



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



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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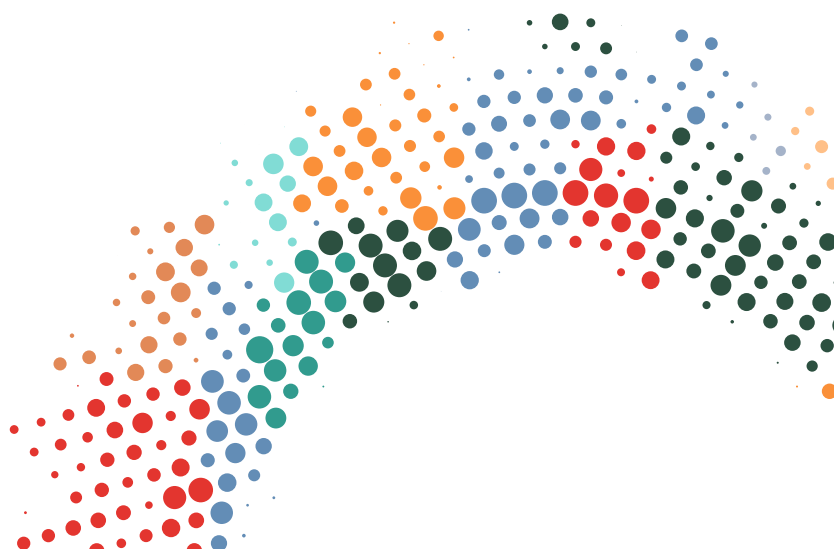
Acknowledgements

The Traveller Movement would like to say a heartfelt thank you to The Youth Futures Foundation and Lloyds TSB for their continued commitment and enthusiasm for TM's criminal justice youth policy work. We'd also like to recognise the support provided by the Department of Education to Open Doors Education and Training, which enabled the pilot programme described in this report to take place.

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.



Foreword

Social research demonstrating the barriers in education for Ethnic Gypsy, Roma and Traveller young people is not a new phenomenon. The data persistently shows how negative educational experiences and outcomes affect later life, impacting the employment prospects, life expectancy and overall wellbeing for countless Ethnic Gypsy, Roma and Traveller young people. We have a responsibility to listen to the voices of young people and allow their experiences to guide us as we create a better and more inclusive education system. As a Director of Learning, Inclusion and Skills for a local authority and an ex-head teacher, I believe that the journey of a young person, irrespective of their ethnicity should not be fraught with hurdles or obstacles.

There is a huge challenge to overcome, but the solutions presented here in this report give hope for a better future if action can be taken now. This optimism comes from seeing positive examples of Ethnic Gypsy, Roma and Traveller young people succeeding in their education and maximising their outcomes. By breaking the trends, defeating the data, and making a difference to their own lives and that of their families they are showing how they can achieve despite the statistics. If it is possible for some, it is possible for many more. It is only through analysing these steadily increasing success stories and sharing the learning from them that we can improve outcomes across the country.

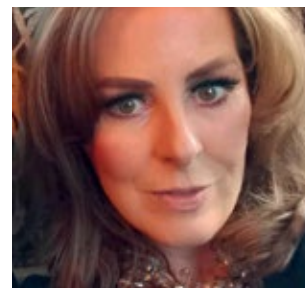
It is now essential that our schools learn from best practice and that school leaders truly engage with the Ethnic Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities they serve. We must support and promote our successful and inclusive schools and help all schools to become as good as the very best. We want to support school leaders, education providers and policy makers, to recognise the potential of those you have chosen to educate and serve and recognise that the education sector needs greater levels of professional development in this area of work.

Too often proposed solutions come from policy makers and distant professionals, but central to this report are the voices of our young people and the hard-won lessons of Open Doors Education and Training (ODET). Drawing from a wealth of excellent resources, this well-researched report deftly renders the scale of this problem and, most importantly, proposes effective and impactful solutions. These solutions come directly from Ethnic Gypsy, Roma and Traveller community members who are the best placed people to inform future solutions using their lived experiences.

Change has never been more critical for Ethnic Gypsy, Roma and Traveller families. Development in technologies including AI, higher productivity demands, worsening economy-related financial strains, all contribute to a society that becomes increasingly difficult to access, especially for those Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET). With a growing body of young people within the NEET category becoming 'economically inactive', we need swift and decisive interventions now more than ever. This is not something we can ignore, nor can it wait until the next election cycle.

I endorse the personalised approach to education and mentoring adopted by ODET and recognise the programme's potential as an intervention for young people at risk of becoming NEET. Importantly, there is scope for programme to be upscaled on a national level, particularly through the infrastructure already created by the National Tutoring Program. ODET, in partnership with The Traveller Movement has the capacity and ability to implement the recommendations contained within this report, leaving a sustainable and positive legacy for young people across the country.

I urge all those working within local and national government to seriously consider the recommendations contained in this report for the sake of our Ethnic Gypsy, Roma and Traveller young people and wider society.



**Pauline Anderson
Melvin OBE**

*Chairperson of
The Traveller Movement*



Introduction

In response to rising numbers of NEET young people across the UK, and the distinct over-representation of Ethnic Gypsy, Roma and Traveller young people within this cohort, The Traveller movement established its sister charity, Open Doors Education and Training in 2021 with a view of trying to address 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 often times overlapping, disadvantages faced by the communities in formal education.

At the core of this approach was the recognition that being NEET is not a choice, but rather an outcome of 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 growth, helping them plot a journey once the programme had finished.

Careers guidance and mentoring, alongside education, played an important role in the program. Each student was allocated dedicated Careers Guidance and Mentoring sessions throughout the course of the programme in which time could be spent exploring pathways into further education, employment or training. This was to ensure the programme wouldn't just be a detour along the journey of the young person, but represented a vital stepping stone to leaving the NEET 'limbo' and realising their future.

This report provides a survey of the NEET landscape of young people, identifying the extent of the problem, its causes, outcomes, and impacts to both society and the individual. Its reach is relatively wide-ranging, aiming to provide a 'broad scope' perspective of the problem before turning to solutions. This final section concludes by doing a 'deep dive' into the ODET model of education, exploring how it might be utilised in different contexts to empower young people to put the NEET classification behind them.

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.

