



Reimagining Futures:

A study of Open Doors Education and Training's alternative approach to education, mentoring and careers guidance amongst NEET and disadvantaged young people.

Executive Summary



September 2023

About the Traveller Movement

The Traveller Movement is a registered UK charity promoting inclusion and community engagement with Gypsies, Roma and Travellers. The Traveller Movement seeks to empower and support Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities to advocate for the full implementation of their human rights.

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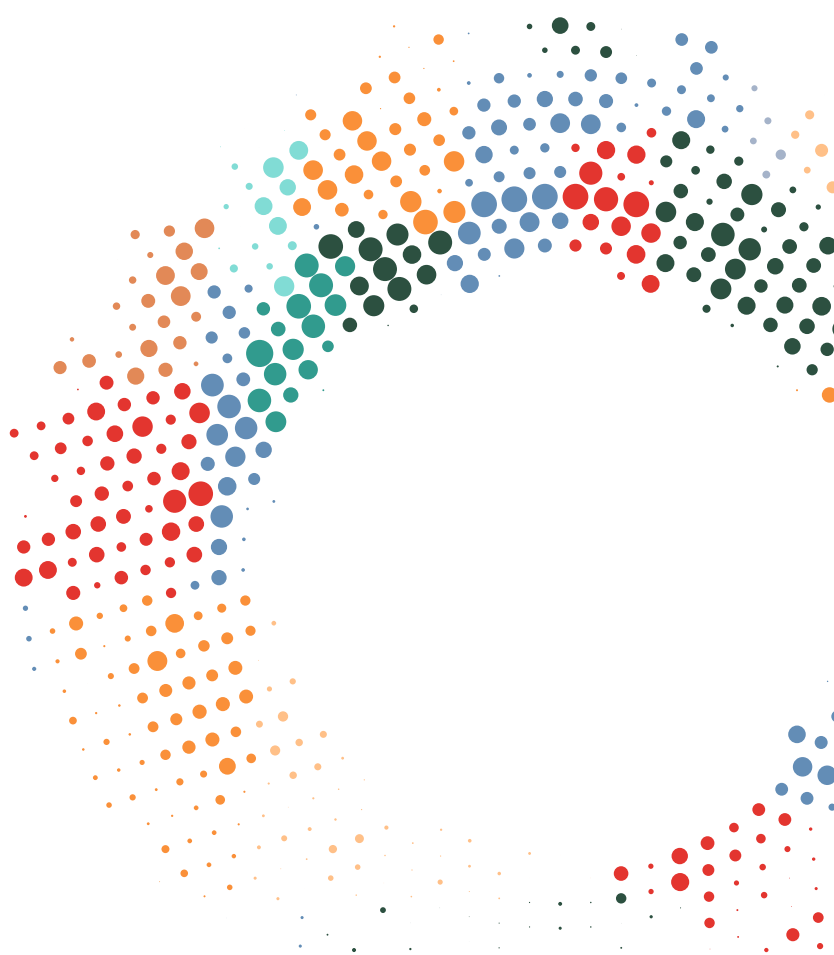
Acknowledgements

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We would also like to share our deep appreciation for all the parents and referrers of students participating in ODET's NEET program. So many went above and beyond to ensure that the lessons could be delivered on time and in a place where students felt safe and comfortable.

Vitaly, we'd also like to thank all the fantastic students who took part in the programme as well the tutors that supported them along the way. This report is entirely indebted to their success stories, and it is our sincere hope that their brilliant work will not be in isolation but pave the way for countless others in future.

We'd also like to acknowledge all the work that went into this report from the Traveller Movement team: Christian Johnson, who was the principal author of this report; Greg Sproston for his assistance with proof-reading and research; and Yvonne Macnamara who oversaw the project. Finally, the team within ODET for their excellent availability and sharing of vital data.



1. Introduction

As the dust settles after COVID-19 and much of the country returns to normal, the nation's young people still face a unique set of hurdles when it comes to finding meaningful and relevant pathways into employment, education and training. This is reflected by the growing body of NEET (not in Education, Employment or Training) young people across the country and a general shift within this cohort towards 'economic inactivity', i.e. those for whom unemployment has become a more permanent rather than transitional state. While youth unemployment has been growing steadily over the past few years, this shift towards economic inactivity is incredibly concerning and risks dramatically impacting the nation's economic health.

