

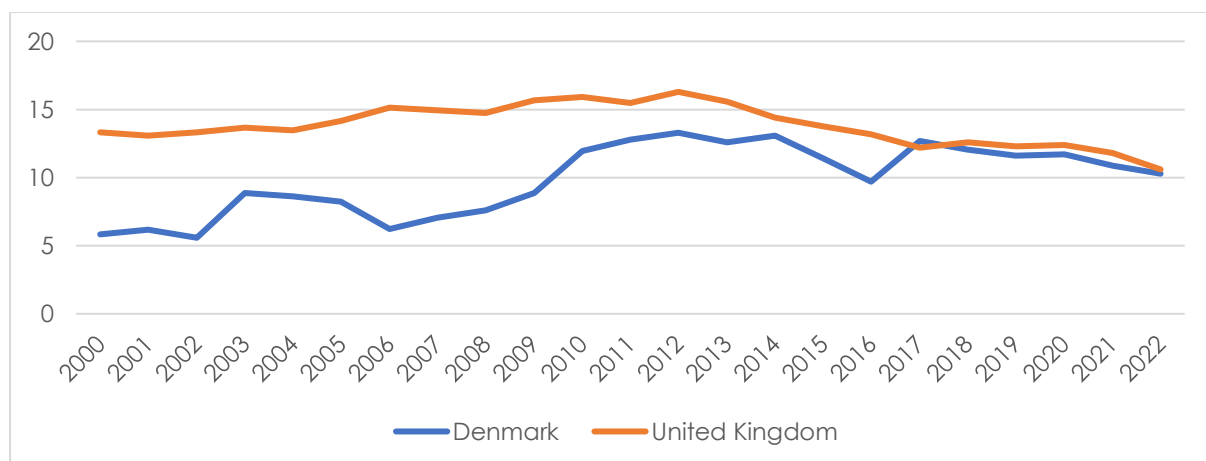
What works in reducing NEET rates: Denmark

1. Contextual information

1.1. Data

For most of the period 2000-2022, the **rate of young people** aged 15-24 and **not in education, employment, or training (NEET)** in Denmark was much lower than in the UK. It was also lower than the OECD average: in 2022, Denmark's NEET rate stood at 10% compared to 12.8% across the OECD countries (**Figure 1**).¹ However, in recent years, Denmark experienced a relative rise in its NEET rate: although between 2016 and 2023, the average NEET rate for those aged 18-24 decreased from 15.8% to 13.8% among OECD countries, in Denmark increased from 10.5% to 11.6%.²

Figure 1: NEET rate among 15-29 year-olds (2000-2022)



Source: [Youth not in employment, education or training \(NEET\) | OECD](#)

The Danish state provides education for all young people, with no tuition fees charged for compulsory education. Individuals above the age of 18 are entitled to an educational grant of approximately \$1,000 (about £802) per month.³ Following compulsory schooling, Denmark's education system offers two primary post-compulsory education tracks, collectively called Upper Secondary Education or Youth Education:

- **General upper secondary education programmes** which prepare students or admission to higher education institutions. Three programmes are available – Higher

¹ OECD. (2024a).

² OECD. (2024b).

³ Rosholm, Mikkelsen and Svarer. (2019).

General Education, a generalist programme broadly equivalent to the UK 6th form curriculum; the business specialised Commercial Examination Programme; and the Technical Examination Programme, which gives special attention to the sciences and technical subjects in preparation for Higher Education.⁴ Most of pupils in general upper secondary education are aged 16-19.⁵

- The **vocational track** provides VET and formal qualifications that allow the learner to take up recognised professions in the labour market, such as 'mechanic' or 'carpenter'. The vocational track involves a combination of classroom-based learning ('basic' phase) and apprenticeships ('main' phase). The main phase alternates between workplace and classroom-based learning periods and lasts 2 - 3.5 years, depending on the course being studied. Grants are available to students during the basic phase to support living costs.⁶

According to Eurostat, in 2023, the NEET rate for those aged 15-29 and who had completed the compulsory component of education was approximately 9%; this was lower than the EU average of 11.2%⁷ and the UK's rate of 11.9%⁸ for the same year. In 2017, when this particular programme model was in operation, there were 169,400 NEETs below the age of 30 in Denmark, with 36,360 receiving welfare support. In common with other OCED countries including the UK, NEETs in Denmark often face interrelated barriers to labour market participation. These barriers commonly include poor mental and physical health; weak demonstration of the social and academic skills necessary for success in classroom-based learning; financial instability; criminal convictions; and compulsive substance abuse.⁹ Being a young person born abroad also considerably increases the likelihood of being NEET: 'NEET rates are often about twice as large among young people born abroad compared to Danish-born young people'.¹⁰