Not In Education, Employment or Training

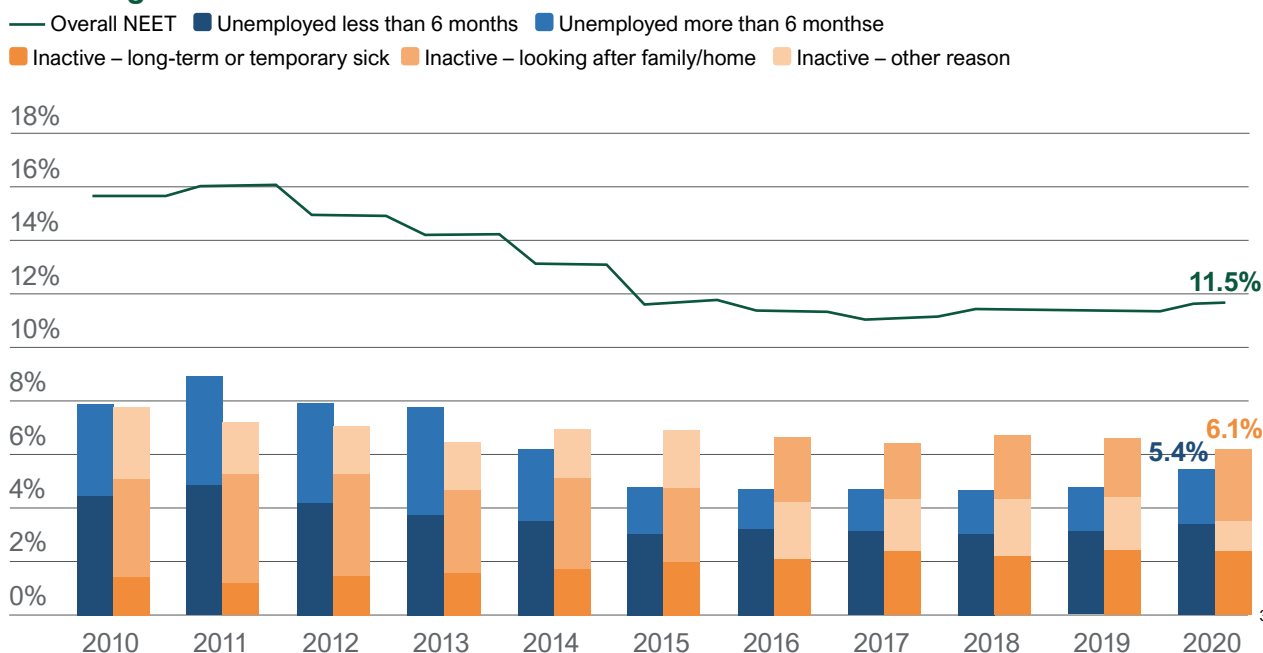
Not in education, employment or training (NEET) is a key indicator for understanding the efficacy of a range of provisions and services along the journeys of children and young people. In the UK, NEET classification requires an individual be outside formal education, employment or further training after the age of compulsory schooling (16+) and before their 25th birthday. The data for NEET figures in the UK are released by the Department for Education and are based on the Labour Force Survey or Annual Population Survey.

By definition, a person is considered to be in education or training if they:

- > are doing an apprenticeship
- > are on a government employment or training programme;
- > are working or studying towards a qualification
- > have had job-related training or education in the last four weeks
- > enrolled on an education course and are still attending or waiting for term to (re) start¹

To understand the data published by the DfE, it's important to understand the internal distinction within the NEET category between 'economically inactive' and 'unemployed'. Those that are considered unemployed are defined as those not currently working or in education; whereas economic inactivity measures people not in employment but who have also not been seeking work within the last four weeks and/or are unable to start work within the next two weeks. Those identified as NEET will always be either unemployed or economically inactive. As of December 2021, the percentage of young people considered to be NEET was estimated at 10.2%. This translates to roughly 260,000 unemployed young people who are NEET and 432,000 economically inactive young people who are NEET².

NEET Figures 2020



It should also be noted that gauging the levels of NEET young people in the UK is a difficult task. They are not a static or homogenous group and many might be simply transitioning between stages in their lives.

Historically, more young women than men have been NEET. Between 2002 and 2010, women had greater representation than men in the NEET category but this gap began to shrink until men overtook women in 2016. Since then, the gap has continued to widen due to a fall in economic inactivity among women. However, when it comes to Ethnic Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities, the divide between male and female is more pronounced, large in part due to gendered expectations.

1 Office for National Statistics – [Young People Not In Education, Employment or Training](#). (2022)
 2 Ibid.
 3 Gov.uk – [NEET Figures 2020](#).



As of 2021, among those identifying as 'White: Gypsy or Irish Traveller' between the ages of 16-24, over a quarter more women than men were classed as economically inactive: excluding full time education⁴. A similar pattern can be seen amongst those listed as 'White: Roma', with almost a third more women than men being classed as E.I in the 16-24 age bracket.

This is likely rooted in cultural expectations placed on each gender and their roles, as per the findings of TM's report, 'Roads to Success', which found that 'An expectation to live according to traditional family and gender roles was cited by young Romany Gypsy, Roma, and Irish or Scottish Traveller people as a barrier to pursuing ongoing education, training, and careers'⁵. Such expectations can, in broad terms, be more likely to direct more men than women towards employment, as was expressed during interviews conducted for the report.

Those interviewed described how:

"A lot of Romany Gypsy, Roma, and Irish or Scottish Traveller women are still expected to be housewives and mothers. Breaking away from traditional gender roles of a man as the breadwinner and the woman as the homemaker can be extremely difficult."

Romany woman, 24

"It all depends on the culture and the background of their parents some are very old school and therefore don't follow the rules of women working."

Irish Traveller girl, 17

"We are all looked at as housewives and not as working people."

Romany Gypsy/Traveller girl, 16)⁶.

4 Ibid.

5 The Traveller Movement – [Roads to Success Report \(2021\)](#).

6 Ibid.



Categorising NEET

It is important to note that due to the criteria involved in classing a young person as NEET, those employed on a 'zero-hours' or temporary basis are considered employed and therefore excluded from the sampling. This is significant, for while such young people are economically active, these types of employment are often unstable, inconsistent and not necessarily conducive to sustainable or progressive careers.

When it comes to those in unstable employment, according to ONS statistics, the number of 16–24 year-olds on zero-hour contracts (ZHCs) has been rising steadily over the past few years. In 2015, 6.7% (152,000) of 16-24 year olds were registered as being on ZHC⁷ vs 10.2% or 165,000 in 2022⁸. ZHC's have no guarantees of regularity or set working hours and can be terminated at any time by the employer with little to no notice period. Data published by the ONS also captures the number of hours worked by those on ZHC's in all age groups. These figures have also fallen over the years, albeit less dramatically, from an average of 22.2 hours per week in 2015 to 21.3 in 2022.

This is further shadowed by the data on the proportion of those employed in temporary zero hours contracts, which has increased from 37.7% to 39.6%⁹. These two statistics underline the unstable and volatile nature of these types of employment, with an average working week being less than 60% of the 40 hours necessary to be considered 'full time' and nearly 40% of these positions being temporary or set to end¹⁰. In terms of the types of roles which makeup the data, the largest categories of ZHC's sit towards the lower end of the ONS' Standard Occupational Classification (SOC) table¹¹. These are the guidelines followed by the ONS to determine the 'skill level' and 'skill specialisation' of specific roles, and are based upon the approximate 'length of time deemed necessary for a person to become fully competent in the performance of the tasks associated with a job'. Those on ZHC's are predominantly represented by the following SOC categories:

Category 9:

'Elementary Occupations'. Contained within the lowest SOC skill level, elementary occupations refer to jobs requiring an education no higher than compulsory education. Examples of these occupations include postal workers, hotel porters, cleaners and catering assistants. They represent 35.2% of ZHC's as of 2022.

Category 6:

'Caring, leisure and other service occupations'. These are defined by the SOC as requiring 'A good standard of general education' and constitute 21.3% of ZHCs¹².

To properly render the landscape of prospects for young people in the UK, it's important to consider the above data. Employment for employment's sake is not the same as gainful and progressive careers. The NEET classification is a useful metric for understanding the efficacy of the available pathways for young people, but only when considered alongside the above data and with an understanding of different employment types. A concerning but vital addendum.



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

7 Office for National Statistics – [Contracts with No Guaranteed Hours. \(2015\)](#)

8 Office for National Statistics – [People in Employment on Zero Hour Contracts. \(2023\).](#)

9 Office for National Statistics – [Labour Force Survey: ZHC Data Tables. \(2017\).](#)

10 Ibid.

11 Office for National Statistics – [Number of People on ZHC by SOC Codes. \(2015\).](#)

12 Office for National Statistics – [Labour Force Survey: ZHC Data Tables. \(2017\).](#)

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 misuse¹³; ultimately, NEET have significantly poorer labour market and health outcomes than their non-NEET peers.

As of 2022, 10.6% of all people aged 16-24 in the UK were classified as NEET – 11% of men and 10.2% of women, which translates to roughly 724,000 NEET¹⁴. Relative to other countries within the G7, the UK is placed in roughly in the centre, with Canada (12.9% as of 2020), U.S (12.2), France (12.75%) and Italy (23.1%) having higher rates of NEET comparatively, while Germany (9.25%) and Japan (3.1%) have lower¹⁵.

