	10.24*** (2.03)	6.43** (2.33)	11.07*** (3.25)
Apprenticeship L4+	7.11*** (1.85)	0.60 (2.08)	6.43* (2.57)	5.51* (2.34)	11.74*** (2.89)
Apprenticeship unknown	-4.13 (2.89)	6.10* (2.69)	2.74 (4.75)	-3.81 (4.99)	6.62 (8.60)
Relatively stable paid work	2.09* (0.95)	6.39*** (1.43)	3.10+ (1.68)	2.36 (1.75)	4.10 (2.53)
Female (ref: Male)	-0.34 (1.06)	-2.26 (1.64)	0.83 (1.64)	-1.65 (1.63)	-0.54 (2.39)
Social class (ref: Mng/Prof)					
Intermediate	-1.61 (1.56)	-0.62 (2.13)	-2.97 (2.16)	0.94 (2.11)	-1.38 (3.30)
Small employer	0.05 (1.92)	4.70 (2.93)	2.09 (3.01)	3.23 (2.96)	1.77 (4.72)
Lower supervisory/Technical	0.16 (1.76)	-0.33 (1.74)	-0.34 (2.05)	2.37 (2.24)	-0.58 (3.15)
Semi-routine/Routine	0.65 (1.64)	-1.56 (2.14)	-0.94 (2.29)	-0.16 (2.49)	-2.83 (3.53)
Ethnicity (ref: White)					
Asian	2.49 (2.03)	-4.03 (3.18)	4.25+ (2.35)	2.52 (2.99)	5.39 (3.56)
Black	-1.83 (1.92)	2.84 (2.27)	2.37 (3.06)	-0.40 (3.08)	6.11 (4.06)
Mixed/other	4.58 (2.99)	-2.92 (2.37)	2.60 (2.17)	0.21 (2.48)	3.27 (3.61)
Born outside UK (ref: UK born)	1.18 (2.16)	1.49 (2.46)	-1.51 (2.65)	-3.01 (3.92)	-1.67 (4.37)
GCSE (ref: below 4)					
4 to below 7	-0.42 (1.61)	3.01 (2.33)	-5.43* (2.60)	-2.17 (2.55)	-6.54+ (3.50)
7 or above	1.36 (1.84)	4.66+ (2.63)	-1.76 (2.99)	1.25 (3.04)	-4.21 (4.22)
SEND (ref: No SEND)					
1 SEND	-0.24 (1.08)	0.67 (1.42)	2.23 (1.62)	2.54 (1.76)	0.51 (2.41)
2+ SEND	1.49 (2.34)	-2.91 (2.80)	-0.00 (3.18)	0.47 (3.12)	1.09 (4.11)
Mental health difficulties	-0.13 (1.19)	-0.32 (1.56)	-1.06 (1.65)	-2.87 (1.76)	-4.46+ (2.53)
Experience of unfair treatment or bullying	-0.13 (1.06)	0.26 (1.36)	-1.19 (1.50)	-5.02** (1.55)	-1.77 (2.33)
Heterosexual (ref: LGB)	-1.28 (1.47)	5.27** (1.44)	-2.11 (1.93)	-1.19 (1.99)	-2.67 (3.02)
Region (ref: North)					
Midlands	2.57+ (1.30)	0.46 (1.82)	-2.72 (2.26)	-0.90 (2.13)	-2.39 (3.52)
East	2.43 (1.52)	-1.72 (2.05)	-1.25 (2.22)	-1.56 (2.43)	-4.15 (3.85)
London	3.83* (1.54)	-2.48 (2.26)	-3.54 (2.91)	-1.99 (2.89)	-7.27+ (3.98)
South	5.01*** (1.43)	-2.22 (1.74)	2.25 (1.80)	0.89 (1.91)	1.41 (2.87)
IMD decile	-0.13 (0.18)	-0.03 (0.23)	-0.29 (0.27)	-0.30 (0.26)	-0.10 (0.43)
Job area (Ref: STEM/Technical)					
Health/care/education	-2.79 (2.12)	-4.15 (2.54)	-0.31 (2.81)	3.66 (2.60)	3.39 (3.65)
Creative/culture/communication	1.57 (2.76)	-13.39**(4.01)	2.93 (3.70)	-0.18 (5.25)	-2.36 (7.95)
Business/services	0.38 (1.91)	-7.68*** (2.18)	-5.51* (2.31)	-0.77 (2.33)	-1.45 (3.12)
Agriculture/other	1.19 (2.07)	-4.43+ (2.56)	-2.32 (2.40)	0.91 (2.47)	3.16 (3.52)
N	**929**	**929**	**929**	**929**	**929**

*Note: Standard errors are in parentheses. + p<0.1, *p<0.05, **p<0.01, ***p<0.001*

Casual and temporary employment emerges as the lowest-quality form of work across most dimensions. Beyond lower pay and poorer job design, young people in these arrangements experience poorer workplace relationships and feel less noticed and listened to at work. The combination of shorter and irregular hours with these qualitative deficits creates a form of employment that is not merely insecure but also potentially more isolating, offering fewer opportunities for mentoring, development and meaningful participation in workplace life. While some young people may value the flexibility that casual arrangements provide, particularly those balancing work with other commitments, the consistently lower quality of this kind of employment suggests that flexibility often comes at a substantial cost to other dimensions of job quality.

Beyond employment type, several individual characteristics and contextual factors were associated with job quality, though these relationships were generally weaker and less consistent than the employment type effects. Young people with mid-level GCSE attainment (average score of 4 to below 7) reported lower job quality in the domains of job design and employee voice than those with lower attainment (average score below 4), which is not observed when comparing those with high attainment (7 or above) to those with lower attainment. This non-linear association may reflect a mismatch between aspirations and job characteristics. Young people with intermediate attainment who enter employment rather than continuing in education may hold higher expectations for autonomy, meaningful work and workplace influence than those with lower attainment, yet find themselves in similar entry-level positions that fail to meet these expectations.

Young people who had reported having a mental health condition at age 15-16 were also more likely to feel that they lacked voice in their workplaces, scoring approximately 4 points lower on the employee voice index. Meanwhile, those who had experienced unfair treatment or bullying at school showed a marked deficit in workplace relationships, scoring more than 5 points lower than peers without such experiences. These findings suggest that vulnerabilities experienced during young people's school years can persist into early employment, affecting how they experience and navigate workplace social dynamics. Whether these patterns reflect ongoing difficulties in social interaction, heightened sensitivity to workplace stressors or actual differences in how employers and colleagues treat young people with mental health, bullying or unfair treatment histories cannot be determined from these findings, but the associations highlight the importance of supportive workplace environments for vulnerable young workers. It is also notable that young people identifying as lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB) worked fewer hours per week than those identifying as heterosexual, possibly reflecting barriers that sexual minorities face in fully participating in the labour market.

Significant regional differences emerged in apparent pay quality. Young workers in London scored 3.8 points higher than those in the North, while those in the South scored 5 points higher. The Midlands also showed an advantage over the North of approximately 2.6 points. These regional pay premiums likely reflect differences in cost-of-living adjustments alongside differences in local labour market conditions and the sectoral composition of youth employment across regions. The apparent London advantage in pay, which needs to be treated with caution because of the higher cost of living in London, was, however, accompanied by a contrasting pattern in employee voice: young workers in London scored 7.3 points lower on employee voice than those in the North. This pattern suggests that workplaces in the capital may provide fewer opportunities for young workers to participate in decision-making and have their perspectives heard.

Job quality varied by occupational sector, with STEM and technical fields serving as the reference category. Young people in business and services reported working fewer hours per week and scored 5.5 points lower on job design quality, suggesting that this sector offers more fragmented and less intrinsically rewarding work for young employees.[10] Creative, cultural, and communication roles showed the largest hours deficit compared to STEM/technical positions, likely reflecting the prevalence of part-time and freelance arrangements in these fields.

6.3. Implications

(1) Low pay is prevalent among young workers.

The finding that approximately 60% of young workers earn below the National Living Wage—and that 15% earn below even the Minimum Wage for their age group—highlights a systemic challenge in ensuring adequate earnings for

[10] The business and services area comprises: (a) Business, Administration and Law; (b) Service Enterprises (e.g. beauty services, property management); (c) Retail and Logistics; (d) Hospitality and Catering; and (e) Travel and Tourism.



young people entering the labour market. Insufficient pay has both immediate and longer-term consequences, limiting financial independence, reducing the ability to save or invest in further training and increasing vulnerability to poverty. The concentration of sub-Minimum Wage pay among Level 2 and 3 apprentices reflects the statutory apprenticeship rate, which permits substantially lower pay for first-year apprentices. While this provision is intended to encourage employers to offer training places, it creates a situation where young people engaged in structured learning earn considerably less than their peers in unstructured employment. This tension between encouraging apprenticeship supply and ensuring adequate living standards for apprentices warrants careful policy attention.

(2) Apprenticeships are associated with higher job quality.

The consistent job quality advantages associated with apprenticeships, spanning pay satisfaction, job design, workplace relationships, and employee voice, indicate that these programmes offer qualitatively superior employment experiences for young people, providing structured developmental environments that support skill acquisition, workplace integration and meaningful participation. While many apprentices, particularly in their first year, earn less than the National Minimum Wage, they tend to report higher pay satisfaction than young people in paid work without training. This likely reflects both their understanding of the dual nature of apprenticeships as both training and employment and their expectations of pay progression and future earnings potential. These findings strengthen the case for expanding apprenticeship provision as a route to higher-quality early employment. However, the persistent low pay among apprentices, as discussed in the previous section, highlights the risk of financial insecurity. Aligning apprenticeship remuneration with living costs is therefore important to ensure that apprenticeships are better placed to deliver adequate income alongside their developmental and other job-quality related benefits.

(3) The poor quality of casual/temporary employment.

Casual and temporary employment is associated with relative deficits across multiple dimensions of job quality, encompassing not only pay quality and hours but also job design, workplace relationships and employee voice. This pattern indicates that casual and temporary employment offers not merely less security but also a qualitatively impoverished work experience, with fewer opportunities for development, connection and influence. Given that over half of young people in paid work at ages 19-20 are in casual or temporary arrangements, these quality deficits affect a substantial proportion of the youth labour force. While some young people may choose flexible arrangements to accommodate other commitments, the breadth of the quality gaps suggests that the costs of casual employment extend well beyond income instability.

The Employment Rights Act 2025 (Department for Business & Trade, 2025) addresses some of these concerns, particularly through provisions ending exploitative zero-hour contracts, introducing rights to guaranteed hours and reasonable notice of shifts and strengthening protections against unfair dismissal. However, our findings suggest that legislative attention to contractual security, while necessary, may be insufficient to address the full spectrum of job-quality deficits experienced by young workers in precarious employment, including poor job design, limited opportunities for skills development and lack of meaningful participation in workplace decisions. Complementary policy initiatives to improve employee access to high-quality training, mentoring, skills development, and opportunities to exercise autonomy and meaningful participation in decision-making at work could substantially improve the early employment experiences of many young people.

(4) Persistence of vulnerabilities into the labour market.

The associations between experiences of mental health difficulties, unfair treatment and bullying at school and poorer relationships and more limited employee voice at work indicate that certain vulnerabilities experienced by young people in their school years continue into their early labour market experiences. These findings emphasise the importance of workplace policies that support young people with mental health needs and create supportive and inclusive environments where all workers can participate fully. They also highlight the value of interventions that address mental health, unfair treatment and bullying during young people's school years, before these difficulties affect their labour market experiences. However, targeted programmes alone are unlikely to prove sufficient. As noted in Chapter 5, reducing the pressure placed on young people, and addressing school cultures that contribute to mental ill health through curriculum and accountability reforms, are also critical (Young Lives, Young Futures, 2024). Investment in school-based mental health support and improving access to mental health support outside of schools therefore need to be accompanied by more deep-seated changes that enable more inclusive school cultures to flourish, with benefits that may extend well beyond educational settings into young people's subsequent workplace experiences and career trajectories.

(5) Spatial inequalities and the multi-dimensional nature of job quality.

Where young people live shapes not only their access to employment but also the quality of work available to them. However, the regional picture is complicated, suggesting that regional differences in job quality are multidimensional rather than representing straightforward advantages and disadvantages.