1.2. Policy landscape



It should be stressed that Denmark has historically had one of the lowest NEET rates in Europe, also thanks to a strong and long-standing policy focus on early intervention and activation aimed at young people and focused on either (re) engagement in education and training (mainly VET/ apprenticeships) and/or employment.¹¹ That said, Denmark has a moderate rate of expenditure on Active Labour Market Programmes (ALMPs) compared to other OECD countries, with expenditure as a percentage of GDP being 0.42% in 2024,



In the UK, the policy aimed at helping young people enter the workforce also incorporates aspects of conditionality and sanctions. The UK's strategy combines activation policies, skills training, and assistance for disadvantaged groups, with a particular focus on conditionality in welfare benefits, much like Australia's approach. Specifically, under Universal Credit (UC), young people are required to fulfil work-search obligations unless they qualify for an exemption (such as for health reasons).¹⁴ individuals aged 16 to 24 on Universal Credit can access

⁴ European Commission. (2024).

⁵ Eurydice. (2024).

⁶ Rosholm, Mikkelsen and Svarer. (2019); Stronat. (2023).

⁷ Eurostat. (2024).

⁸ Office for National Statistics (ONS), published on 18/3/2024. <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/neet-statistics-annual-brief/2023>

⁹ Rosholm, Mikkelsen and Svarer. (2019).

¹⁰ OECD, (2024a).

¹¹ Bredgaard. (2018).

¹⁴ Department for Work and Pensions. (2024a).

0.03% lower than the OECD average.¹² To qualify for welfare, NEETs under the age of 30 must actively seek work and participate in one of such programmes that are available to them.¹³

additional assistance in finding employment through the Youth Offer, which integrates various forms of support, including the Youth Employment Programme, Youth Hubs, and Youth Employability Coaches.¹⁵ UK policies also include components focused on skills development, especially through apprenticeships and traineeships.

Danish ALMPs fall under three categories:¹⁶

- **Education, guidance in and upgrading of skills:** This includes guidance activities, formal education, and specific training projects.
- **Jobs subject to wage subsidy at public or private employers:** These retrain the professional and social competences of unemployed individuals. Wage subsidies are provided to employers hiring someone unemployed for at least six months, lasting 4 or 12 months depending on unemployment categories.
- **Practical work training at public and private enterprises:** These internships / work placements aim to retrain jobseekers and upgrade their qualifications. Participants continue to receive unemployment insurance benefits during these internships.

Specifically, activation measures are generally aimed at young people receiving unemployment benefits, cash benefits, or education benefits (uddannelseshjælp). The latter are at the same level as those provided by the State Educational Grant and Loan Scheme (Statens Uddannelsesstøtte - SU & SU-lån). Such activation measures include:¹⁷

- (i) **Guidance and upskilling measures**, including support for education and training (e.g., vocational education, apprenticeships, specifically arranged projects and training periods);
- (ii) **Jobs supported by wage subsidies** aimed at those who have been unemployed for at least 6 months. The duration of the wage subsidy which can be paid to both private and public sector employers ranges between 4 and 12 months, depending on the specific category of the unemployed person;
- (iii) **Work placement/ internship programmes** to help young people gain practical job-related, experience;
- (iv) **Socially useful tasks** (nytteindsats), where recipients undertake – for a maximum period of 13 weeks – community-based work (e.g., maintenance work, cleaning, painting public buildings and facilities) for public sector employers;
- (v) **Mentoring** provided by a private company, an educational institution, or a municipality. The maximum duration of such support is 6 months with a possible extension for another 6 months; and

¹² OECD. (2021a).

¹³ Rosholm, Mikkelsen and Svarer. (2019).; European Commission. (2015).

¹⁵ Department for Work and Pensions. (2021).

¹⁶ Andersen. (2019).

¹⁷ Active Employment Measures Act. (2019).; OECD. (2024a).; and Eurydice. (2025).

- (vi) **Resource courses** which adopt a holistic approach and include rehabilitation for people with limitations in their ability to work as well as support for people with multiple and complex problems in addition to unemployment. These courses must be completed within a maximum of 5 years.