The effect of high unemployment among young people within an economy 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 absolutely vital to a nation's economic health to keep unemployment within manageable levels. When it comes to young people specifically, a report published by the London School of Economics found that unemployment when young 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 40's or 50's¹⁶. One the 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.

Similarly, there is also data suggesting a connection exists between time spent NEET and poor health. This is partly due to an increased likelihood of low-quality work later in life and an influence on unhealthy behaviours and involvement in crime¹⁷.

Alongside the myriad negative outcomes for young people classed as NEET, there are also considerable cost and resource implications involved in supporting those who are economically inactive, unemployed, or educationally under-achieving. Calculating these costs is difficult. In part because of the problems ascertaining the exact NEET population, but also because of the many facets involved in determining a complete financial picture of an individual over the course of their life. Nevertheless, a report published in 2010 found that each 16-18 year old who spends time NEET will cost an average of £56,000 over the course of their life (pre-retirement) in public finance costs. These include costs to services and lost tax revenue.



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

10.6%

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

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

15 [OECD - Youth Not in Employment, Education or Training. \(2021\).](#)

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

17 [Public Health England - Reducing the Number of Young People Not in Education, Employment or Training. \(2014\).](#)



This figure increases dramatically, once the loss of income to the economy and individual is considered, to £104,000. To put this into perspective, the lifetime public finance cost for the 16-18 NEET cohort in 2008 has been estimated between £12bn and £32bn¹⁸.

Another report published by Public Health England in 2014 put these figures into perspective, describing how £4000 worth of support to a teenage mother focused on enabling her to return to work would be repaid twenty times over through the increase in tax contributions over the course of her life. At the same time, the public service cost would be reduced by £200,000¹⁹.

These figures clearly demonstrate that while early interventions may seem costly at the time, their long-term returns can be considerable, both financially and personally. Along this line, the report also outlined a series of programs and interventions in which their cost effectiveness was calculated over the long-term.

- > A programme for children at risk of becoming NEET in a school in Salford was evaluated by the Audit Commission, which found that the scheme would become cost-neutral if it helped just eight out of the 31 young people involved into education, training or employment. If all of them were prevented from becoming NEET, Salford would save at least £250,000.
- > In Surrey, NEET levels more than halved from 2009 to 2014. The reduction in NEET levels from 2011-12 to 2012-13 alone resulted in savings of £7m to the public purse.
- > Ready for Work is a programme run by Business in the Community (BITC), which supports businesses to work with disadvantaged unemployed people of all ages. The social return on investment of the programme is £3.12 for every £1 invested, and it generates a social impact of at least £3.2m for each year's investment.
- > In East London, Tower Hamlets' NEET programme has resulted in a reduction in NEET levels from 10.9% in 2006 to 6.7% in 2008. The Audit Commission estimated a potential saving of £2.1m considering this cost and the reduction in NEET levels.
- > A set of interventions in Swansea and Wrexham have been evaluated by Arad Research, which found that the reductions in NEET levels were likely to have resulted in public finance savings of £1.1m in Wrexham and £8.6m in Swansea, compared to a scenario where they followed the 'Wales average' of NEET levels.
- > Activity Agreement Pilots, a national programme to reduce long-term NEET levels, cost £2,122 per participant, and 49% of people who took part were in education or employment three months after the programme. However, evaluation found that 72% of these 'successful' participants would have moved into education or training without the programme²⁰.



18 University of York - [Estimating the Life-Time cost of NEET. \(2010\)](#)

19 Public Health England - [Reducing the Number of Young People Not in Education, Employment or Training. \(2014\)](#)

20 Ibid.

The Road to NEET

It's important to note that 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.

Looking at the data however, there are some broad and apparent trends for why young people become NEET. The greatest risk factor 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 or join an apprenticeship or traineeship. 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 itself a symptom of another underlying barrier preventing a child to succeed, rather than a cause itself. Further examination into these barriers will be discussed in the following section.

For example, 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. As such, those with characteristics known to negatively affect educational attainment are at considerably greater risk of becoming NEET, such as: Special Educational Needs (SEN), learning difficulties, have a disability, been looked after, or are otherwise categorised as a Child in Need (CIN).

Unfortunately, the UK's education system is performing poorly when compared to other countries in the OECD. Too many young people are leaving compulsory education without the attainment level required to pursue further training or education. This is particularly evident when reviewing the percentage of 16-19 year olds whose highest qualifications fall below the international standard of 'level 2' - equivalent to GCSE. The below graph was published in 2016 as part of the OECD's review of adult education levels in the UK ²¹.

Relative to other countries in the OECD, as of 2018 UK has the highest proportion of young people with low literacy and numeracy. This is incredibly alarming, especially when considering the UK's financial position; having a higher GDP than the average for all OECD countries and with education spending in the upper 25th percentile of the same group. This should be seen as a warning sign about the efficacy of the education system but could also signal an approaching increase in the amount of young people within the NEET category. More recently, this data was echoed in figures published by the Youth Futures Foundation, which identified a 13% increase in the number of NEET young people between 2021-2022²².

Within this cohort, 62% were classed as economically inactive and only 38% were unemployed, i.e., not in work but looking to work. Vitality, a similar increase can also be seen in the percentage of NEET who are economically inactive versus unemployed overall. In the same period, the proportion of those classed as E.I rose from 56% of the total NEET population to 62%, as those classed as unemployed fell from 43% to 38%. This is an important distinction to make, because while both comprise the NEET umbrella, they differ dramatically in reflecting the position and outlook of the young person. Whereas unemployed encompasses those for whom unemployment is a temporary setback or simply a transitional state, E.I may be considered more 'long-term'.

²¹ OECD - *Building Skills for All: A Review of England*. (2016).

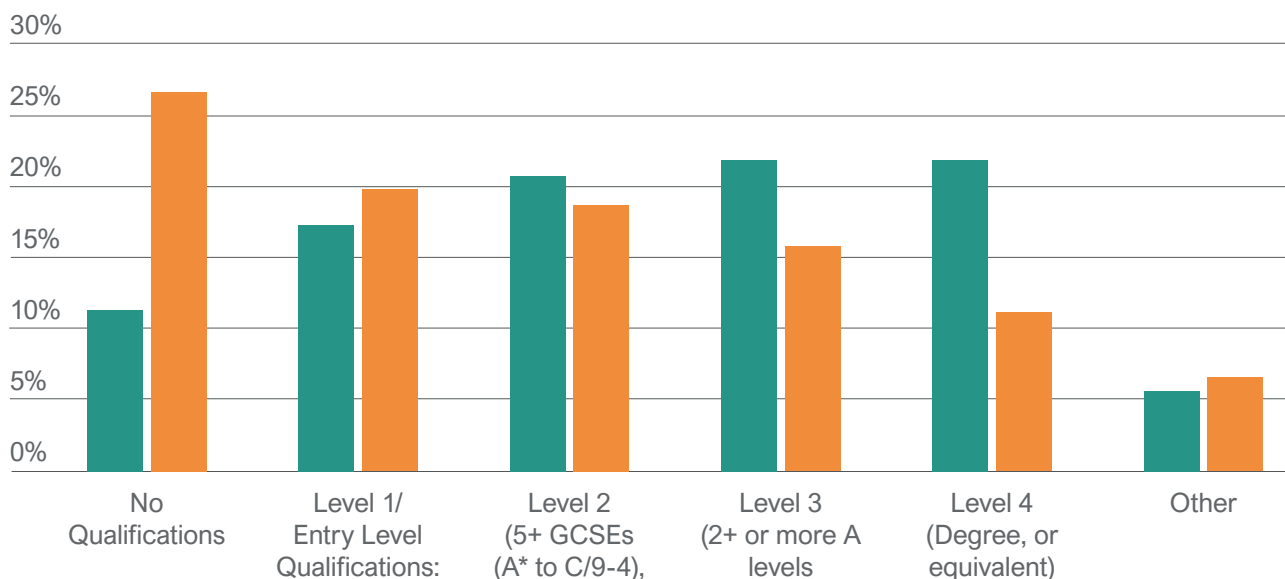
²² Youth Futures Foundation – *Alarming Rise in NEET Young People* (2023).