The significant regional variation in pay quality, with young workers in the South and London earning more than those in the North, mirrors broader patterns of spatial disparities in the UK labour market. However, this apparent advantage requires careful interpretation. The cost of living, and housing costs in particular, are substantially higher in London, and analyses that adjust for renting and purchasing power parity often find that London's earnings advantage is considerably diminished or eliminated (e.g., Hearne, 2021). In contrast, we found more marked regional differences in relation to employee voice, with young workers in London far less likely than their counterparts in the North to report that they were noticed and listened to by their managers.

The place-based emphasis of recent policy development, including the Post-16 Education and Skills white paper's commitment to empowering Strategic Authorities to join up skills, work, health, and transport interventions tailored to local economies, represents a welcome recognition of regional inequalities (Department for Education et al., 2025). However, while our findings underline the importance of such approaches, they also suggest that their success will depend on attending not only to skills provision and employment access but also to the multidimensional nature of job quality so as to ensure that place-based strategies address workplace voice, job design and employment security alongside pay and the availability of work.

Chapter 7. Personal wellbeing and subjective outcomes

The preceding chapters examined the pathways young people follow after compulsory education, the factors that shape their destinations and the quality of employment they experience. This chapter turns to a different set of outcomes: young people's subjective wellbeing and their evaluations of their current circumstances and past decisions. Understanding how different post-school destinations relate to wellbeing is important in itself and because the transition out of compulsory education is a formative period that can shape life experiences and satisfaction for years to come.

The analysis compared wellbeing and subjective outcomes across destination categories at ages 19-20. Both unconditional comparisons (raw differences between groups) and conditional comparisons (adjusting for gender, social class, free school meals eligibility, parental education, ethnicity, migration background, GCSE results, SEND status, mental health difficulties, unfair treatment and bullying experiences, sexual orientation, region, and area-based deprivation) are presented. Because sample sizes are too small to support reliable analysis when apprenticeships are grouped by level, apprenticeships at all levels are aggregated into one group.

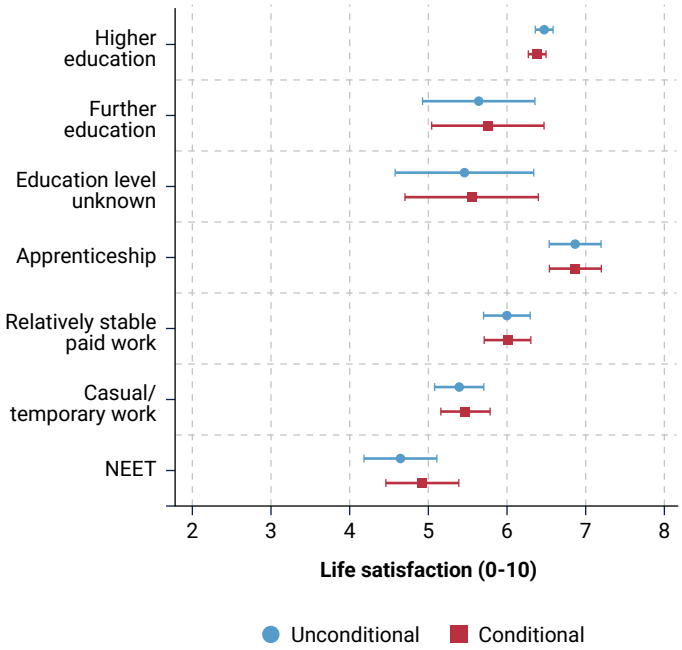
7.1. Life satisfaction

Figure 4 presents life satisfaction scores by destination at ages 19-20, showing both unconditional and conditional estimates. Across all destinations, average life satisfaction fell within the medium to high range, with scores of between 5 and 7. However, substantial and statistically significant differences emerged between groups. Young people in apprenticeships reported the highest life satisfaction, with an average score of 6.9, which is significantly higher than for the other groups. The second highest was reported by those in higher education (6.4), which scored significantly higher than relatively stable work (6.0), casual or temporary work (5.5) and NEET status (4.9).

The gap between the highest and lowest scoring destination types (i.e., apprenticeships and NEET status) was nearly two full points on the 10-point scale, representing a meaningful difference in subjective quality of life. Relatively stable paid work was also associated with significantly higher life satisfaction scores than NEET status, indicating a gradient across destinations rather than a simple binary between positive and negative outcomes.

These patterns persisted after adjusting for the wide range of individual and contextual characteristics included in the conditional models, suggesting that the associations between destination and life satisfaction are not simply artefacts of compositional differences between groups.

Figure 4. Life satisfaction, by age 19-20 status



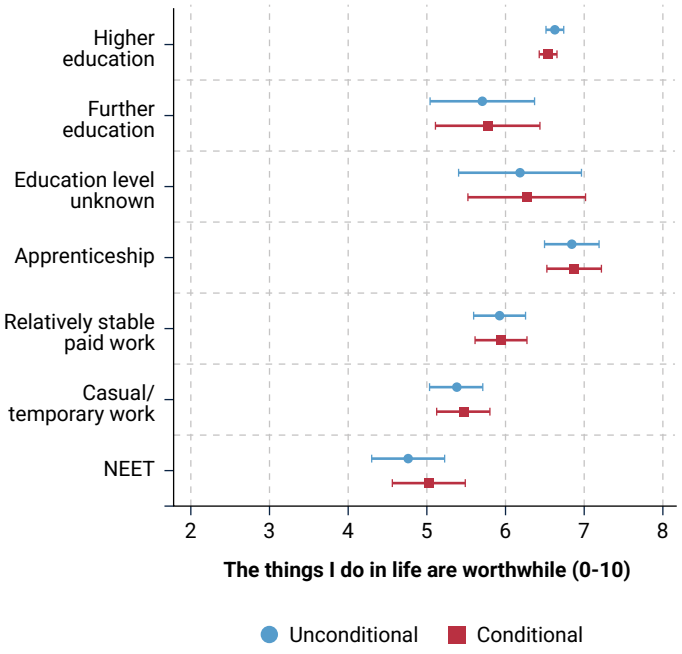
Note: The conditional model controls for gender, social class, free school meals eligibility, parental education, ethnicity, migration background, GCSE results, SEND status, mental health difficulties, unfair treatment and bullying experiences, sexual orientation, region, and area-based deprivation. Confidence intervals are at the 95% level.

7.2. Sense of purpose

Figure 5 presents scores on the 'sense of meaning and purpose' measure, which captures whether young people feel the things they do in life are worthwhile. A similar pattern emerged for this measure as for life satisfaction. Young people in apprenticeships (6.9) and higher education (6.5) reported significantly higher scores than those in relatively stable paid work (5.9), casual or temporary work (5.5) and the NEET category (5.0). The gap between young people in apprenticeships and those classified as NEET is approximately two points, with young people in the NEET category scoring in the low range on this measure.

The particularly low scores among those in the NEET category and those in casual employment suggest that these circumstances tend to be associated with a diminished sense of purpose. Being outside structured education or training or engaged in fragmented and insecure work may make it difficult for young people to feel that their daily activities are meaningful.

Figure 5. Sense of meaning and purpose, by age 19-20 status

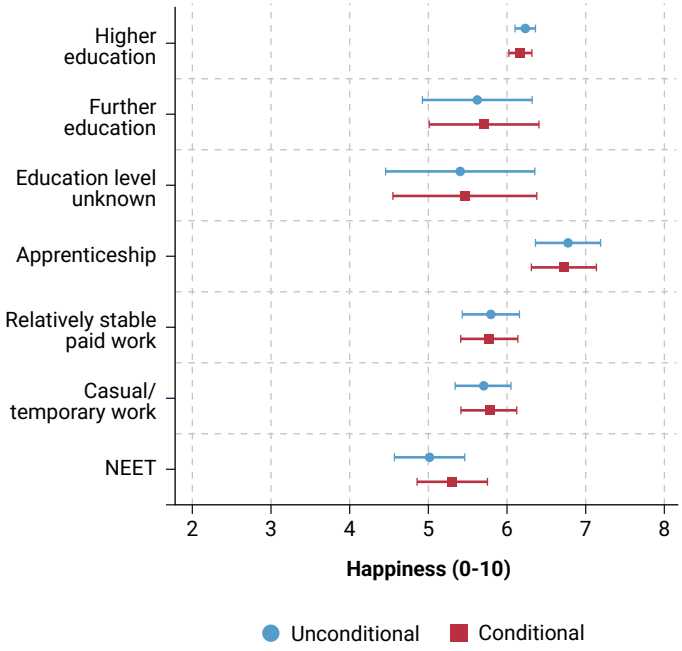


Note: The conditional model controls for gender, social class, free school meals eligibility, parental education, ethnicity, migration background, GCSE results, SEND status, mental health difficulties, unfair treatment and bullying experiences, sexual orientation, region, and area-based deprivation. Confidence intervals are at the 95% level.

7.3. Happiness

Figure 6 presents happiness scores, measuring positive affect. Differences between destinations were somewhat smaller for happiness than for life satisfaction or sense of purpose, although the overall pattern remained consistent. Apprenticeships were associated with the highest happiness scores (6.7), significantly exceeding higher education (6.2), stable paid work (5.8), casual work (5.8), and NEET status (5.3). Higher education also showed relatively higher scores, though these were not significantly different from stable or casual paid work after accounting for sampling variability. NEET status was the only category with significantly lower happiness scores than higher education.

Figure 6. Happiness, by age 19-20 status

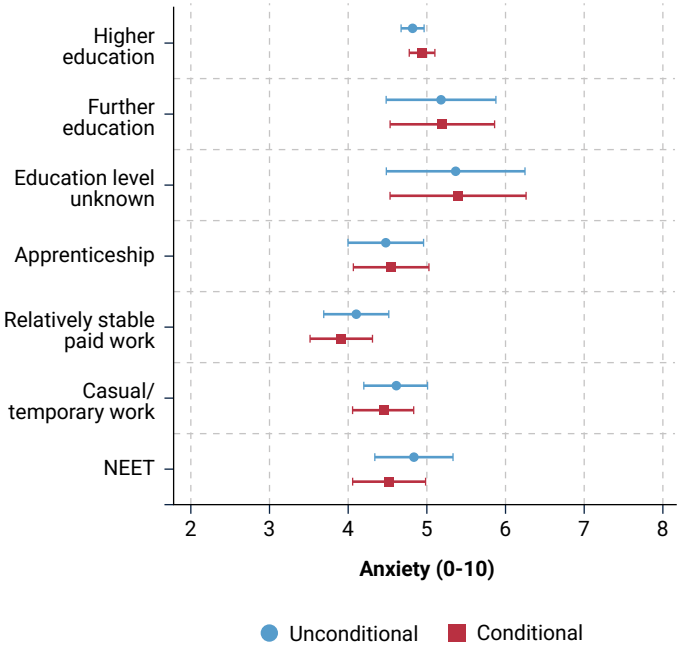


Note: The conditional model controls for gender, social class, free school meals eligibility, parental education, ethnicity, migration background, GCSE results, SEND status, mental health difficulties, unfair treatment and bullying experiences, sexual orientation, region, and area-based deprivation. Confidence intervals are at the 95% level.

7.4. Anxiety

Figure 7 presents anxiety scores, where higher values indicate greater anxiety and thus poorer wellbeing. The pattern for anxiety differed notably from the other wellbeing measures. Young people in relatively stable paid work reported significantly lower anxiety (3.9) than those in education, including both higher education (Levels 4 and above) (4.9) and further education (Levels 0-3) (5.2). While anxiety levels were generally lower among those in paid work compared with other statuses, some differences did not reach statistical significance, possibly reflecting smaller sample sizes in certain categories. This finding suggests that while education and apprenticeships are associated with greater life satisfaction and sense of purpose, they may also involve more stress and uncertainty. The predictability of established employment, with its regular income and structured routines and/or the absence of stress associated with the financial costs and/or assessment pressures of education may provide psychological benefits in terms of reduced worry and anxiety that are not captured by measures of positive wellbeing.