Too many young people are leaving compulsory education without the prerequisite qualifications needed to pursue further training or education, particularly those with pre-existing challenges in their lives. Young people already facing disadvantages in formal education, for example; looked after children, those with SEN requirements or an EHCP plan, and those facing poverty, among others, are far more likely to find themselves NEET. Nowhere is this more pronounced, however, than among Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities, in which 53 per cent are economically inactive – the highest of any ethnic minority group – and those who are employed are significantly overrepresented in routine and semi-routine occupations.¹

In response to the expanding body of NEET young people following the pandemic, and the distinct over-representation of Ethnic Gypsy, Roma and Travellers within this cohort, The Traveller movement established its sister charity, Open Doors Education and Training (ODET) in 2021 with a view to addressing this imbalance. Building on The Traveller Movement's extensive research into the journeys of Ethnic Gypsy, Roma and Traveller young people, combined with the understanding that low educational attainment is the key risk factor in becoming NEET, ODET sought to deliver a model of pedagogy rooted in an understanding of the multiple, and oftentimes overlapping, disadvantages faced by the community in formal education.

This report also recognises the well-understood connection between youth unemployment and the likelihood of a young person encountering the criminal justice system. A portion of the report focuses on ODET's experiences working with those serving community sentences, exploring how the one-to-one model represents a powerful intervention to support those transitioning away from offending.

Blending insights into the economic landscape of young people with the hard-won lessons from two years of individualised one-to-one teaching, the result is an extended review of the NEET cohort, its causes and effects – for the individual and society more broadly; findings from prior initiatives, and lastly: a series of proposals for how the ODET model might harbour solutions for national interventions.



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1 Gov.uk - [Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Ethnicity Summary](#). (2022).



2. Key Findings

Outcomes for NEET Young People

There are a range of broad-reaching outcomes associated with young people identified as NEET. Higher rates of low economic activity, limiting long-term illness, higher rates of self-harm, depression, anxiety and drug misuse;² ultimately, NEET have significantly poorer labour market and health outcomes than their non-NEET peers. As of 2022, 10.6 per cent of all people aged 16 to 24 in the UK were classified as NEET – 11 per cent of men and 10.2 per cent of women, which translates to roughly 724,000 NEET.³

The economic effect of high unemployment among young people can be severe. Lower economic productivity results in lower GDP, fewer collected taxes, higher social costs (NHS, DWP, etc.), higher interest rates, and a decline in overall consumption and productivity. As such, it's vital to a nation's economic health that youth unemployment is kept within manageable levels. When it comes to young people specifically, a report published by the London School of Economics found that unemployment can also lead to long-term 'scarring' in later life, which can result in lower pay, higher unemployment and reduced life chances. The report also found a higher likelihood for participants to suffer mental health problems in their 40s or 50s.⁴ On the one hand, these findings gesture to the difficulty of quantifying the exact effects of unemployment but also highlight how it can have lasting and adverse repercussions over the course of an individual's life, both professionally and personally.

The Road to NEET

It's important to understand that being NEET is a symptom not a cause. When a young person falls into the 'limbo' state outside education, employment or training, it's often due to a variety of intersecting factors. As such, any attempt to support a young person transitioning towards a sustainable and meaningful career should be grounded in acknowledgement and understanding of the hurdles the young person faces or has faced in the past. And because every young person is unique, with their own lives, histories and environments, it stands to reason that a 'one size fits all' model of support is rarely an effective form of intervention.

There are, however, several key risk factors for why young people become NEET - the greatest of which is low educational attainment. Those leaving compulsory education without having achieved a Grade 4 (the 'pass' threshold) at GCSE in English and Maths are often unable to proceed into higher education, join an apprenticeship or traineeship, or pursue employment. This is because most course providers and employers require prospective students or employees to have, at a minimum, pass marks in both English and Maths. However, as is often the case, low educational attainment is often a by-product of an underlying hurdle faced by the young person.

Those who are NEET at the age of 18/19 often have the lowest results in exams at age 11 and GCSE, lower attainment than average and low levels of literacy and numeracy. Therefore, for students with challenges known to negatively affect educational attainment, the likelihood of becoming NEET is increased, such as: Special Educational Needs (SEN), learning difficulties, have a disability, been looked after, or are otherwise categorised as a Child in Need (CIN).

While on some level these trends are to be expected across all ethnic groups, they are particularly pronounced among those from Gypsy, Roma and Traveller backgrounds. Over 70 per cent of those classed as economically inactive, who identified as Ethnic Gypsy or Irish Traveller, had no qualifications. This is compared to 54 per cent of those identifying as White: Roma, and just 34 per cent for White: British. This demonstrates a clear connection between lower levels of education and long-term unemployment, but more importantly, how disproportionately such barriers affect those from Gypsy, Roma and Traveller backgrounds.