Although education has a major role to play for both groups, data from the 2021 census highlights how lower educational attainment is more pronounced among 'economically inactive' cohorts. Within the E.I category, those registered as having 'no qualifications' comprised the largest cohort by some margin. This is followed by those with level 1 or entry level qualifications, who represent the second largest cohort. Perhaps unsurprisingly, this trend can be seen to continue in the graph below²³, with the level of education inversely correlated to the proportion of E.I young people. The implication being that access to opportunities is restricted by a lack of education, leaving those who are unemployed to transition to E.I.

Unemployed and Economically Inactive by Education

■ Unemployed ■ Economically Inactive



While on some levels this trend is to be expected across all ethnic groups, it's particularly pronounced among those from Gypsy, Roma and Traveller backgrounds. As per the below graph²⁴, over 70% of those classed as economically inactive, who identified as Ethnic Gypsy or Irish Traveller, had no qualifications. This is compared to 54% of those identifying as White: Roma, and just 34% for White: British. This demonstrates a clear connection between lower levels of education and long-term unemployment, but more importantly, how disproportionately this affects those from Gypsy, Roma and Traveller backgrounds.



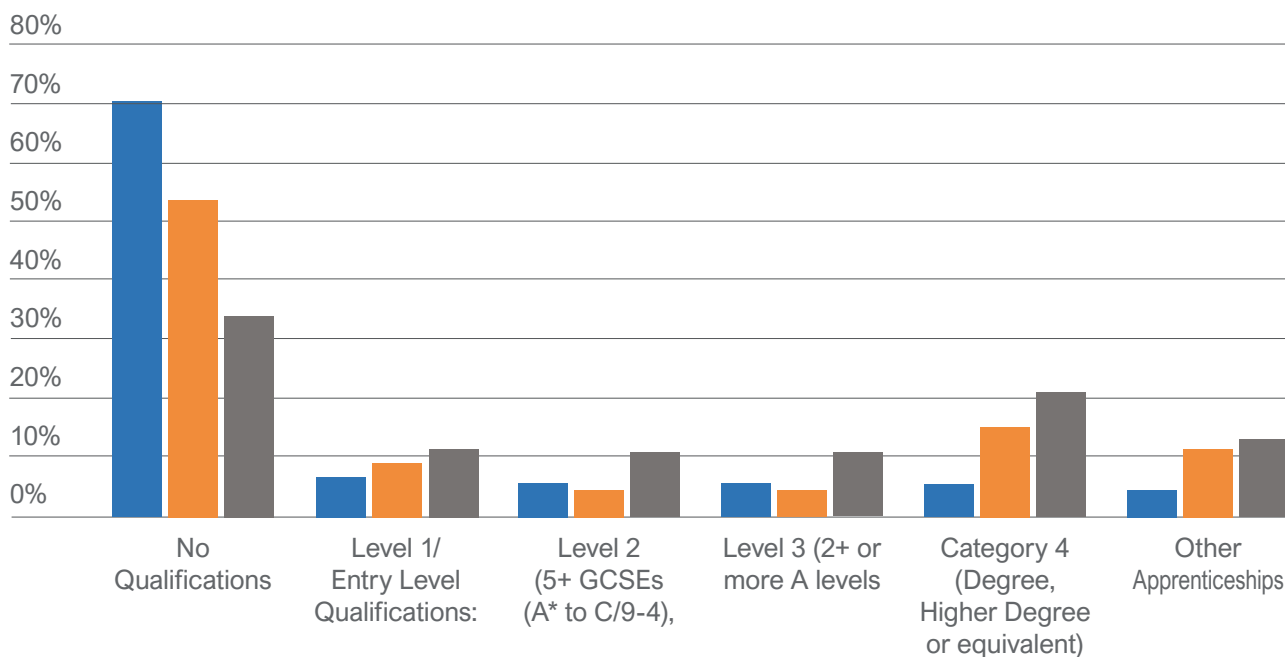
23 Office for National Statistics – Custom Dataset: Economic Activity/Highest Level of Qualification. (2021).

24 Office for National Statistics – Custom Dataset



GRT Education Level dataset

■ White: Gypsy or Irish Traveller ■ White: Roma ■ White: British



Unequal Impact of the Skills Gap

The rising number of economically inactive NEET young people shadows a dramatic skills shortage within the labour market, particularly amongst roles requiring a greater pre-requisite education level. According to some estimates, more than half of UK businesses are experiencing skills shortages²⁵, with New Economics Foundation research finding that the UK Government's current skills policy is not enough to address the root causes of the issue²⁶. The Open University estimates the skills gap costs firms £4.4bn a year²⁷. Research into the digital skills gap more specifically has found the cost to the wider economy to be £12.8bn per year²⁸. The DfE's Employer Skills Survey has found that almost a quarter of all job vacancies were skills shortages vacancies²⁹, with the Industrial Strategy Council projecting that by 2030, an additional 7 million workers will be under-skilled for their job requirements³⁰. Research from McKinsey and the CBI paints an even bleaker picture; estimating 9 out of 10 workers will need new skills by 2030³¹.

Data comprising specific breakdowns of where exactly shortages exist in each sector is currently unavailable, however, general patterning can be gleaned from the list of 'shortage occupations' published by the Government each year with the intention of attracting overseas labour, particularly in light of the Standard Occupation Classifications. As of 2023, this list details 32 occupational shortages across all sectors of the economy, however; of these, only 2 required a 'good standard of general education and vocational training', equating to a level 2 education (GCSE's or equivalent). The rest of the occupations listed require post-compulsory education or higher and there is currently no shortage of labour for roles requiring no qualifications. This weighting suggests the skills shortage is more pronounced among roles requiring a higher pre-requisite education, while roles lower on the SOC tables aren't in demand of overseas candidates.

Clearly then, there is a disequilibrium at play. On the one hand, roles requiring higher levels of education are going unfulfilled while vacancies asking for 'a good level of education' or less are oversubscribed. Both instances are resulting in growing unemployment for young people, particularly amongst those facing barriers to education and upskilling, as is the case within Ethnic Gypsy, Roma and Traveller cohorts.

25 People Management – [Firms Spend £6.6bn Plugging Skills Gap. \(2020\).](#)

26 New Economics Foundation – [UK Facing Skills Shortage. \(2021\).](#)

27 The Open University – [Calculating the Cost of the Skills Shortage. \(2019\).](#)

28 Good Things Foundation – [Digital Skills Gap Costs. \(2022\)](#)

29 Department of Education – [Employer Skills Survey. \(2019\)](#)

30 Industrial Strategy Council – [UK Skills Mismatch. \(2019\).](#)

31 CBI – [A Strategy for Lifetime Reskilling. \(2019\).](#)



Perhaps unsurprisingly, this leads to a climate where workers in lower-level occupations, and those with fewer qualifications are at much greater risk of unemployment³² meaning that people from Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller backgrounds are in a particularly precarious position. 53% of Ethnic Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller people are economically inactive – the highest of any ethnic minority group – and those who are employed are significantly overrepresented in routine and semi-routine occupations³³ which, when combined with the highest rates of social renting of any ethnic group³⁴, suggests a greater-than-average experience of poverty for Ethnic Gypsy, Roma, and Travellers.