Figure 7. Anxiety, by age 19-20 status

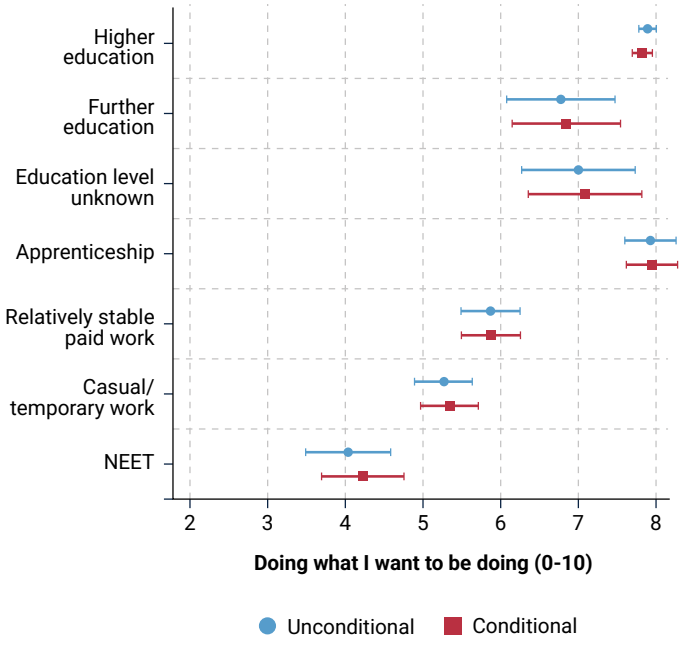


Note: The conditional model controls for gender, social class, free school meals eligibility, parental education, ethnicity, migration background, GCSE results, SEND status, mental health difficulties, unfair treatment and bullying experiences, sexual orientation, region, and area-based deprivation. Confidence intervals are at the 95% level.

7.5. Doing what they wanted to be doing

Figure 8 presents the extent to which young people at age 19-20 reported that they were currently doing what they wanted to be doing, capturing the alignment between their circumstances and aspirations. Young people in education or apprenticeships were significantly more likely to report that they were doing what they wanted compared with those in paid employment and those who were NEET. This pattern suggests that educational and training pathways, despite their demands and uncertainties, are more likely to align with young people's sense of their own goals and direction. Those classified as NEET reported the lowest levels of satisfaction with their current status, consistent with the wellbeing findings and reinforcing the interpretation that NEET circumstances represent a mismatch between young people's aspirations and their actual situations. The gap on this measure between being classified as NEET and other destinations was particularly pronounced, underscoring the subjective costs of not being in education, training or employment.

Figure 8. Doing what they want to be doing, by age 19-20 status

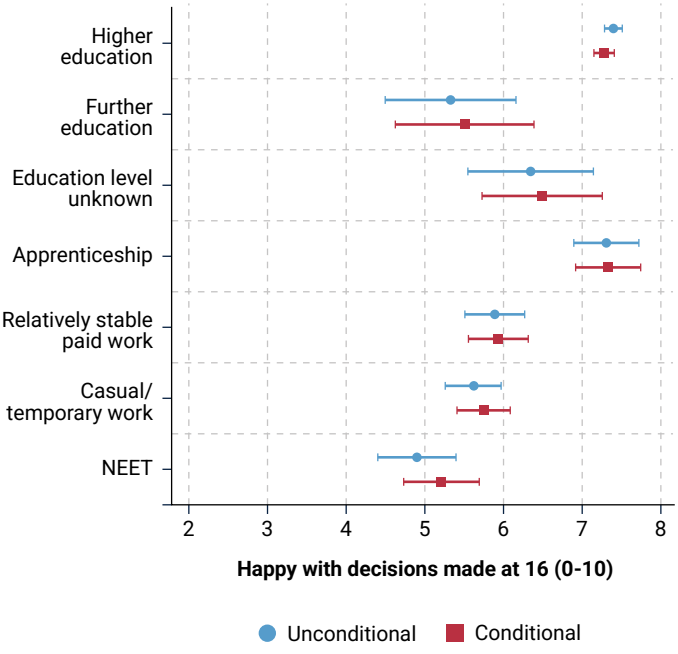


Note: The conditional model controls for gender, social class, free school meals eligibility, parental education, ethnicity, migration background, GCSE results, SEND status, mental health difficulties, unfair treatment and bullying experiences, sexual orientation, region, and area-based deprivation. Confidence intervals are at the 95% level.

7.6. Satisfaction with decisions made at age 16

Figure 9 presents satisfaction with education and career-related decisions made at age 16, providing insight into how young people evaluate their past choices at the age of 19-20. Young people in higher education and apprenticeships expressed significantly greater satisfaction with their age-16 decisions than those in further education, paid employment or those classified as NEET. This pattern likely reflects some combination of the outcomes these pathways have contributed to, the sense of purposeful progression they can provide and the fact that, for those in higher education, a decision made to take the traditional A Level to university route can be a means of postponing decisions about the future.

Figure 9. Happiness with decisions at age 16, by age 19-20 status



Note: The conditional model controls for gender, social class, free school meals eligibility, parental education, ethnicity, migration background, GCSE results, SEND status, mental health difficulties, unfair treatment and bullying experiences, sexual orientation, region, and area-based deprivation. Confidence intervals are at the 95% level.

A notable finding emerged when comparing those in paid employment with those who are NEET. While there was a significant difference between these groups in their satisfaction with their current status (as shown in the previous measure), there was no significant difference in their satisfaction with their past education or career decisions. This finding suggests that NEET status may often reflect barriers encountered after (as well as before) initial decisions have been made, such as limited opportunities, labour market constraints, health difficulties, or other adverse circumstances rather than poor decision-making at age 16. Young people who are NEET appear to evaluate their past choices similarly to their employed peers, even as they report substantially lower satisfaction with their current circumstances.

7.7. Implications

(1) Apprenticeships promote wellbeing.

The consistent finding that young people in apprenticeships are more likely to report greater life satisfaction, sense of purpose and happiness compared with their peers in paid employment, those in casual work and those classified as NEET indicates that apprenticeships tend to offer benefits extending beyond skills acquisition and labour market preparation. Structured training that combines learning with work typically appears to provide a sense of purpose and progression that supports psychological wellbeing.[11] Notably, apprenticeships show wellbeing outcomes comparable to those associated with higher education and, in some domains—particularly life satisfaction and happiness—appear to outperform higher education. This pattern indicates that apprenticeships perform as well as, or even better than, higher education in supporting young people's wellbeing. This finding strengthens the case for expanding apprenticeship provision not only on economic grounds but also as a pathway that enhances young people's overall quality of life during a formative period.

[11] The observational design of this study means that causal claims cannot be made with certainty, and the relationship between destinations and wellbeing is likely to be bidirectional, with young people who have higher wellbeing potentially being better positioned to secure apprenticeship places. However, we consider it plausible that the wellbeing differences documented here are at least partly a consequence of the pathways themselves. This interpretation is supported by our findings on goal-activity alignment and satisfaction with decisions at age 16, both of which are more directly tied to the nature of the post-16 experience and show patterns consistent with the broader wellbeing results.



(2) Stable employment associated with lower anxiety.

Relatively stable paid work is associated with lower anxiety than educational programmes. While education and apprenticeships score higher on measures of life satisfaction and sense of purpose, the immediate experience of stable employment with its regular income, structured routines and tangible daily rewards may buffer against stress and worry in ways that educational pathways do not. In the case of higher education, additional stressors such as concern over tuition fees, debt and the pressure to achieve a "good" degree can amplify anxiety, even when the longer-term outcomes are positive. This pattern suggests that the benefits of different post-school destinations are multidimensional. Higher education and apprenticeships may offer a greater sense of purpose and alignment with aspirations, while relatively stable employment may provide immediate security that reduces anxiety and/or a means of avoiding the assessment and financial pressures associated with higher education. Young people may face trade-offs between these different aspects of wellbeing depending on which pathway they follow.

(3) Precarious work and NEET status pose wellbeing risks.

Casual and temporary work, as well as NEET status, are consistently associated with lower levels of life satisfaction, happiness and sense of purpose. Young people who are NEET report the lowest overall wellbeing and are least likely to feel they are doing what they want to be doing. These patterns indicate that precarious employment and labour market exclusion carry psychological costs beyond their economic consequences, potentially contributing to feelings of isolation, lack of control and diminished self-worth. However, the finding that satisfaction with past decisions is comparable between young people who are NEET and those in paid employment is worth noting. It suggests that young people who find themselves outside education and employment appear to recognise that their situation stems from factors beyond their initial choices, even as they experience the substantial wellbeing costs of their current circumstances. This interpretation aligns with the findings from earlier chapters showing that young people who are NEET are predominantly seeking work or education, and that NEET status is strongly predicted by factors such as area-based deprivation, SEND and mental health difficulties.[12] Together, these findings highlight the importance of addressing structural barriers rather than attributing NEET status to individual failings or poor choices.

[12] The mechanisms underlying these relationships are explored in our qualitative analysis (Khazbak et al., 2026).

Chapter 8. Apprenticeship application and success

The preceding chapters documented the diverse pathways young people follow after compulsory education and the factors associated with their destinations at ages 19-20. Those analyses showed that apprenticeships, while performing well on job quality and wellbeing measures, remain a minority route, accessed by only around 8% of the cohort by ages 19-20. This chapter examines apprenticeship participation from a different angle, asking not only who ends up in an apprenticeship but also who applies for one and, among applicants, who succeeds in securing a place. Understanding the gap between aspiration and access is essential for assessing whether the limited uptake of apprenticeships reflects low demand among young people or barriers operating at the point of entry. The analysis draws on data from the 4,295 young people who participated in Wave 3 of the survey, in which respondents were asked whether they had ever applied for an apprenticeship and, if so, whether they had succeeded in securing one.

8.1. Descriptive patterns in application and success

Table 9 presents descriptive patterns in apprenticeship application and success. A striking finding is that demand for apprenticeships among young people is substantially higher than participation rates suggest. By ages 19-20, over a quarter of the cohort (27%) had applied for an apprenticeship at some point, yet only 11% of the cohort had succeeded in securing one. This means that for every young person who obtained an apprenticeship place, approximately one and a half others had applied and been unsuccessful. This gap between application and success indicates that limited apprenticeship participation reflects constrained supply and barriers to entry rather than a lack of interest or ambition among young people.

Gender differences were pronounced. 32% of young men had applied for an apprenticeship compared with 23% of young women, and young men were also more likely to have secured one (13% versus 8%). Prior attainment also shaped application patterns. Young people with the lowest GCSE scores were the most likely to apply (38%), although a substantial share of these applicants were unsuccessful. Those with mid-range GCSE scores (4 to below 7) were the next most likely to apply (32%) and had a higher likelihood of securing a place than those with the lowest GCSE scores. By contrast, those with the highest GCSE scores (7 or above) were the least likely to apply (18%), consistent with the systemic channelling of high-attaining students towards academic routes and higher education.

Family background was also associated with application likelihood. Young people whose parents did not have a university degree were more likely to have applied (31%) than those with university-educated parents (23%). Patterns by parental occupation were less linear. Application rates were highest among those with parents in lower supervisory and technical employment (33%), followed by those from small employer backgrounds (29%). Rates were similar across the remaining groups, at around 24%. Parental education appeared to influence not only whether young people applied but also whether they succeeded.



Table 9. Apprenticeship application results at Wave 3, by sociodemographic features

	Applied and secured	Applied but failed	Never applied
Gender			
Female	8.48%	15.00%	72.12%
Male	12.95 %	18.77%	62.55%
Others/Missing	13.04%	9.28%	74.20%
GCSE			
<4	12.68%	24.31%	54.55%
4 to below 7	12.71 %	18.82%	63.66%
7 or above	6.94%	10.75%	80.09%
Missing	7.53%	14.84%	57.40%
Parental education			
University-educated	8.34%	14.20%	73.79%
Not university-educated	13.15%	18.29%	62.90%
Missing	9.18%	18.88%	64.55%
Social class			
Managerial/Professional	10.80%	13.21%	72.49%
Intermediate	10.03%	13.49%	74.68%
Small employer	10.47%	18.83%	64.97%
Lower supervisory/Technical	14.30%	18.54%	62.20%
Semi-routine/Routine	8.56%	14.94%	71.11%
Missing	10.33%	23.35%	57.25%
Total	10.78%	16.69%	67.50%

Note: Sampling weights are applied. Cases with missing data in apprenticeship application result are not reported.