2 [Scottish Longitudinal NEET Study - Consequences, risk factors, and geography of young people not in education, employment or training \(NEET\). \(2015\).](#)

3 [Office for National Statistics - Young People Not in Education, Employment or Training. \(2023\)](#)

4 [London School of Economics - Youth Unemployment Produces Scarring Effects. \(2017\)](#)



ODET Model

Stemming from concerns around the impact of Covid-19 on the education of Ethnic Gypsy, Roma and Traveller students, The Traveller Movement established ODET to deliver an online tutoring programme, supporting students to 'catch up' on their studies and help them overcome some of the barriers they faced. This provided one-to-one online personal tutoring for students from these communities, who were unable to attend their schools under lockdown restrictions. In its first year it had reached 120 students from over 116 primary and secondary schools. Some of these students were referred to the programme from local councils or from non-governmental organisations (NGOs). Some students found out about the service through word of mouth and became involved through their own or family initiative.

Following the resounding success of its initial programme and the findings of the Roads to Success report, ODET recognised an opportunity for a much-needed intervention to prevent more Ethnic Gypsy, Roma and Traveller young people from becoming NEET. This solution took the form of another online programme delivering one-to-one education to students across the country, however, rather than being adjacent to full-time education, the programme would specifically target NEET students. The programme consisted of five hours of tailored tuition per week in which students worked towards completing exams in level 2 functional skills in English and Maths at the end of the 36-week program.

At the core of this approach was the recognition that being NEET is not a choice, but rather an outcome of intersecting disadvantages faced both within and outside the school gates, and that for effective intervention to take place, the programme must be able to accord for the needs of the individual student. As such, students did not attend classrooms with other students, virtual or otherwise; rather they were assigned one tutor to work with them directly and who would stay with them for the duration of their journey. This tutor would deliver a tailored, co-designed curriculum which was relevant and fluid to the needs of the learner. This enabled students to be comfortable - feeling that their culture and background was not just recognised but understood – and subsequently flourish academically. Moreover, this direct correspondence, between tutor and student, offered fertile ground for productive and positive relationships to flourish; where students felt relaxed in the learning environment and free to express their thoughts, goals and hopes for the future, just as tutors were able to support their onward growth, helping them plot a journey once the programme had finished.

The following page visualises the journey of the young person once they join the ODET program, from the point of referral to the final exams at the end of the 36 weeks.



Number of 16-24 year-olds on zero-hour contracts (ZHCs)

2015: 6.7%
2022: 10.2%

Number of 16-24 year-olds hours worked weekly on zero-hour contracts (ZHCs)

2015: 22.2 hrs
2022: 21.3 hrs



Number of people aged 16-24 classified as NEET in the UK in 2022

10.6%



1 REFERRAL

Referral Source submits form including key information about the young person. ODET's Education Officer will contact the referrer and request further information regarding learning requirements and educational background



2 FIRST STEPS

The student will be assigned a tutor relevant to their needs and interests. The Student attends the first lesson and meets their tutor. This is an opportunity to discuss their interests, goals and schedule.

3 EDUCATION

The student and tutor agree lesson times and commence lessons. The tutor incorporates the interests of the student into lessons over the course of the coming months.



4 MENTORING

Depending on the student's hopes for the future, they will be assigned dedicated careers guidance sessions. The student will attend ten hours of CG over the course of the program with a view to building a roadmap for the future



5 LOOKING AHEAD

With support from the referral source, education officer and tutor, the student will prepare to sit their exams at the end of the program.

3. Recommendations

1. The DfE should continue its postponed review of the Education Act (1996) and revise 'qualifying persons' eligible to receive support from Youth Services (as defined in section 507b) to include those between the ages of 16-25 without GCSE's in English and Maths at Grade 4.
2. The government should expand its allocation of support for the NTP to include specialist careers guidance for pupils whose predicated grades suggest they are likely to leave formal education without GCSE's in English and Maths at Grade 4, as well as those from disadvantaged backgrounds and looked after children.
3. The DfE must permit local youth services to access funding ringfenced for the Local Skills Improvement Plan.
4. When conducting pre-sentence reports, the Ministry of Justice should expand its definition of 'priority cohorts' to include all NEET young people between the ages of 16-25.
5. Legislation stemming from the 2020 white paper, *A Smarter Approach to Sentencing*, should require the National Probation Service to place greater emphasis on one-to-one models of intervention when commissioning rehabilitative services for offenders on community orders.





The Traveller Movement would like to say a heartfelt
THANK YOU to our funders for their support.

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