In effect, education represents the panacea for this imbalance and a means of helping economically inactive young people, particularly those from Gypsy, Roma and Traveller backgrounds, transition into sustainable and meaningful employment. However, poverty is both cause and effect of skills shortages. Training and further education is often inaccessible for people on low-paying jobs, working on precarious or zero-hour contracts, or with caring responsibilities. This inability to develop new skills keeps people locked in such roles, entrenching instability and a lack of development in a vicious cycle.

Education: Cause, Effect and Solution

A variety of factors play a role in influencing the educational attainment of a young person, and by proxy, determine the employability of an individual once they leave school. One example can be seen among students classified as 'vulnerable' while in education. Data from the 2020/21 exam series highlights the attainment gap for pupils categorised as having special educational needs. During this period, only 35% of those with either an EHCP plan or in receipt of SEN support achieved a pass mark in English and Mathematics at GCSE level, relative to 79% for those who had no identified SEN³⁵. Similarly, for those classified as CIN (Child in Need), a similar pattern can be seen, with only 44.8% of these students receiving the necessary pass marks in English and maths. The data also reveals how these factors compound and overlap, reducing the likelihood that a student will attain the required educational level. For example, students identified as a CIN and with a SEND diagnosis had an average pass rate of just 12.8%, meaning they were over six times less likely to leave compulsory education having acquired the qualifications needed to progress into employment or higher education.

Strangely, these factors do not fall evenly across ethnic groups. According to data released by the ONS in January 22, Travellers of Irish heritage were more likely than any other ethnic group to be prescribed an EHCP plan (Educational healthcare Plan) (5.7% vs a national average of 4.1% for all students with English as a first language)³⁶. An EHCP is a document created to set out the special educational needs and requirements for a student. They are created by Local Authorities following an in-depth clinical assessment of a child with a view to guiding schools and other bodies along the educational journey of a child towards effectively supporting those with complex needs. They are only provided to students whose special educational needs require certain adjustments. Similarly Special educational needs, with or without an EHCP plan, are most prevalent in travellers of Irish heritage and Ethnic Gypsy/Roma pupils with 30% and 26% respectively.

In no way does this data suggest any such biological predisposition towards SEN amongst any ethnic group, rather it implies a pronounced confluence of social and environmental factors along the school journey of pupils from certain backgrounds.

32 Edge Foundation – [Skills Shortages In the UK Economy. \(2022\).](#)

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

34 Ibid.

35 Gov.uk - [Outcomes for children in need, including children looked after by local authorities in England. \(2022\).](#)

36 Department of Education - [Special educational needs and disability: an analysis and summary of data sources. \(2022\)](#)



Ethnic Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller Experiences of Formal Education

Poor educational attainment in formal schooling is a root cause of poverty, and a significant barrier in lifelong ability to access training and development. This is of particular relevance to Ethnic Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller communities, who experience significant discrimination within education, as well as the poorest attainment outcomes of any ethnic group.

Ethnic Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller pupils have the highest rates of school absences and are temporarily and permanently excluded from school at a higher rate than any other ethnic group³⁷. Ethnic Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller pupils also experience significant racism in a school setting with 70% of Gypsies, Roma, and Travellers having experienced discrimination during compulsory education³⁸. Many Gypsies, Roma, and Travellers report that their experiences of discrimination in school comes from both peers and staff:

“A head teacher [was] showing me and my child around her school. [She] was perfectly polite until I told her we were Travellers. She then launched into a rude and extremely judgmental lecture on personal hygiene and time keeping. I took my child to a different school”

“The teachers at my school were worse than the pupils for highlighting that I was different”

“Many kids used to verbally abuse me over being a Gypsy”¹³

“The effect [of racism] is the feeling that you’re not good enough and it stays with you for the rest of your life... I knew I was good at a lot of subjects but they would just assume that just because I was a Gypsy”

“You could just tell it was a different treatment towards you than it was towards the others, and you could just tell it was because of what or who you were. It wasn’t a lot of teachers, it was probably like 2 in 10 or 3 in 10. But them ones had a big massive effect on me in school and to my education”³⁹

Disruptions to education, whether a result of absence, exclusion, or discrimination, have a profound impact on attainment outcomes for people from Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller backgrounds. At every single age group from 5 to 16, attainment for Ethnic Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller pupils lags significantly behind the average⁴⁰. This inevitably leads to significant barriers in the ability to progress to further or higher education. In the most recent period for which data is available, 52 students from Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller backgrounds were studying A Levels⁴¹, and the number of Ethnic Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller people enrolled in higher education was approximately 660⁴². In comparison, the UK’s Ethnic Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller population per the 2022 census stands at 168,749⁴³.

37 The Traveller Movement – [Disrupting the School to Prison Pipeline](#). (2022)

38 The Traveller Movement – [The Last Acceptable Form of Racism?](#) (2017).

39 Ibid.

40 Gov.uk - [Education, Skills and Training](#). (2021)

41 Gov.uk - [Students Getting 3 A Grades at A Level or Better](#). (2022).

42 Office for Students – [Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Communities](#). (2022)

43 Office for National Statistics – [Ethnic Groups, England and Wales](#). (2021).



“The effect (of racism) is the feeling that you’re not good enough and it stays with you for the rest of your life...I knew I was good a lot of subjects but they would just assume that just because I was a Gypsy”



Further Influencing Factors

Geography also plays a role in the outcomes for many students, with a noticeable difference in the pass-rates for these subjects between the north and south of England. For example, the North-East and North-West had an average pass rate of 65.8% versus an average of 71.9% across the South-East, South-West, and London. Perhaps unsurprisingly, this divide is reflected in NEET statistics by region, with an average of 13.1% of the population being classed as NEET across the North-East and West vs 10.15% for the South-East and West⁴⁴.

Alongside education, and its intersections with geography, a report published by Public Health England⁴⁵, found that the following are also substantial risk factors in a young person becoming NEET:

Factor	NEET Risk
Being NEET at least once before	7.9x more likely to become NEET
Pregnancy or parenthood	2.8x
Youth offending team supervisions	2.6x
Fewer than 3 months post-16 education	2.3x
Disclosed substance abuse/misuse	2.1x

Because many of these risk factors are correlated with lower socio-economic status, and can overlap, creating multiple disadvantages for a young person, the overall likelihood of a young person becoming NEET is higher among disadvantaged regions. In part, this might explain why some areas (particularly the North-East), have higher rates of NEET young people.



44 Gov.uk - NEET and NET estimates from the LFS' from 'NEET age 16 to 24'. (2023).

45 Public Health England - [Reducing the Number of Young People Not in Education, Employment or Training. \(2014\)](#)



The Voices of Young NEET: Barriers to Education

The last major research project into the attitudes and experiences adults and young people in the NEET category was conducted in 2010. Though now dated, the findings of the report⁴⁶ outline some of the key barriers faced by NEET young people many of which will have persisted into the present day. The focus of the research was on the voices and opinions of those identified as NEET in the UK. Rather than aggregating data, researchers interviewed a large sample, compiling their findings into a few key groups. The report outlined several key barriers reported by their NEET sample as preventing them from learning:

- > **Family, partner and peers** – One in five reported that family members and peers were an obstacle to engaging in learning. This was more pronounced with women, many of which believed parenthood was holding them back from learning.
- > **Course Content and Format** – One in six suggested that the structure or content of courses had acted as a barrier to them learning or had resulted in them dropping out of a course. Factors such as the style of learning, relationships with teachers, the learning environment, and a lack of interest in the course were commonly cited.
- > **Cost and Finances** – One in six cited financial barriers to learning being a key hurdle. These included the course fees, being able to live while learning, transport costs and a lack of benefits while in education.
- > **Behaviour, attendance or attitude** – One in six reported that behavioural problems or low attendance had resulted in them being asked to leave courses. For others, a negative attitude towards learning or towards themselves acted as a barrier to them taking part in education or training.
- > **Accessibility and availability of courses** – Some young people, particularly among those who ‘were looking for learning opportunities’, spoke about issues with accessibility and the availability of provision being a barrier to accessing education. Most commonly this was directed towards issue with the application process.
- > **Lack of professional support, information, advice or guidance** – A lack of support, either when looking for courses, or when-course, acted as a barrier to learning for one in ten young people.
- > **Lack of skills or qualifications** – A lack of skills, particularly literacy or numeracy, or formal qualifications often acts as a barrier to engaging in education and training. Interestingly, this barrier was most pronounced among those ‘looking for learning opportunities’.
- > **Personal circumstances** – Young people facing challenging personal circumstances such as offending, homelessness, substance misuse, or a lack of confidence, often find that these act as barriers to successfully engaging in learning.
- > **Health and disability** – Six percent of young people referred to health or disability issues acting as a barrier to engaging in education or training. Mental health problems were cited as particularly challenging, alongside long-term physical health conditions and sensory impairments.
- > **Lack of motivation or direction** – Some young people struggled with a lack of motivation to engage in learning, either resulting in a lack of direction or confidence, poor previous learning experiences, or environmental factors such as employment.
- > **Poor previous learning experiences** – Negative prior learning experiences, either at school or in further education, can act as a power deterrent to returning to education.

46 Department for Business Innovation and Skills - [Motivation and Barriers to Learning for Young People not in Education, Employment or Training. \(2013\)](#)

Policies to Tackle NEET

The largest measure to tackle the growing body of NEET young people came in the form of the 2008 Education and Skills Act, which mandated young people in England engage in either education or formalised training until their 18th birthday. To support these legislative changes, the Department for Education (DfE) funded Local Authorities (LAs) to participate in four-year trials aimed specifically at raising the participation age (RPA). Students leaving compulsory education could choose to pursue, until the age of 18, either; further education, a traineeship, an apprenticeship, or work/volunteer alongside part time study. Since the ESA, several other measures and pilots have been implemented:

Kickstart Program

The ESA was accompanied by several initiatives designed to support young people transitioning into formalised training or continuing with their studies. Perhaps the most prominent of these was the now defunct Kickstart program.

A government initiative, the scheme provided funding employers who create new jobs for young people. Aimed at 16-24 year-olds in receipt of Universal Credit and deemed at risk of long-term unemployment, the scheme pays employers to train and support young employees in newly created roles. The jobs created must offer a minimum of 25 hours paid work per week for 6 months. Kickstart ran from September 2020 to January 2023 and was estimated to have generated £1.65 for with every £1 spent on the scheme.

Alongside the program, the act brought with it further incentives for employers to take on apprentices and trainees, expanded job support for young jobseekers and increased funding for selected level 2 and 3 qualifications.

Salford NEET Strategy

In 2019, Salford launched its own NEET reduction strategy targeting those at risk of becoming NEET by using a 'prevention via support' model. Working across schools, local authorities, colleges and employers, the scheme designed and implemented a 'post 16 transition policy'. Initially awarded £190,000 of funding by the Alternative Provision Fund, evaluations of the programme estimate a NEET prevention saving of £784k over the two years. Counterpart to this funding, the Greater Manchester Combined Authority also invested £44k in developing Supported Apprenticeships as part of the scheme. The cost benefit for this portion of the funding is estimated to be £360k (based on 10 young people per annum)⁴⁷.

National Tutoring Program

In response to the Covid-19 pandemic and the effect of school closures on the education of students across the country, the Government committed £350 million towards the National Tutoring Programme (NTP). The policy targets 5-16 year-olds, 16-19 year-olds, and oral language interventions for children in reception. The programme is delivered through three core strands; via tuition partners (tutoring organisations), academic mentors (in-house staff members), and school led tutoring. While in principle, the programme was designed to support pupils – particularly those facing disadvantage – through the turbulence of the pandemic by ensuring that their education wasn't adversely affected; concerns were highlighted around the delivery of the programme after its first year following the results of an independent review by OFSTED published in 2021. Visiting 63 schools, HMI inspectors found that many school leaders 'do not really know if the tutoring is working'. Other findings in the review included⁴⁸:

- > School leaders in schools were more likely to choose the school-led tutoring approach.
- > The tutoring that pupils were receiving was strong in over half of schools visited
- > However, at one out of every six schools that were visited, the tutoring was 'haphazard and poorly planned'
- > Some schools were also reluctant to extend the school day for tutoring and concerns were raised around tutoring sessions disrupting the core curriculum.

47 Salford City Council – Salford NEET Reduction Strategy. (2021).

48 Ofsted - [Independent review of tutoring in schools: phase 1 findings.](#) (2022).



A review of the policy by the National Audit Office (NAO) demonstrated the significant engagement that schools had had with the NTP, assessing that 87% of schools had had some form of engagement with the NTP in the 2021/22 academic year, with around 1.3million children (or 1 in 5 of pupils) receiving school-led tutoring in the same period. Echoing the findings of the OFSTED review, the NAO found that school-led tutoring accounted for the largest proportion of NTP courses started that academic year (81%).

Despite the apparent speed with which the policy was delivered across the country, the NAO also identified significant gaps in delivery and effectiveness. The DfE only reached 45% of its total target for the number of courses delivered under the NTP, and only 47% of courses were delivered to disadvantaged students, i.e., those in greatest needs⁴⁹. Not unrelatedly, the disadvantage gap (a measure of attainment between disadvantaged and other pupils) has grown significantly since 2019. Though this is primarily a result of the pandemic, as opposed to the NTP itself having contributed to the widening of the gap, this nevertheless demonstrates that – currently – the NTP is not narrowing the gap between disadvantaged pupils and others. Central Government funding for the NTP is time-limited, with “DfE looking to schools increasingly to fund tutoring themselves”⁵⁰.

With current budgetary constraints, the extent to which this is feasible for schools is unclear. Further, discontinuing the NTP before carefully considering how Ofsted and the NAO’s findings inform further policy reform risks losing the best practice learned across the project to date while leaving no clear mechanism for raising the attainment outcomes for disadvantaged pupils in a consistent and targeted way.

Despite the pitfalls associated with the delivery of the programme, the evidence base for creating a national tutoring programme is itself sound. The Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) highlights that ‘targeted, frequent and consistent small group tuition sessions can help struggling pupils to make around 4 months’ additional progress over the course of an academic year’⁵¹. In effect, well delivered tutoring presents a hopeful form of intervention for students facing barriers in mainstream education - provided the taught curriculum is well considered, targets gaps in the students’ learning and makes accommodations/exhibits understanding for barriers faced by individual pupils.

One significant option for reform of the NTP is the development of a framework which places a greater emphasis on tuition partners as an alternative to school-led tuition. Schools must currently choose from tuition partners which have been quality assured and approved by the DfE. Whilst accountability and standards are essential, the DfE should consider ways in which they can broaden the pool of approved organisations and provide direct support to smaller organisations who want to successfully become approved under the programme. The DfE should also consider ways in which it can facilitate networking between approved providers; and disseminate toolkits and non-statutory guidance to highlight best practice and develop a ‘what works’ model for tutoring.

Many small tuition organisations possess a detailed understanding of how to effectively engage with, and raise attainment outcomes, for the groups that they support. Enhancing the ability of these organisations to engage meaningfully with the NTP will benefit specific cohorts of disadvantaged pupils, whilst also offering other tuition partners to learn from their successes.

49 Ibid.

50 Ibid.

51 Ibid.

The 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 Open Doors Education and Training to deliver an online tutoring programme, supporting students while helping them 'catch up', overcoming some of the barriers they faced. This provided one-to-one online personal tutoring for students from these communities, now finding themselves 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.