8.2. Predictors of application and success

To examine whether these descriptive patterns hold after accounting for the simultaneous influence of multiple characteristics, Table 10 presents average marginal effects from logistic regression models predicting (a) whether a young person had ever applied for an apprenticeship and (b) whether they succeeded in securing one, conditional on having applied.

Table 10. Predictors of apprenticeship application and success: Logistic regressions result

	Ever applied	Succeeded in securing one
Female (ref: Male)	-0.083*** (0.020)	-0.049 (0.043)
Social class (ref: Mng/Prof)		
Intermediate	-0.039 (0.032)	-0.012 (0.083)
Small employer	-0.007 (0.045)	-0.094 (0.105)
Lower supervisory/Technical	0.005 (0.036)	-0.019 (0.078)
Semi-routine/Routine	-0.056 (0.046)	0.002 (0.081)
University-educated parent	-0.064* (0.027)	-0.064 (0.053)
FSM eligibility	0.003 (0.024)	-0.035 (0.053)
Ethnicity (ref: White)		
Asian	0.002 (0.026)	-0.146* (0.058)
Black	-0.023 (0.032)	-0.117+ (0.064)
Mixed/other	0.017 (0.034)	-0.025 (0.070)
Born outside UK (ref: UK-born)	-0.038 (0.032)	-0.183** (0.061)
GCSE (ref: below 4)		
4 to below 7	-0.040 (0.047)	0.054 (0.081)
7 or above	-0.174*** (0.049)	0.075 (0.088)
SEND (ref: No SEND)		
1 SEND	0.018 (0.025)	0.008 (0.057)
2+ SEND	-0.031 (0.042)	-0.197* (0.073)
Mental health issue	0.001 (0.025)	0.006 (0.051)
Experience of unfair treatment or bullying	0.015 (0.020)	-0.003 (0.043)
Heterosexual (ref: LGB)	0.054* (0.025)	0.023 (0.056)
Region (ref: North)		
Midlands	-0.026 (0.028)	0.076 (0.060)
East	-0.051 (0.035)	-0.072 (0.075)
London	0.028 (0.030)	-0.075 (0.060)
South	0.008 (0.030)	-0.012 (0.058)
IMD decile	-0.003 (0.004)	0.011 (0.008)
N	4295	1092

*Note: Average marginal effects are reported. Standard errors are in parentheses; + p<0.1, *p<0.05, **p<0.01, ***p<0.001. Individuals who successfully secured an apprenticeship did not necessarily undertake or complete it.*

The gender gap in application persisted after controlling for other characteristics. Young women were 8.3 percentage points less likely to have applied than young men. This gap may reflect gendered perceptions of apprenticeships, the sectoral concentration of available opportunities or differences in the careers advice and guidance that young men and women receive.

Prior attainment remained the strongest predictor of application. Young people with the highest GCSE scores (7+) were 17.4 percentage points less likely to have applied than those with scores below 4, reflecting the tendency for academically high-attaining young people to be channelled away from apprenticeships before they reach the point of application.

Family background effects also persisted. Young people with at least one university-educated parent were 6.4 percentage points less likely to apply, consistent with the intergenerational reproduction of educational pathways. Parental occupation differences, however, were not statistically significant once other factors were controlled for, suggesting that the descriptive patterns by parental occupation largely reflect correlated differences in attainment and parental education.

Young people identifying as heterosexual were 5.4 percentage points more likely to have applied than those identifying as LGB. No significant differences in application rates were found by ethnicity, migration background, SEND status, mental health, region, or area-based deprivation.

The predictors of success among applicants differed markedly from the predictors of application, revealing a distinct set of inequalities operating at the point of recruitment. Ethnicity emerged as a significant predictor of success. Young people from Asian backgrounds who had applied were 14.6 percentage points less likely to secure an apprenticeship than their White peers who had also applied, and Black applicants were 11.7 percentage points less likely to succeed. Crucially, neither group was less likely to have applied in the first place, indicating that the disadvantage operates at the selection stage rather than through differences in aspiration or engagement.

Young people born outside the UK also faced a substantial penalty. They were no less likely to apply than their UK-born peers but were 18.3 percentage points less likely to secure a place. This divergence between application and success raises serious concerns about the equity of apprenticeship recruitment practices and the possibility of discriminatory selection.

Young people with two or more SEND were 19.7 percentage points less likely to succeed in securing an apprenticeship than those without SEND, despite applying at similar rates. This finding highlights persistent barriers to inclusion within apprenticeship recruitment.

By contrast, gender, GCSE attainment and parental education, while significant predictors of whether young people applied, were not significantly associated with success among those who did apply. This suggests that the stratification of apprenticeship participation by gender, attainment and parental occupation operates primarily through differences in who applies, shaped by educational tracking, careers guidance and family expectations, rather than through systematic selection bias against female applicants or those from particular attainment or parental education backgrounds. The barriers that reduce success rates operate along different axes, notably ethnicity, migration background and SEND status, pointing in these cases to inequalities in recruitment practices rather than differences in aspiration.

8.3. Implications

(1) Demand for apprenticeships far outstrips supply.

The finding that over a quarter of young people had applied for an apprenticeship by ages 19-20, while only 11% had secured one, demonstrates a substantial mismatch between young people's demand for apprenticeships and the places available to them. This mismatch is particularly concerning given the ongoing decline in apprenticeship starts among young people under 25 (Crowley, 2024; Department for Education & Department for Work & Pensions, 2026), which means the gap between aspiration and opportunity is likely widening.

(2) Gendered patterns in apprenticeship applications.

The significantly lower application rate among young women (8.3 percentage points lower than young men) warrants attention. Whether this reflects gendered perceptions of available opportunities, sectoral concentration of apprenticeships in male-dominated fields or differences in the information and guidance young women receive (Fuller & Unwin, 2013; Young Women's Trust, 2016), addressing this gap is important for ensuring that apprenticeships function as an equitable pathway. Broadening the range of sectors in which apprenticeships are available and visible, challenging the gender stereotyping that fuels occupational segregation and ensuring that careers guidance actively promotes apprenticeships to young women could help close this gap.

(3) Barriers at the point of recruitment: ethnicity, migration and SEND.

The finding that those from Black and Asian backgrounds and young people born outside the UK apply for apprenticeships at comparable rates to their White and UK-born peers, yet are significantly less likely to secure one (by between 11.7 and 18.3 percentage points), is among the most important findings of this chapter. A similar pattern is observed for young people with multiple SEND conditions, who are nearly 20 percentage points less likely to succeed in securing an apprenticeship even when they apply. In each case, the disadvantage operates at the point of employer selection rather than through differences in aspiration or effort, raising important questions about the transparency and fairness of apprenticeship recruitment processes and the potential role of direct or indirect discrimination. Our qualitative findings illuminate some of the potential mechanisms in play here. In particular, they point to recruitment practices that are insufficiently sensitive to inequalities in young people's access to relevant employer networks (which is typically secured through family connections) and to the 'insider' knowledge, support and guidance on application and interview preparation that is typically required to secure a high-quality apprenticeship (McPherson et al., 2024; Khazbak et al., 2026). Policy responses should therefore include greater scrutiny of employer recruitment practices, the promotion of more inclusive and standardised application processes, the provision of reasonable adjustments throughout the recruitment process, and targeted support to ensure that apprenticeship pathways function as genuine opportunities for young people from all backgrounds.

(4) Academic attainment and family background channel aspiration, not selection.

The findings that high GCSE attainment and having a university-educated parent are strongly associated with not applying for apprenticeships, but not with failure among those who do apply, suggest that the educational system and family context channel young people away from apprenticeships before they reach the point of application. If apprenticeships are to function as a genuinely high-status pathway, rather than one perceived as a fallback for those not pursuing higher education, this channelling effect needs to be addressed through careers guidance that presents apprenticeships at all levels as viable and valued options for young people across the attainment spectrum and from all family backgrounds.



Chapter 9. Conclusion

This report has examined the post-school transitions of young people in England who were aged 15-16 in the 2020/21 academic year, following their journeys through to ages 19-20. Drawing on three waves of data from the *Your Life, Your Future survey*, complemented by insights from our qualitative research, the analysis has traced the pathways young people follow after compulsory education, identified the factors that shape their destinations and assessed the quality of employment and wellbeing outcomes associated with different trajectories. This concluding chapter synthesises the key findings, reflects on their broader significance and considers their implications for policy and practice.

9.1. Summary of key findings

(1) Diverse post-school pathways.

The transition from compulsory education to early adulthood is characterised by considerable diversity. By ages 19-20, just over half of young people surveyed had entered higher education, while the remainder were distributed across apprenticeships, relatively stable employment, casual or temporary work, further education, and NEET status. This diversity, which reflects the multiple routes that exist within the English education and training system, coexists with substantial inequalities in both access to different pathways and the outcomes they produce.

The traditional academic route (A-levels followed by university) remains the dominant trajectory, accounting for over a third of all young people. However, approximately 15% reached higher education via vocational or mixed qualifications, reflecting both the transferability of education pathways within the English education system and the limited non-graduate labour market opportunities available to vocationally oriented youth. Apprenticeships were accessed by around one in ten young people, while nearly a quarter entered paid employment without further education or formal training. A significant minority (8%) fell into the limited participation category, characterised primarily by being NEET at ages 19-20 without having had previous experience of working.

(2) A deteriorating youth labour market and widespread precarity.

Among young people who entered paid employment, precarious work was strikingly prevalent. Approximately half of those in paid work at ages 19-20 were in casual or temporary arrangements rather than permanent positions. This represents a substantial deterioration compared with earlier cohorts. Analysis of a cohort born six years earlier shows that 81% of young people in work at similar ages in 2018/19 held permanent positions (Ross et al., 2025). This shift reflects multiple interlinked factors, including the disruption of the COVID-19 pandemic, technological displacement of routine entry-level tasks and a broader trend toward the casualisation of employment that extends well beyond the youth labour market and affects workers across age groups, sectors and seniority levels. The job quality of casual and temporary employment was consistently poorer than that of apprenticeships and relatively stable employment across multiple dimensions. Beyond lower pay and irregular hours, young people in precarious work reported poorer workplace relationships, more limited employee voice and more limited opportunities for learning and development. Casual employment thus represents not merely less security but a qualitatively impoverished employment experience.

(3) The persistence of NEET status and the central role of mental health.

NEET rates increased from 4% at ages 17-18 to 10% at ages 19-20, indicating that the end of compulsory participation represents a critical point of vulnerability. More concerning still, NEET status showed considerable persistence: 41% of those who were NEET at ages 17-18 remained so two years later, the highest rate of persistence from any prior activity. However, the composition of the NEET group challenges simplistic assumptions of disengagement. The majority of young people classified as NEET were actively seeking work or education, while others were engaged in activities, such as unpaid caring and voluntary work, that play an important role in maintaining critical social infrastructure. A portion were unable to participate in the labour market due to illness or disability. Among those prevented from working for health reasons, over 80% reported long-term mental health conditions. Mental health difficulties at age 15–16 were independently associated with an elevated probability of being NEET at age 19-20 and of not continuing in

education beyond 16, even after controlling for a wide range of individual and contextual characteristics, while the proportion reporting health-related barriers to work more than doubled between survey waves. These findings suggest that NEET status more often reflects structural barriers and challenging circumstances than apathy or poor decision-making.

(4) Apprenticeships as a high-quality pathway.

Apprenticeships emerged as a distinctive pathway offering benefits across multiple domains. Compared with other forms of employment at ages 19-20, apprenticeships were associated with higher job quality on measures of pay, job design and nature, workplace relationships, and employee voice. Young people in apprenticeships also reported the highest levels of life satisfaction, sense of purpose and happiness of any destination group including those in higher education. While the observational design of this study means that causal claims cannot be made with certainty, we consider it plausible that these wellbeing differences are at least partly a consequence of the pathways themselves, an interpretation supported by our findings on goal-activity alignment and satisfaction with decisions at age 16, both of which are more directly tied to the nature of the post-16 experience. These findings indicate that apprenticeships typically provide qualitatively different experiences from other employment and educational arrangements, offering structured developmental environments that support both skill acquisition and psychological wellbeing.