The Journey of the Student

Students initially encountered the programme through a variety of sources. Much like the 'catch up' programme mentioned previously, many students were referred to ODET via local authorities, NGO's, outreach programs and via word of mouth. However, a not insignificant portion of referrals came via the Criminal justice system and the probation service. While this wasn't originally anticipated when the programme was conceived, it was a welcome source of referrals. Students referred via the CJS were afforded a much-needed degree of 'scaffolding' by their probation officer or Youth Offending officer, which proved to be invaluable in ensuring the lessons were delivered consistently. As the programme developed, such scaffolding proved to be a vital factor in determining the success of students on the programme – more on this later.

Once initial contact was made with the referrer, the student, a parent or the referral body themselves would be asked to complete a short referral form detailing the student's prior learning history along with any other educational requirements or learning criteria. Such information is absolutely vital in ensuring that the appropriate tutor is assigned and the needs of the student are aptly met. The referral form would also request information regarding the digital access requirements of the student so that, where applicable such accommodations can be made, including providing students with a suitable device to complete lessons, a 'dongle' providing stable internet, as well as physical resources such as workbooks.

As the world transitions into an increasingly digital future, its important young people feel confident using modern technology and learning the skills they need so they don't get left behind. Digital access can present a considerable barrier in the educational journeys of all children, but particularly those from marginalised communities. A 2018 report published by Friends, Families and Travellers⁵² found that:

- > One in five Ethnic Gypsy and Traveller participants had never used the internet, compared to one in ten members of the general population.
- > Over half of Ethnic Gypsy and Traveller participants said that they did not feel confident using digital technology by themselves.
- > Only two in five Gypsies and Travellers surveyed said that they use the internet daily, compared to four out of five of the general population.
- > Only 38% of Gypsies and Travellers (33% if housed) had a household internet connection, compared to 86% of the general population.

With accessibility and inclusion at its core, the 'ODET' model ensures that students aren't kept waiting at the 'digital gates'. By providing immediate support to help resolve technical issues, as well as patient and supportive tutors who understand such barriers, the online format of the lessons meant students became increasingly comfortable using technology over the course of the program.

52 Friends, Families and Travellers – [Digital Exclusion in Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Communities. \(2018\)](#)



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.

Assigning Tutors to Students

Once the referral form has been completed and submitted to ODET, the education officer will review the information before assigning the student with a relevant tutor, based on their needs, education level, background, and interests. ODET's team of tutors have, collectively, a great breadth of experience working with students with a variety of requirements; SEND, literacy and numeracy barriers, behaviour issues, etc. The assigning process is an important step in the journey of the student. Ensuring the right match is made, between a student and tutor, plays a vital role in determining the subsequent engagement and attainment of the student.

Once an appropriate pairing has been made, an introduction will be facilitated, and the first introductory lesson will be scheduled. This first lesson differs quite considerably from the later, more structured, sessions. For it's a chance for tutors to speak with the students about the programme as a whole and enquire about the students' past experiences of learning, their interests, goals, and their ideal times for lessons to take place. This last point represents another tenant in the ODET approach to delivering education: it's important that the offering accords for the responsibilities and commitments of the student, that the lessons take place at a time which suits them and doesn't conflict with any other component of their life.

For students from Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities, this last point achieves particular importance. Many young people from the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities are given responsibilities from a young age and are often expected to be providing for their families. This can make it extremely difficult for young people to return to education as most programmes require students to attend classes during times they'd usually be supporting their families, such as when parents or family members are out of the house, or at work, etc.. Moreover, there is also the added burden of travelling to and from colleges and schools, which as well as presenting time and cost implications, can also be impractical for many students. All lessons delivered by ODET are done so at a time suited to the needs of the student. In this initial meeting, the tutor will establish a timetable for the student but one which can, if the student requires, be amended later. This is to ensure that if responsibilities or commitments change, the education of the young person isn't interrupted and lessons can continue.

The online format of the lessons also means that students are less susceptible to facing stigma from within the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities themselves. Because the time commitment is considerably less than full time education, particularly when factoring in travelling to and from a learning institution, and lessons can be conducted at home; students have reported feeling more comfortable engaging with education without needing to disclose their learning to those around them. When considering cultural and gendered expectations of young people, this is absolutely vital, as it ensures that students can pursue their interests and achieve qualifications on their own terms. But also, for those students who've previously faced discrimination in mainstream education, the prospect of commuting to a school or college environment can, understandably, be too daunting to bear.

Curriculum and Course Content

During the first conversation with the student, the tutor will also have an opportunity to begin co-developing the curriculum for the coming months. Due to the criteria for the functional skills level 2 exams, there is, as with all qualifications, a core syllabus which needs to be followed, however, there is considerably greater freedom for interpretation than with equivalent level qualifications, such as GCSE's for example. This means that tutors have greater license to adapt the curriculum to the interests, needs and learning requirements of the students, but also incorporate aspects of Ethnic Gypsy, Roma or Traveller culture where applicable. Once such example is through the use of including Ethnic Gypsy, Roma and Traveller role models in the sets of resources. The intention here is to, on the hand; celebrate Ethnic Gypsy, Roma and Traveller culture, but also to highlight to students that academic success, or a skilled career, is not 'just for someone else' (as one student described), but something they can achieve, that's open to them.



Culturally Appropriate Engagement

This process ensures that the curriculum is never a 'one size fits all' model, but that each student receives an education that's culturally appropriate and specific, while relevant to their interests.

Another example can be seen in the following case study, as reported by his tutor:

Michael joined the program, having been taken out of formal education at the age of 11. Now 16, he was keen to pursue a career as a builder but knew that in order to do so, he'd need to get his Functional Skills level 2 in English and Maths so he could go to college. Having been working informally for his family's business for the past few years, the prospect of going back to school to complete his GCSE's didn't seem viable. During our first session, he told about his ambitions and what he hoped to achieve so we designed a curriculum which took his interest in building and construction into account. We were able to work through considerable portions of the curriculum for maths by looking at architecture and 3-D models – both of which would also pertain to a career in construction. When it came to English, we were also able to place the lessons within this 'construction' frame; persuasive language was taught by composing advertisements for a building business, descriptive language by describing imagined projects, and general writing/structure via letters to clients. I'm confident that by rendering the topics within the curriculum in this way, Michael was able to see their direct relevance to what he wanted to achieve, making our lessons effective and his engagement consistent.

Continuation of Programme and Careers Guidance

Once the first lesson has been completed, students are encouraged to have an open discourse with their tutor about the efficacy of the lesson and what might be amended in future sessions. As such, the approach of the tutor and the design of the curriculum is continually under review. In this way, it's able to remain dynamic and flexible in order to best accord to the needs and circumstances of the student over the course of the program.

Running adjacent to the delivery of education, students and tutors are also allotted several 'careers guidance' sessions over the course of the program. Much like the curriculum itself, these sessions are flexible in their approach and are designed around the needs, goals, interests and current situation of the student. Some may require help understanding a local college prospectus, others may request guidance around the university application process, or help writing a CV and/or cover letter. Nevertheless, the tutor is there to help support the student every step of the way towards achieving their goals, whatever they may be.



Scaffolding

During the delivery of the pilot program, ODET noticed that there was a direct correlation between those that succeeded and those who had an active and supportive figure in their lives who was in regular communication with ODET. Borrowing from the pedagogical dictionary, this began to be known colloquially amongst ODET staff as 'scaffolding', as it pertained to ensuring the student had the necessary 'on the ground' support to assist the student with matters out of the remit of the program. As is the case with all students, environmental factors can have a considerable impact on education.

When it comes to students formerly within the NEET category, they're more likely than not to encounter considerable barriers to their education - often the reason they've become NEET in the first place. It's important that they receive the necessary 'pastoral' support to overcome these barriers. This would often be delivered by the referral body, be that a local authority's outreach worker or education officer, probation officer, or youth worker.

Among the types of referrers, those working within the broader CJS, such as probation officers or youth offending officers, were the most readily available to provide support where necessary. This is large in part due to the nature of their relationship with the young person, being professional, supportive and consistent over the course of the student's sentence. Perhaps more than other referral sources, they were always on hand to convene with parents and other family members, places of work, or other bodies to ensure that any changes to the students' circumstances didn't conflict with the delivery of their education.

Below is an account of a tutor's engagement with a student working through the probation service:

James was a fantastic student. To begin with, he did seem a little reticent to engage with learning, having not had positive experiences of mainstream education to date, but after a few weeks, he really came into his own. His attendance was consistent and he began to demonstrate a genuine interest and passion to succeed in his studies. This was a remarkable pivot, both in attitude and attainment, from how he'd described his previous experience of school during our lessons. Over the course of the next few months, his offending officer was always on hand to help resolve and intervene when personal issues hindered his studies. This relationship, between myself, our education officer and the referral officer, proved invaluable and enabled us to overcome multiple hurdles which would've prevented this young man from securing an education and progressing with his life once his community order had finished. The way the programme encouraged tutors to engage with the students on a personal as well as educational level, combined with the regularity of the lessons and their one-to-one format, allowed our lessons to foster a holistic and individual focus, which I feel, was instrumental to the efficacy of the programme as a whole. When it came to students, such as James, who'd had negative experiences of mainstream education in the past, the programme allowed us as tutors to demonstrate alternative ways of learning and its possibilities for the young person.



Conclusion

The impact of being NEET on young Gypsies, Roma, and Travellers was thoroughly outlined in Traveller Movement's Roads to Success report. In some ways – particularly with respect to experiences of institutional and interpersonal discrimination - these impacts are highly specific to their identity and ethnic background. In other ways, these experiences are generalisable across young people from a wide range of disadvantaged backgrounds.

Yet the wider impacts of NEET are not only felt at the individual level, and it is a mistake to see this as a problem only for disadvantaged communities. The number of NEET young people, a figure in which those from Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller and other disadvantaged backgrounds are significantly overrepresented, contribute meaningfully to the skills and productivity gap in the UK. Employers are finding it increasingly difficult to fill vacancies and to find employees with the skillsets required to succeed. Reducing the number of NEET young people by delivering targeted provision to those from backgrounds who need it most will benefit the UK's wider economic health.

The causes of becoming NEET are multifaceted and complicated. Therefore, an appropriate response and support system for NEET young people across the country needs to be versatile and prepared to cater to a wide range of scenarios. While the National Tutoring Programme represents a bold and effective form of intervention, the NTP impact assessment raised substantial concerns around the delivery of the project. These concerns centred on the quality of provision being provided and questions surrounding whether NTP funding was spent on its intended purpose. While it would be reasonable to combat this by ring-fencing NTP funding to ensure that it's spent on the direct provision of tuition for students, it's simply not possible to develop an auditing infrastructure to oversee this takes place. Positively though, the programme's impact assessment did echo ODET's findings regarding the impact of properly delivered 'one-to-one' education as a form of intervention.

However, without reform – and continued funding – for the NTP, it is likely to revert to the mean and reproduce the same inequalities it was designed to address. Cumbersome administrative requirements and uncertainty over future funding has led to schools taking the path of least resistance – as remarked upon by Ofsted and the NAO – with the result of widespread engagement with the NTP at school level which is not necessarily filtering down to cohorts of students from disadvantaged backgrounds.

The ODET model demonstrates that one size does not fit all, and that specialist organisations with thorough knowledge of the communities they serve, and an ability to meaningfully communicate with them can drive engagement with tutoring and improve educational attainment as a result. Currently, ODET and other organisations like it are not meaningfully embedded within the NTP.

Reform of the policy is required to ensure that smaller organisations have a seat at the table and, crucially, have the ability to disseminate their best practice and share their specialised knowledge to develop a more comprehensive picture of what works.

Going forward, continued delivery of the NTP should also incorporate tailored and targeted careers guidance for students whose predicted grades fall below the pass threshold at GCSE level. While careers guidance is currently delivered by secondary schools across the country, it is unlikely to be taken on board by students who are disengaged from the education system and most in need of it. There is great scope for schools to draw on NTP funding to train or employ specialist careers guidance personnel to work with these pupils. As per the findings of the ODET project, properly delivered careers guidance can underline for pupils the importance of staying in education and getting the necessary grades to move to the next stage of their lives.

And for those students who do leave education without the minimum qualifications, schools should be encouraged to actively work with youth services to ensure that these cohorts are supported and able to access provision. While much of youth service funding has been abolished over the past decade, ensuring that young people have access to education past school leaving age is, and should be, a top priority.

The recently commenced Local Skills Improvement Plan may represent a vital funding stream for youth service providers to ensure that young people are able to access intervention initiatives, such as ODET. The Local Skills Improvement Plan is an initiative designed to develop skills and deliver education with the demands of local businesses in mind. The government has committed £80m in 2023/2024 and £85m in 2024/2025 to LSIPs across the country. Currently, LSIP funding is only available to Further Education providers, however, this should be amended so that youth services can draw down funding for young people who are currently not on roll in further education and unlikely to benefit from a classroom environment.

There is currently a void in youth services across the country. NEET encapsulates 16-25 but youth services are only mandated to provide support to young people up until 19. This leaves those past the age of 19 in a precarious position if they've left school without the necessary attainment level. Currently, those who've been prescribed an EHCP in school are eligible to receive support from youth services up until the age of 25. The government needs to go further and amend section 507b of the education and skills act so that young people who've left school without GCSE's in English and Maths at Grade 4 are still eligible to receive support from youth services up until the age of 25.

While the ONS doesn't disaggregate NEET Data by individual ages, they do distinguish between 16-18 and 18-25. By some margin, the 18-25 cohort represents the vast bulk of the total NEET cohort - demonstrating that it's this demographic which needs the most support. As of May 2023, 770,000 young people were classed as NEET. Of this, only 49,000 (6.7%) were within the 16-17 age bracket. While this doesn't clearly define those post 19 as representing the largest demographic within NEET, it does point to a general trajectory that the NEET demographics are weighted towards those in the upper age bracket. It's also known that those falling within the NEET category will, after a time, transition into economic inactivity, when interventions are needed the most. With this mind, it's clear that support should not just be available to those within mainstream education, as a preventative measure, nor up until the age of 19, but continued for those that need it until 25. This is an important measure against widening inequalities which begin in formal education and only develop as a young person grows older.

The path between being a NEET young person and encounters with the criminal justice system is well understood. For NEET offenders, the Ministry of Justice needs to recognise this and make greater attempts to address the underlying causes of why a young person might be NEET. Positive steps in this direction were taken with the release of the government's 2020 white paper, *A Smarter Approach to Sentencing*, but more needs to be done. There needs to be greater recognition and emphasis on the individual circumstances of each young person entering the CJS, with sentences delivered accordingly. By identifying all NEET young people between 16-25 as 'priority cohorts' when conducting pre-sentence reports, courts will have greater abilities to address the factors which may have led to an offence. This should be coupled with a greater recognition of the efficacy of one-to-one forms of education interventions, and the National Probation Service should be encouraged to commission rehabilitative services accordingly.

Overview of Recommendations



1

REVISE

Revise 'qualifying persons' eligible to receive support from Youth services

EXPAND
Expand allocation of support for the NTP to include specialist careers guidance

2



3

PERMIT

Permit local youth services to access funding ringfenced for the Local Skills Improvement Plan

DEFINITION

Ministry of Justice should expand its definition of 'priority cohorts' to include all NEET young people

4



5

EMPHASIS

National Probation Service to place greater emphasis on one to one models of intervention



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

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