(5) Demand for apprenticeships far outstrips supply, and access is unequal.

Despite the benefits associated with apprenticeships, participation remains limited, with only 8% of young people in apprenticeships at ages 19-20. Analysis of apprenticeship applications reveals that this low participation rate does not reflect a lack of demand. Over a quarter of young people had applied for an apprenticeship by ages 19-20, yet only 11% had secured one. The gap between aspiration and access was shaped by inequalities operating at different stages. At the aspiration stage, young women were significantly less likely to apply, as were young people with high GCSE attainment and those with university-educated parents, indicating that gendered perceptions, educational channelling and family background all narrow the pool of applicants. At the recruitment stage, a distinct set of barriers emerged. Young people from Asian and Black backgrounds, those born outside the UK and those with multiple SEND applied at comparable rates to their peers yet were significantly less likely to secure a place. These findings, complemented by our qualitative analysis (Khazbak et al. 2026), indicate that limited apprenticeship uptake reflects constrained supply and structural barriers to entry rather than a lack of interest among young people, and raise serious concerns about the equity of recruitment practices.

(6) Non-higher education destinations shaped by structural inequalities.

Post-school destinations among young people who do not enter university are profoundly shaped by factors beyond their individual choices. Parental occupation gradients in apprenticeship participation, particularly at higher apprenticeship levels, indicate that these programmes may reinforce rather than disrupt intergenerational inequality. Young people from minoritised ethnic backgrounds, while more likely to continue in education, face substantial barriers to relatively stable employment, with gaps reaching approximately 24 percentage points for Black young people compared with their White peers. And, as noted in sub-section (5) above, young people from Asian, Black and migration backgrounds also face barriers to participation in apprenticeships relative to their White and UK-born peers respectively, indicating that vocational pathways are not equally accessible across social and demographic groups.

Young people with SEND faced compounding disadvantages, being less likely to access apprenticeships or stable work and substantially more likely to become NEET. Mental health difficulties and experiences of unfair treatment or bullying during school years were also associated with an elevated risk of being NEET and poorer workplace experiences, indicating that vulnerabilities experienced at secondary school age can have lasting consequences.

Geographical context also powerfully shaped opportunities. Area-based deprivation is independently linked to reduced access to higher level apprenticeships, while regional differences in employment patterns meant that young people in the North faced more limited access to stable work than their peers in the South and East, increasing their vulnerability to becoming NEET.

9.2. Broader implications

(1) Supporting structural approaches to youth transitions.

These findings align with a growing recognition in policy that structural inequalities shape post-school

transitions (see, e.g., Department for Culture, Media & Sport, 2025; and Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government, 2025). The evidence presented here reinforces the importance of this direction: young people's options are profoundly shaped by inequalities related to family background, ethnicity, geography, health, and prior educational experiences. Interventions focused on improving individual employability or providing better information and guidance, while valuable, are therefore on their own insufficient to address the systemic patterns documented in this report. Achieving more equitable transitions requires attention to the structural conditions that constrain opportunity, including the supply and accessibility of high-quality work and training, employer practices, labour market regulation, and the spatial distribution of opportunities.

(2) The limited uptake of vocational education and training.

Despite a sustained policy emphasis on vocational routes, the data reveal that academic pathways continue to dominate post-16 transitions. Nearly half of young people at ages 17-18 were pursuing academic Level 3 qualifications, while vocational programmes, mixed routes and apprenticeships were far less common. Progression into academic higher education also significantly exceeded participation in vocational higher education or higher-level apprenticeships. These patterns highlight a substantial gap between current practice and policy ambitions for vocational education. The Government's target that at least 10% of young people pursue higher technical education or higher apprenticeships by 2040 (Department for Education et al., 2025) appears distant given current trajectories. Whether the limited uptake of vocational routes reflects constraints in supply, weak employer demand, barriers to participation, or perceptions of inferior status and returns, the evidence suggests that vocational pathways remain insufficiently developed as credible alternatives to academic progression.

(3) The scarring effects of early career precarity.

The prevalence of casual and temporary work among young people entering the labour market raises concerns about its longer-term consequences. Research on labour market scarring suggests that early experiences of unemployment and precarious employment can have persistent effects on subsequent earnings, employment stability, career progression, health, and wellbeing (Arulampalam et al., 2001; Schmillen & Umkehrer, 2017; Kim, 2024). The combination of insecure contracts, limited training opportunities and poorer job quality documented in this report creates conditions that may disadvantage affected young people well into their adult lives. The deterioration in employment quality compared with earlier cohorts is particularly concerning. If the current generation of young workers are beginning their careers in substantially more precarious conditions than their predecessors, the implications for their future employment prospects, lifetime earnings, economic security, health, and wellbeing could be substantial.

(4) Mental health as a transition factor.

The findings consistently highlight mental health as a significant factor in post-school transitions. Mental health difficulties at age 15-16 were associated with elevated risks of being NEET, not continuing in education and poorer workplace experiences among those in employment. Moreover, among young people unable to work for health reasons, the overwhelming majority reported long-term mental health conditions. These patterns indicate that mental health is not merely a background characteristic but an active influence on young people's trajectories through the post-school period. The persistence of mental health effects across different outcomes, from continuation in education to employment quality to economic inactivity, suggests that effective responses will need to span multiple settings, not only improving access to mental health support for young people across different post-school destinations, but also addressing the broader pressures and organisational cultures in both education and employment that can contribute to poor mental health.





9.3. Policy considerations

The findings of this report suggest several areas where policy attention could support more equitable and successful post-school transitions.

(1) Strengthening vocational pathways.

The findings highlight a persistent gap between policy aspirations for a high-status, high-participation vocational education and training system and the realities experienced by young people. Despite successive reforms, academic programmes remain the dominant post-16 options, while vocational pathways continue to suffer from uneven provision, variable quality, limited visibility, and very low take up. Strengthening the vocational system requires a coordinated strategy that simultaneously improves the supply of high-quality programmes, provides flexible pathways, enhances employer engagement, and provides impartial guidance that allows young people to move into vocational routes with confidence.

The Government's commitment to recruiting and retaining more further education lecturers (Department for Education et al., 2025) is a welcome and necessary first step for quality enhancement, but one that is unlikely to be successful without addressing pay. Further education lecturers earn on average £7,000 less than school teachers (Tahir, 2025), creating a recruitment crisis in sectors where industry wages far exceed what colleges can offer. Without a stable and well-qualified teaching workforce, efforts to expand high-quality vocational provision are likely to remain constrained.

Alongside investment, vocational pathways need to be sufficiently flexible to accommodate the diverse and often non-linear, disrupted or delayed transitions that young people experience. Many young people need opportunities to explore their interests before committing to a specific occupational pathway, or to change pathways, take breaks from studying or complete their programmes over a longer period than is typically expected. High-quality work experience, employer encounters and taster programmes can help young people make informed decisions while developing confidence and awareness of the opportunities available to them. However, if institutions are to be properly enabled to better accommodate non-linear transitions without stigmatising them, then more deep-seated changes to school and college accountability metrics are required. The current metrics, which are largely based on standardised age-based transition points and expectations that students will complete courses or enter employment within specified timelines, militate against such flexibility, thereby disadvantaging, and often stigmatising, young people whose education biographies are not aligned with dominant models of progression. Those young people whose transitions are most characterised by non-linearity, disruption or delay – and who would therefore have most to gain from flexible pathways that give them more control over the timing and pacing of their studies – are most likely to come from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds.

Qualification design matters as well. It is important that vocational qualifications are structured in ways that enable progression between levels, so that young people are not

locked into narrow pathways but can build toward higher-level skills over time.

Strengthened vocational pathways also require greater employer engagement. Government measures to work with Strategic Authorities on employment and skills support and the replacement of the Apprenticeship Levy with the Growth and Skills Levy to incentivise employer investment in training both recognise the need for system-wide change (Department for Education et al., 2025). However, on their own incentives are not sufficient to secure the scale of employer engagement required, particularly among small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), which account for around 60% of employment but only around 37% of apprenticeships. Incentivisation needs to be combined with a more concerted policy emphasis on raising awareness and communicating the benefits of apprenticeships to SMEs, and providing practical advice, support and brokerage services to connect them to training providers. This should include a national framework for brokerage services and targeted investment in expanding brokerage services to SME 'cold spots'–starting with areas where NEET rates are high and where there is no existing support for SMEs (Gluck & Papworth, 2025).

Employer engagement should also extend beyond offering placements and apprenticeship opportunities to include a stronger role in shaping the vocational education and training system itself. One such mechanism that has been successful in other European countries has been social partnership. While it has also been tried in Britain, governments have all too often lost interest and withdrawn funding from or abolished promising initiatives such as the Union Learning Fund and the UK Commission for Employment and Skills before they really had a chance to show their long-term value to the economy and society.[13] A revived initiative would involve employers, trade unions, regional authorities, and providers working together on the design and periodic review of vocational qualifications and the scrutiny of ground-level training and assessment practices to ensure their quality (Winch & Burgess, 2024). We also recommend that social partnership bodies are given statutory protection so that they are not so easily abolished when transient political interest moves on.

Finally, strengthening careers information, advice and guidance (CIAG) is crucial if vocational and technical routes are to be widely valued. CIAG should fulfil a genuine guidance and brokerage function, informing young people about the full range of opportunities available to them and connecting them with opportunities aligned with their interests and aspirations. This requires a professionally staffed, locally administered national CIAG service that is independent of schools, as schools are not well-placed to give impartial advice as long as their funding continues to be tied to learner numbers (Young Lives, Young Futures, 2025b). Without such improvements, efforts to raise the profile of vocational education risk reinforcing existing scepticism rather than expanding opportunities.

(2) Addressing NEET persistence.

The persistence of NEET status among a significant minority of young people demonstrates that disengagement is not a short-term or self-correcting phenomenon. Instead, it reflects the cumulative impact of educational disruption, socioeconomic disadvantage, health challenges, and limited local employment and training opportunities. Addressing NEET persistence therefore requires a shift from reactive interventions to a more preventive and sustained approach.

Early identification mechanisms in schools, supported by cooperation between education providers, local authorities, and health and social services, are crucial for identifying young people at heightened risk before they transition out of compulsory education. However, our qualitative findings suggest that early identification alone is insufficient without more deep-seated transformations to schooling (Young Lives, Young Futures, 2024; Khazbak et al., 2026). Schools can themselves be alienating environments for some young people, and addressing the root causes of disengagement requires attention to how schools are held accountable and greater flexibility in curriculum design, creating space for young people to explore different interests and pathways. Beyond education, increasing the supply of good quality employment is also essential. Our qualitative findings indicate that young people often struggle to remain in poor-quality jobs for more than a few months at a time, meaning their transitions into precarious work may simply delay rather than prevent NEET status (Young Lives, Young Futures, 2025a, 2026).

For those already disengaged, re-engagement programmes must provide more than short, time-limited courses and avoid a standardised, one-size-fits-all approach. The most effective models are sensitive to the diverse needs, interests and capabilities of the young people they are

[13] Although it is encouraging that at the time of writing in September 2026 the UK Chancellor John Healy announced that the Union Learning Fund, which had been discontinued by the Conservative government in 2021, would be reinstated (HM Treasury & Healy, 2026).

designed to help and to the needs of regional and local labour markets (Maguire, 2022). They typically combine multiple components, including one-to-one guidance, confidence-building, tailored skills support, and clear pathways into nurturing and sustained accredited work-based learning or paid employment, underpinned by accurate labour market information and tracking systems to collect reliable data on young people's intended and actual destinations (Mawn et al., 2017; Maguire, 2022).

Recent policy developments recognise the importance of local discretion in designing interventions (Department for Education et al., 2025; Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government, 2025), and our findings support this direction. It will be critical for the success of these policies that local authorities and relevant institutions are adequately resourced and given sufficient flexibility to develop approaches that are responsive to the specific challenges of their labour markets and demographic profiles and to the voices and choices of young people seeking to enter the labour market.

Crucially, efforts to reduce NEET rates should avoid framing young people themselves as the problem. While the risks associated with prolonged disengagement are clear, many young people classified as NEET are actively seeking opportunities, undertaking informal learning and contributing to their families, communities, wider society and the economy through unpaid care work, volunteering and other forms of civic engagement. These activities may not be captured in conventional labour-market or education metrics, but they represent meaningful forms of participation that challenge simplistic narratives of inactivity. Recognising this diversity of experience is essential for designing support that avoids pathologising legitimate forms of contribution and respects young people's agency. It also means acknowledging that transitions are not one-off events but involve a series of decisions over time. Young people benefit from opportunities to try different things, discover what they enjoy and are suited to, and re-enter education or training through multiple entry points when earlier choices do not work out.

The Government's Youth Guarantee (Department for Work & Pensions et al., 2024) represents a commitment to ensuring all young people have access to education, training or employment support. However, safeguards are needed to ensure that young people are not compelled into work experience misaligned with their interests or used as cheap labour—practices that have undermined previous similar schemes. Effective implementation should prioritise meaningful experiences that connect with young people's capabilities and aspirations. At the same time, acknowledging young people's contributions and the iterative nature of their transitions should not obscure the structural barriers that limit access to education, training and decent work. Rather, it should inform more inclusive and holistic approaches to supporting young people through the multiple stages of their post-school journeys, including through the provision of material assistance, such as bursaries and help with travel, meal and uniform costs, for those for whom finances are a barrier to engagement and progression in their chosen pathways.

(3) Improving employment quality.

The growing concentration of young workers in insecure and low-quality jobs represents a structural challenge with implications for lifetime economic, health and social wellbeing. Early-career precarity undermines income stability, restricts access to training, weakens opportunities for progression, and is associated with poorer immediate and longer-term health and wellbeing outcomes. These potential longer-term scarring effects mean that improving employment quality is both a matter of individual welfare and a wider economic concern.

Policy responses must address the regulatory environment governing entry-level work. The Employment Rights Act 2025 (Department for Business & Trade, 2025) acknowledges and addresses some of these concerns, introducing protections against exploitative zero-hour contracts, rights to guaranteed hours and reasonable notice of shifts and a stronger enforcement mechanism through the new Fair Work Agency. Our findings reinforce the importance of these directions. However, effective implementation will be essential: strengthening enforcement of existing labour standards, ensuring that rights apply effectively to workers on temporary or variable-hour contracts and addressing non-compliance in sectors reliant on flexible labour remain key requirements. Moreover, the Act's provisions focus primarily on contractual security, whereas our analysis reveals that young workers in casual and temporary employment also experience disadvantages in job design, skill development opportunities and workplace voice. These dimensions require attention beyond legislative protection.

Employers should be encouraged to develop structured early-career roles with clear progression frameworks. Targeted subsidies or tax incentives may be needed to offset the upfront costs of training and supervision, particularly for small employers. The Autumn 2025 Budget

announced one such measure, extending training support for small and medium sized enterprises. However, given the high costs of apprenticeships to employers in England compared to, for example, Germany and Austria, more may be needed (Erickson et al., 2025).

Transition support within employment (e.g., career coaching for young workers in insecure roles and upskilling schemes linked to sectors with labour shortages) could help individuals move from casual work into more sustainable occupations. Public sector and large private sector employers can play a leading role by committing to minimum job-quality standards for young workers and embedding progression opportunities within their workforce strategies. Initiatives such as Youth Employment UK's *Good Youth Employment Standards* (Youth Employment UK, 2026) provide an existing framework that employers can adopt, offering a practical route to demonstrating commitment to quality employment for young people and benchmarking practice against recognised standards.

Finally, the inclusion, within PSHE[14] teaching at schools and the vocational curriculum in colleges, of education about health, wellbeing, fairness, and the role of trade unions in the workplace is vital for raising awareness among young people about what it is reasonable to expect, and what to do if they are not experiencing the work conditions or quality of training they are entitled to.

We make some further recommendations for improving work quality for young people in sub-section (6), 'Integrating mental health protection and support', below.

(4) Expanding and equalising apprenticeship access.

The evidence presented in this report makes a strong case for the expansion of apprenticeship provision. Apprenticeships are associated with the highest job quality and wellbeing outcomes of any destination, and demand among young people substantially exceeds supply. Closing this gap requires a decisive increase in the number of apprenticeship places available to young people, reversing the trend of declining starts among those under 25.

However, expansion alone will be insufficient if the inequalities in access documented in this report are not simultaneously addressed. At the aspiration stage, careers guidance must actively present apprenticeships as a viable and valued option for young people across the attainment spectrum, from all family backgrounds and of all genders. This means challenging the perception



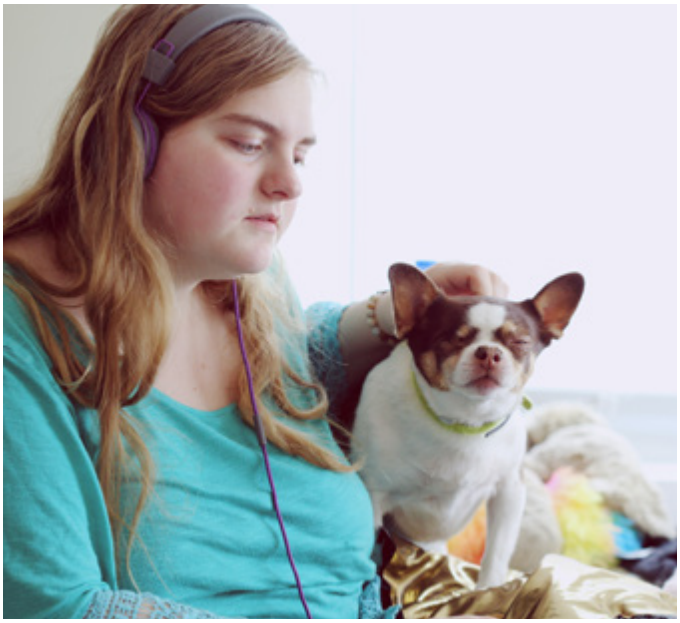
[14] Personal, social, health and economic education.

of apprenticeships as a fallback for those not pursuing higher education, ensuring that information about higher-level apprenticeships reaches high-attaining students, broadening the availability and visibility of apprenticeships across sectors so that young women are not deterred by the concentration of opportunities in male-dominated fields, and challenging the stereotyping that feeds gender-based occupational segregation.

At the recruitment stage, policy responses should address the transparency and fairness of how apprenticeship vacancies are advertised, shortlisted and filled. Specific measures could include the promotion of more inclusive and standardised application processes, the provision of reasonable adjustments throughout the recruitment process for young people with SEND, and accountability mechanisms that require employers and training providers to monitor and report on the diversity of their apprenticeship intake. Without such measures, the expansion of apprenticeship provision risks reproducing existing inequalities rather than creating inclusive pathways into skilled employment.

(5) Tackling spatial inequalities.

Geographical disparities remain a powerful determinant of young people's educational and labour-market opportunities. Differences in training provision, transport infrastructure, local economic strength, and employer presence mean that young people's prospects are strongly shaped by where they live. Tackling spatial inequality therefore requires a combination of educational, infrastructural and economic interventions.



Enhancing the capacity of further education and training providers in disadvantaged regions is essential, including investment in specialist staff, industry-standard equipment and outreach activities that improve awareness of available opportunities. Improvements in local transport affordability and connectivity (e.g., subsidised or free travel for young learners, better links to employment centres) could substantially widen the range of feasible options for training and work. At the economic level, youth policy should be integrated with broader regional development strategies, including sectoral growth plans, inward investment and support for emerging industries.

Local and combined authorities need the autonomy and funding to co-ordinate education-to-employment pathways at local and regional levels, aligning provision with realistic labour-market demand rather than relying on national templates that may not reflect local conditions. Regional pilots announced in the Autumn 2025 Budget are funding regions to connect young people who are NEET with local apprenticeship opportunities matched to regional labour market needs (Department for Work & Pensions, 2025). Our findings support such place-based approaches and suggest that their success will depend on sustained investment, genuine local discretion, responsiveness to young people's interests, and attention to the quality of opportunities available—not merely their existence.

(6) Integrating mental health protection and support.

Our findings demonstrate that mental health is a central factor shaping young people's transitions. High levels of mental health need among those who are NEET, lower rates of continuation in education among those reporting mental health conditions and the predominance of mental health conditions among young people unable to work all point to the necessity of embedding mental health protection and support within school and post-school systems and workplace cultures.

Strengthening mental health protection and support across all educational settings is critical—in schools as well as post-16 institutions. This requires preventive changes that address the pressures, conditions and cultures within educational environments that can contribute to poor mental health. In addition, schools, colleges, apprenticeship providers, and training organisations require reliable access to dedicated, professionally staffed counselling and mental health support teams capable of offering timely support and referring young people to specialist services when needed. However, such referrals are only effective if



specialist services can respond: currently, long waiting lists for mental health support mean that many young people do not receive timely intervention, allowing difficulties to compound during critical transition periods.

In employment support contexts, frontline staff in welfare-to-work programmes and job centres should be equipped to recognise mental health difficulties and support participation without imposing sanctions or requirements that exacerbate psychological distress. For young people living with long-term mental health conditions, integrated programmes that combine therapeutic support with gradual re-engagement in learning or work can provide a realistic and sustainable pathway back to participation.

Recent Government reviews signal a welcome recognition that mental wellbeing is a core determinant of economic inclusion (Department for Work & Pensions et al., 2024; Department for Work & Pensions & Department for Business & Trade, 2025), and of the urgent need to 're-humanise the workplace' (Department for Work & Pensions & Department for Business & Trade, 2025). However, the findings reported here together with those from the qualitative strand of our research (Young Lives, Young Futures, 2025a) suggest that a more expansive conception of workplace re-humanisation is needed if meaningful health-protecting improvements to the quality of work experienced by young people are to be realised. We suggest this should involve ensuring that principles of good job design – including manageable workloads and opportunities for young workers to exercise autonomy at work, have their voices heard and derive fulfilment from their work – are made central to efforts to create more inclusive workplaces. Embedding these principles into the implementation of initiatives designed to bolster workplace inclusivity would help ensure that the goal of 'good, healthy work' (Department for Work & Pensions et al., 2024) translates into meaningful improvements in how jobs are structured and experienced by young workers.

All of these changes require coordinated action across government departments, ensuring alignment between education, health and employment policies.

9.4. Concluding reflections

The post-school years represent a critical period in young people's lives, shaping their skills, employment trajectories and adult identities. The evidence presented in this report reveals how young people's transition experiences are characterised both by opportunity and inequality, with some young people progressing relatively smoothly into higher education or high-quality training or employment with training and others encountering precarious employment, limited options and barriers to participation. The diversity of pathways available within the English system is in many respects a strength, providing multiple routes through which young people with different capabilities and aspirations can progress. Yet this diversity coexists with persistent inequalities that channel young people from disadvantaged backgrounds, those with additional needs and those in high-deprivation areas toward less favourable destinations. Addressing these inequalities requires recognition that, while supporting young people to make informed decisions and develop employability skills remains important, achieving genuinely equitable transitions demands broader action. This includes attending to the supply of opportunities, the quality of employment available and the structural barriers and organisational cultures that prevent some young people from accessing or progressing in the pathways that would serve them best. The cohort examined in this report navigated their post-school transitions during a period marked by the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, rising inflation and labour market turbulence. How their trajectories develop in the coming years, and whether the patterns documented here persist or shift, will be important questions for future research. For now, the evidence points clearly to the need for sustained attention to the systems and structures that shape young people's journeys from education to adulthood.

Appendix A. Measurement of sociodemographic variables

Gender: Self-reported gender that describes the respondent best at Wave 1, coded 0 for males and 1 for females. Respondents identifying as non-binary were treated as missing due to small numbers that precluded reliable estimation.

Ethnicity: Young people's ethnic group, coded 1 for students reporting their ethnicity as White, 2 for Asian, 3 for Black, and 4 for Mixed or Other ethnicity.

Migration status: Whether the respondent was born in any of the UK countries, coded 0 for UK-born and 1 for born outside the UK.

Self-reported GCSE results: At Waves 2 and 3, respondents were asked to report their GCSE grades in two core subjects (English Language and Maths) if they had completed them. Grades ranged from 1 to 9. The average of the two subject grades was then calculated and classified into three groups: below 4, 4 to below 7 and 7 or above.

Sexual orientation: Young people's perception of their own sexual orientation at Wave 1, coded 1 for heterosexual/straight and 0 for gay/lesbian, bisexual and other.

Special educational needs and disabilities (SEND): At Wave 1, respondents reported any SEND that had lasted, or were expected to last, for at least 12 months. These included learning difficulties (e.g., dyslexia, dyspraxia, ADHD), speech, language or communication needs, autism/autism spectrum conditions, physical illnesses or health conditions (e.g., asthma, diabetes, serious allergies), physical impairments or mobility issues, deafness or partial hearing, blindness or partial sight (not correctable with glasses), and other conditions. The total number of reported SEND conditions was then grouped into three categories: zero, one and two or more.

Mental health difficulties: At Wave 1, respondents reported whether they had a mental health condition (e.g., anxiety, depression) that had lasted, or was expected to last, for at least 12 months, coded 1 for having a mental health condition and 0 otherwise.

Experience of unfair treatment or bullying: At Wave 1, respondents reported whether they had ever been treated unfairly or bullied by their peers at school, coded 1 for having experienced unfair treatment or bullying and 0 for having no such experience.

Parental occupation: Young people were asked about the type of jobs their parents held, based on the five-category NS-SEC classification (1=Higher managerial, administrative and professional, 2=Intermediate, 3=Small employer and own account workers, 4=Lower supervisory and technical occupations, 5=Semi-routine and routine occupations). Where information was available for both parents, the highest-ranked occupation (i.e., the lowest numerical value) was used to indicate parental occupational group. Although the NS-SEC categories do not represent a strict linear hierarchy, the classification broadly reflects gradations in employment relations and conditions that are associated with differential access to resources and opportunities.

Parental education: Coded as 1 if the young person had at least one parent who was university-educated, and 0 otherwise.

Eligibility for free school meals: Coded 1 for respondents who had ever been eligible for free school meals and 0 otherwise.

Government office region: The region young people lived in at Wave 1 was classified into 5 groups: North (North East, North West, Yorkshire and The Humber), Midlands (East Midlands, West Midlands), East (East of England), London, and South (South East, South West).

Index of multiple deprivation (IMD) decile: IMD deciles measure levels of deprivation in small areas in England, based on indicators of income, employment, education and skills, health and disability, crime, barriers to housing and services, and the living environment. The first decile represents the most deprived areas, while the tenth decile represents the least deprived areas.

Appendix B. Descriptive statistics

Variable	N	%
Gender	4186	
Female		49.9
Male		50.1
Ethnicity	4286	
White		71.4
Asian		13.2
Black		6.6
Mixed/Others		8.8
Self-reported GCSE result	4190	
Below 4		7.8
4 to below 7		61.6
7 or above		30.7
SEND	3907	
None		68.3
1 SEND		24.8
2+ SEND		7.0
Parental occupation	3336	
Managerial/Professional		46.3
Intermediate		16.9
Small employer/Own account		7.5
Lower-supervisory/Technical		16.1
Semi-routine/Routine		13.2
Government office region	4291	
North		26.3
Midlands		20.3
East		11.9
London		14.8
South		26.7

Variable	N	Mean	SD
Migration status (Non UK-born)	4227	0.11	0.31
Sexual orientation (hetero)	3979	0.82	0.38
Mental health difficulties	4295	0.21	0.41
Experience of unfair treatment or bullying	4295	0.48	0.50
University-educated parent	3914	0.45	0.50
FSM eligibility	3956	0.30	0.46
IMD decile	4291	5.2	3.0

Note: Complete cases only. Weights are applied.

Appendix C. Predictors of age 19-20 status (Sensitivity analysis using IDACI)

Variable	Further education	Apprenticeship Level 2-3	Apprenticeship Level 4+	Relatively stable paid work	Casual/ Temporary work	NEET
Female (ref: Male)	0.008 (0.019)	-0.020 (0.021)	-0.009 (0.018)	0.049+ (0.030)	0.056+ (0.033)	-0.073* (0.030)
Social class (ref: Mng/Prof)						
Intermediate	0.033 (0.037)	-0.005 (0.033)	-0.051* (0.024)	0.132* (0.051)	-0.050 (0.049)	-0.075 (0.048)
Small employer	0.012 (0.040)	0.015 (0.060)	-0.053+ (0.028)	-0.076 (0.058)	0.057 (0.078)	0.017 (0.066)
Lower supervisory/Technical	0.004 (0.028)	-0.008 (0.034)	-0.012 (0.027)	0.001 (0.046)	0.034 (0.054)	-0.034 (0.056)
Semi-routine/Routine	0.004 (0.027)	-0.035 (0.034)	-0.048* (0.024)	0.023 (0.048)	-0.008 (0.055)	0.042 (0.055)
Ethnicity (ref: White)						
Asian	0.080* (0.031)	0.041 (0.054)	0.013 (0.023)	-0.164*** (0.035)	-0.040 (0.042)	0.067 (0.047)
Black	0.108+ (0.059)	0.018 (0.041)	0.062 (0.046)	-0.240*** (0.032)	-0.070 (0.058)	0.043 (0.056)
Mixed/other	0.121** (0.045)	-0.005 (0.039)	-0.004 (0.024)	-0.154*** (0.039)	-0.070+ (0.042)	0.106+ (0.056)
Born outside UK (ref: UK born)	0.008 (0.027)	-0.057+ (0.033)	-0.004 (0.029)	-0.021 (0.056)	0.042 (0.065)	0.038 (0.052)
GCSE (ref: below 4)						
4 to below 7	-0.003 (0.028)	0.077*** (0.021)	0.027 (0.024)	0.010 (0.054)	-0.012 (0.050)	-0.107* (0.053)
7 or above	-0.035 (0.031)	0.086** (0.031)	0.092** (0.033)	-0.018 (0.062)	-0.062 (0.059)	-0.070 (0.068)
SEND (ref: No SEND)						
1 SEND	0.010 (0.024)	0.026 (0.026)	-0.020 (0.019)	-0.063+ (0.035)	-0.029 (0.038)	0.076* (0.033)
2+ SEND	0.043 (0.042)	-0.053* (0.024)	-0.050* (0.023)	-0.087 (0.053)	-0.031 (0.056)	0.187** (0.060)
Mental health difficulties	-0.039+ (0.020)	0.004 (0.026)	-0.010 (0.022)	-0.009 (0.033)	-0.021 (0.036)	0.073+ (0.037)
Experience of unfair treatment or bullying	0.002 (0.020)	-0.016 (0.021)	0.004 (0.016)	-0.023 (0.031)	-0.035 (0.031)	0.062* (0.031)
Heterosexual (ref: LGB)	-0.018 (0.030)	0.019 (0.025)	0.024 (0.020)	0.058+ (0.034)	-0.026 (0.041)	-0.058 (0.040)
Region (ref: North)						
Midlands	-0.033 (0.028)	-0.023 (0.029)	0.017 (0.029)	-0.038 (0.039)	0.101* (0.045)	-0.032 (0.043)
East	-0.044 (0.032)	-0.029 (0.036)	-0.028 (0.029)	0.121* (0.053)	0.057 (0.050)	-0.083 (0.053)
London	-0.059* (0.026)	-0.054* (0.027)	-0.001 (0.026)	0.050 (0.060)	0.135* (0.054)	-0.074 (0.050)
South	-0.033 (0.028)	0.011 (0.032)	-0.027 (0.023)	0.092* (0.041)	0.077+ (0.040)	-0.135*** (0.041)
IDACI decile	-0.003 (0.003)	-0.002 (0.004)	0.010** (0.003)	0.002 (0.006)	0.001 (0.006)	-0.009 (0.005)
N=1328						

*Note: While the outcome variable (Wave 3 status) includes all seven categories except for HE, only six types are reported in the table for simplicity (apprenticeship level not stated is not reported). Standard errors in parentheses. + p< 0.1, * p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p< 0.001.*

References

Amo-Afful, K., Johnson, P., & Pusumane, O.P. (2026). Prejudice and Discrimination in the United Kingdom Labor Market. In: *The Palgrave Handbook of Global Social Problems.* Palgrave Macmillan.

APPG for Young Carers & Adult Carers (2026, January). *"You may want us to focus on education and our future - but we have to put that second": Inquiry into removing the barriers to higher education, employment and training for young adult carers.* https://carers.org/downloads/appg-yac-report-web.pdf

Arulampalam, W., Gregg, P., & Gregory, M. (2001). Introduction: Unemployment Scarring. *The Economic Journal*, 111(475), F577–F584.

Blundell, R., Dias, M. C., Cribb, J., Joyce, R., Waters, T., Wernham, T., & Xu, X. (2022). Inequality and the COVID-19 Crisis in the United Kingdom. *Annual Review of Economics, 14*, 607–636. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-economics-051520-030252

Bocock, L., Scott, M., & Hillary, J. (2025). *The Skills Imperative 2035: Creating a system of lifelong learning to provide the essential skills for tomorrow's workforce.* NFER.

CIPD & Youth Futures Foundation (2024). *Balancing act: Youth apprenticeships and the case for a flexible skills levy.* London: CIPD.

CIPD. (2025). *CIPD Good Work Index 2025.* Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD).

Collins, J. (2023). Revaluing work after COVID-19. *Anthropology of Work Review, 44*(1), 25–37. https://doi.org/10.1111/awr.12247

Crawford, C., & Greaves, E. (2015). *Socio-economic, ethnic and gender differences in HE participation.* Department for Business, Innovation and Skills. https://doi.org/10.1920/re.ifs.2024.0387

Crawford, C., Wyness, G., Vignoles, A., & Duckworth, K. (2011). *Young people's education and labour market choices aged 16/17 to 18/19.* Centre for Analysis of Youth Transitions. https://doi.org/10.1920/re.ifs.2024.0707

Creach, M. (2023). *Insecure Work in 2023: The impact on workers and an action plan to deliver decent work for everyone.* https://www.tuc.org.uk/sites/default/files/insecureworkin2023.pdf

Cribb, J., Hood, A., & Joyce, R. (2017). *Entering the labour market in a weak economy: Scarring and insurance* (IFS Working Paper W17/27). Institute for Fiscal Studies.

Crowley, L. (2024). *The changing face of the youth labour market.* Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development.

Cullinane, C., Anders, J., De Gennaro, A., Early, E., Holt-White, E., Montacute, R., Shao, X., & Yarde, J. (2022). *Wave 1 Initial Findings – Lockdown Learning.* UCL Centre for Education Policy and Equalising Opportunities & Sutton Trust.

Department for Business & Trade. (2025). *Factsheet: Employment Rights Act 2025—Overview.* https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/69440cd78f4636fa2c547e8a/employment-rights-act-2025-overview.pdf

Department for Culture, Media & Sport. (2025, December 10). *Youth Matters: Your National Youth Strategy* [Policy paper]. https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/youth-matters-your-national-youth-strategy/youth-matters-your-national-youth-strategy

Department for Education. (2016). *Report of the Independent Panel on Technical Education.* Department for Education.

Department for Education. (2022, March). *Written evidence submitted by the Department for Education.* https://committees.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/107554/html/

Department for Education. (2024). *Participation of young people in education, employment or training.* https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/660e971663b7f8001fde187f/Participation_of_young_people_in_education__employment_or_training.pdf

Department for Education. (2025). *Participation measures in higher education* [Dataset]. https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/participation-measures-in-higher-education/2022-23

Department for Education. (2026, January). *Introduction of T Levels* [Policy paper]. Department for Education. https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/introduction-of-t-levels/introduction-of-t-levels

Department for Education & Department for Work & Pensions. (2026). Academic year 2025/26: Apprenticeships. https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/apprenticeships/2025-26#909f-subject-level-and-age

Department for Education, Department for Work & Pensions, & Department for Science, Innovation & Technology. (2025). *Post-16 Education and Skills: Post-16 education and skills reforms to develop a skilled workforce and break down barriers to opportunity.* HM Government.

Department for Work & Pensions. (2025, December 10). *50,000 more young people to benefit from apprenticeships as Government unveils new skills reforms to get Britain working.* https://www.gov.uk/government/news/50000-more-young-people-to-benefit-from-apprenticeships-as-government-unveils-new-skills-reforms-to-get-britain-working

Department for Work & Pensions, & Department for Business & Trade. (2025). *Keep Britain Working: Final Report.* HM Government.

Department for Work & Pensions, HM Treasury, & Department for Education. (2024). *Get Britain Working.* HM Government.

Dickson, M., Maguire, S., Laczik, D. A., Dabbous, D. D., Newton, O., & Thomson, D. (2025). *Keeping young people in learning until the age of 18–does it work?: Evidence from the Raising of the Participation Age (RPA) in England.* Institute for Policy Research.

Diniz, J., & Murphy, L. (2025). *False starts: What the UK's growing NEETs problem really looks like, and how to fix it.* Resolution Foundation.

Duckworth, K., Ross, A., & Harding, C. (2025). *Post-16 Pathways: Analysis of routes and groups.* Department for Education.

Elliott, G. (2021). Generation Covid and the impact of lockdown. *Research Matters: A Cambridge Assessment publication,* 31, 68–83.

Erickson, E., Grollmann, P., Hefler, G., Hogarth, T., Lennartz, C., & Markowitsch, J. (2025). *Apprenticeship Costs in Germany, Austria and England: A Matched Plant Study.* Gatsby Foundation.

Florisson, R., & Gable, O. (2022). *The gender gap: insecure work in the UK.* The Work Foundation at Lancaster University.

Florisson, R. (2024). *The UK Insecure Work Index 2024.* The Work Foundation at Lancaster University.

Florisson, R. (2026). How secure work can reduce regional inequality. *Global Political Economy, 5*(1), 183-197.

Fuller, A., & Unwin, L. (2013). *Gender Segregation, Apprenticeship and the Raising of the Participation Age in England: Are Young Women at a Disadvantage?* Centre for Learning and Life Chances in Knowledge Economies and Societies.

Gospel, H. (2021). *Direct Employment: A Study of Economic, Business and Social Outcomes.* Joint Industry Board. https://www.jib.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/JIB-Direct-Employment-Report.pdf

Green, F., Henseke, G., & Schoon, I. (2022). Perceived effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on educational progress and the learning of job skills: New evidence on young adults in the United Kingdom. *Journal of Education and Work, 35*(5), 485–501. https://doi.org/10.1080/13639080.2022.2092608

Hearne, D. (2021). Regional prices and real incomes in the UK. *Regional Studies, 55*(5), 951–961.

HM Treasury, & Healy, J. (2026, September). Chancellor backs young people into work by supporting jobs. https://www.gov.uk/government/news/chancellor-backs-young-people-into-work-by-supporting-jobs

Holt-White, E., Montacute, R., & Tibbs, L. (2022). *Paving the way: Careers guidance in secondary schools.* Sutton Trust.

Hughes, D. (2017). Careers work in England's schools: Politics, practices and prospects. *British Journal of Guidance & Counselling, 45*(4), 427–440. https://doi.org/10.1080/03069885.2017.1346234

Khazbak, R., Gewirtz, S., Bayrakdar S., Maguire M. et al. (2026) A neglected 'class ceiling'? The impact of intersecting inequalities on the post-16 transitions of early education leavers, *Social Policy Review*, 38: 27-56.

Kim, K. (2024). Impacts of Early Youth Unemployment Self-Esteem and Quality of Life: Moderating Effects of Career Unemployment. *Applied Research in Quality of Life, 19*(5), 2871–2894. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11482-024-10360-7

Lewis, J., & Bolton, P. (2025, January 22). *Technical education in England: T Levels* [Research Briefing]. House of Commons Library. https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/CBP-7951/CBP-7951.pdf

Little, R. J. A., & Rubin, D. B. (2002). *Statistical Analysis with Missing Data* (2nd ed.). Wiley.

Maguire, S. (2022, April). *A difficult nut to crack? How the UK has tackled the youth unemployment challenge.* Edge Foundation. https://www.edge.co.uk/documents/301/Youth_unemployment_report_final2.pdf

Maris, R., Khandekar, S., & Robinson, D. (2024). *A quantitative analysis of T level access and progression.* Education Policy Institute.

Martin, P. (2025). Examining the relationship between ethnicity, school attainment and higher education participation in England. *Research Papers in Education, 40*(5), 641–662. https://doi.org/10.1080/02671522.2025.2464737

Mawn, L., Oliver, E. J., Akhter, N., Bambra, C. L., Torgerson, C., Bridle, C., & Stain, H. J. (2017). Are we failing young people not in employment, education or training (NEETs)? A systematic review and meta-analysis of re-engagement interventions. *Systematic Reviews, 6*, 16. https://doi.org/10.1186/s13643-016-0394-2

McCurdy, C., & Murphy, L. (2024). *We've only just begun: Action to improve young people's mental health, education and employment.* Resolution Foundation.

McPherson, C., Bayrakdar, S., Gewirtz, S., Laczik, A., Maguire, M., Newton, O., O'Brien, S., Weavers, A., Winch, C., & Wolf, A. (2023). *Schools for All? Young people's experiences of alienation in the English secondary school system.* https://www.ylyf.co.uk/_files/ugd/44751f_4aedd3f1a10548a383d9e514b986fbe1.pdf

McPherson, C., Bayrakdar, S., Weavers, A., Gewirtz, S., Maguire, M., Winch, C., & Laczik, A. (2024). In: Downes, P., Anderson, J., Behtoui, A., & Van Praag, L. (Eds.). *Promoting Inclusive Systems for Migrants in Education* (1st ed.). Routledge.

Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government. (2025). *Pride in Place.* https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/68d65f83c908572e81248d46/Pride_in_Place_Strategy.pdf

Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government. (2025, July 10). *English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill.* https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/english-devolution-and-community-empowerment-bill

Montacute, R., & Cullinane, C. (2023). *25 Years of University Access: How access to higher education has changed over time.* Sutton Trust.

Moote, J., & Archer, L. (2018). Failing to deliver? Exploring the current status of career education provision in England. *Research Papers in Education, 33*(2), 187–215. https://doi.org/10.1080/02671522.2016.1271005

Ofsted. (2023, July 20). *T-level thematic review: Final report* [Research and analysis]. Ofsted. https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/t-level-thematic-review-final-report/t-level-thematic-review-final-report

ONS. (2020). *Volume 3: The National Statistics Socio-economic Classification (NS-SEC rebased on the SOC 2020).* https://www.ons.gov.uk/methodology/classificationsandstandards/standardoccupationalclassificationsoc/soc2020/soc2020volume3thenationalstatisticssocioeconomic classificationnssecrebasedonthesoc2020

ONS. (2025a, January 14). *Personal well-being user guidance.* https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/wellbeing/methodologies/personalwellbeingsurveyuserguide

ONS. (2025b, November 20). *Young people not in education, employment or training (NEET), UK: November 2025.* https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peoplenotinwork/unemployment/bulletins/youngpeoplenotineducationemploymentortrainingneet/november2025

Powell, A (2024). *Apprenticeships policy in England* (Briefing Paper SN03052). London: House of Commons Library.

Ross, A., Duckworth, K., & Harding, C. (2025). *Post-16 Pathways: Analysis of Outcomes.* Department for Education.

Rubin, D. B. (1987). *Multiple Imputation for Nonresponse in Surveys.* John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

Schmillen, A., & Umkehrer, M. (2017). The scars of youth: Effects of early-career unemployment on future unemployment experience. *International Labour Review, 156*(3–4), 465–494. https://doi.org/10.1111/ilr.12079

Skills England. (2025, November 5). *Assessment of priority skills to 2030* [Research and analysis]. Skills England. https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/assessment-of-priority-skills-to-2030/assessment-of-priority-skills-to-2030

Tahir, I. (2025, June 12). *What does the Spending Review really mean for FE?* Institute for Fiscal Studies.

The Careers & Enterprise Company. (2020). *Careers education in England's schools and colleges 2020: Working together for young people's futures.* The Careers & Enterprise Company.

The Gatsby Charitable Foundation. (2024). *Good Career Guidance: The Next 10 Years.* The Gatsby Charitable Foundation.

Toner, P. (2008). Survival and Decline of the Apprenticeship System in the Australian and UK Construction Industries. *British Journal of Industrial Relations*, 46, 431-438.

TUC. (2023). *Jobs and pay monitor: Young workers.* Trades Union Congress (TUC).

TUC. (2025). *An Ambitious Plan for Young People.* Trades Union Congress (TUC).

Tuckett, S., Hunt, E., Robison, D., & Cruikshank, R. (2022). *COVID-19 and Disadvantage Gaps in England 2021.* Education Policy Institute.

Vizard, T., Sadler, K., Ford, T., Newlove-Delgado, T., McManus, S., Marcheselli, F., Davis, J., Williams, T., Leach, C., Mandalia, D., & Cartwright, C. (2020). *Mental Health of Children and Young People in England, 2020: Wave 1 follow up to the 2017 survey.* Health and Social Care Information Centre.

Winch, C., & Burgess, N. (2024, August). *A Comparative Case Study Analysis of Three European Quality Assurance Systems for Vocational Education and Training: A Report to the Gatsby Foundation.* https://www.gatsby.org.uk/app/uploads/sites/2/2025/07/a-comparative-case-study-analysis-of-three-european-qa-systems-for-vet-2024.pdf

Wolf, A. (2011). *Review of Vocational Education – The Wolf Report.* Department for Education.

Yarde, J., Shao, X., Anders, J., Cullinane, C., Holt-White, E., Latham, K., & Montacute, R. (2023). *Wave 2 Initial Findings – Post-18 Opportunities and Aspirations. (COSMO Wave 2).* UCL Centre for Education Policy and Equalising Opportunities & Sutton Trust.

Yates, E. (2023). Developing or Degrading Young Workers? How Business Strategy and the Labour Process Shape Job Quality across Different Industrial Sectors in England. *Work, Employment and Society, 37*(5), 1186–1205. https://doi.org/10.1177/09500170211070447

Young Lives, Young Futures. (2024, November). *Policy Brief No.2: Building more inclusive school curricula and cultures.* https://d4e4bf3a-3df7-4e27-8f1c-a8371a2bb814.filesusr.com/ugd/92717c_788a01013a1a4b219184370407b26601.pdf

Young Lives, Young Futures. (2025a). *Precarious transitions: A summary report of key findings from the Young Lives, Young Futures study.* https://d4e4bf3a-3df7-4e27-8f1c-a8371a2bb814.filesusr.com/ugd/92717c_3a89bd293ef4406da38f1d95d830b192.pdf

Young Lives, Young Futures. (2025b, November). *The case for a national independent information, advice and guidance system in England: Findings and policy recommendations from the Young Lives, Young Futures study.* https://d4e4bf3a-3df7-4e27-8f1c-a8371a2bb814.filesusr.com/ugd/92717c_b60e7b20995442c0bcb0e6598d5708c3.pdf

Young Lives, Young Futures. (2026, January). *Response to the Young People and Work Report: Call for Evidence from the Young Lives, Young Futures study.* https://d4e4bf3a-3df7-4e27-8f1c-a8371a2bb814.filesusr.com/ugd/92717c_0df3a47ca28f434ab6b07fb7ae29547a.pdf

Young Women's Trust. (2016). *Making Apprenticeships Work for Young Women.* Young Women's Trust.

Youth Employment UK. (2026). *Good Youth Employment Standards.* https://www.youthemployment.org.uk/good-youth-employment-standards/

Get in touch

Write to us

Centre for Public Policy Research (CPPR)
School of Education, Communication & Society
King's College London
Waterloo Road
London
SE1 9NH

Email us

younglives@kcl.ac.uk

www.ylyf.co.uk



Young Lives, Young Futures

KING'S College LONDON

UKRI Economic and Social Research Council

EDGE FOUNDATION