Crucially, the **2013 cash benefits reform introduced individualised activation pathways** for unemployed young people aged under 30. The aim is to better support their transition into education or stable employment. Municipal job centres assess whether individuals are job-ready or require additional support through vocational education or activation measures.¹⁸

The above discussion notwithstanding, research by Rangvid, Jensen, and Nielsen¹⁹ highlights concerns about the effectiveness of existing interventions not only in Denmark but more widely in the OECD countries, noting that public resources may be wasted on programmes with limited evidence of impact. The average impact index score for such interventions was between 0.05 and 0.12.²⁰

2. Intervention: Bridging the gap between Welfare and Education programme

'**Bridging the gap between Welfare and Education**' (Brobygning til uddannelse) was initiated as a pilot in 2013 by the Danish Agency for Labour Market and Recruitment in collaboration with the Danish Ministry of Education. It was rolled out nationwide in 2015 with a budget of DKK19m (about £2.6m adjusted for inflation).²¹ The programme spans 14 weeks and prepares young adults for education or stable employment through a combination of classroom training, educational internships, job training, and mentoring.²² Success for the learner was considered to be enrolment in *and* completion of education.²³ **Table 1** provides a summary of the intervention.

Table 1: Summary table outlining Bridging the gap between Welfare and Education programme's characteristics

Intervention characteristic	Description
Rationale	The rationale for targeting this group is that unemployed young people with no qualifications and no further training face the largest risk of unemployment and unstable employment.

¹⁸ OECD. (2024a). ;Eurydice. (2025).

¹⁹ Rangvid, Jensen, and Nielson. (2015).

²⁰ Rosholm, Mikkelsen and Svarer. (2019).

²¹ Preisler. (2015).

²² Rosholm, Mikkelsen and Svarer. (2019).

²³ Ibid.

Intervention characteristic	Description
Target population	18–29-year-old NEETs who receive social assistance, are not enrolled in education, and lack qualifications after leaving compulsory school.
Providers	Municipal job centres; educational institutions (typically vocational schools); employers
Modes and locations of delivery	In person at job centres and vocational schools
Duration	14 weeks on average (but actual duration depended on the young person's needs)
Modifications	The intervention 'Bridging the gap between welfare and education' was initiated as a pilot in 2013 by the Danish Agency for Labour Market and Recruitment (STAR) in collaboration with the Danish Ministry of Education. The pilot ran between 2013 and 2014 and due to its positive results, the programme, it was decided to implement two new programmes closely linked to it: (i) 'Extending the use of Building Bridge to Education - Bridge building as a first choice' (Udbredelse af brobygningsforløb – Brobygning som førstevalg), an implementation programme, rolling out the 'bridging course' concept in 34 municipalities in 2016-2017; and (ii) 'Job Bridge to Education'.

Source: RAND Europe.

Target population: The Bridging the gap intervention focuses on NEETs aged 18-29 who receive social assistance, are not enrolled in education, and lack qualifications after leaving compulsory school. Recruitment to the programme is initiated when a young person visits a job centre, at which point their skills are assessed. This assessment was used to categorise the learner as 'ready for education' or 'not ready for education'. Both categories of participant were eligible for the programme, though the categorisation was used to help tailor the support the participant receives.

Rationale: The **intervention's approach**, known as '**bridging**'²⁴ was based on promising findings from preceding measures and **incorporated** the **following principles** in its development:²⁵

- Integration of work and education within the programme.
- Tailoring the details of the intervention to the needs of the participant (such as the initial assessment of their preparedness for education). This includes a targeted and individualised approach to address the specific educational deficits as well as other physical and social challenges of the young participants.
- High levels of contact and support throughout the intervention, with careful monitoring of the participant's progress and outcomes.
- Offering financial incentives to encourage participation from the target group, in this case young NEETs.
- An overarching agile and adaptive framework of implementation that provides a structured approach in terms of identifying and engaging young people and offers enough flexibility for personalisation of support.

²⁴ Within the Danish context, the main aim of a 'bridging course' is to make it easier for young people to enrol in 'mainstream education' – European Commission. (2018).

²⁵ Rosholm, Mikkelsen and Svarer. (2019).

Delivery: The bridging programme was presented as an option for participation, alongside other ALMP options. Following this initial assessment, the young person together with the job centre and the relevant educational institution (usually a VET school) jointly drew up a training/ educational plan. Crucially, this is based on the young person's needs, skills and preferences, as this increases the chances of meaningful engagement, effective participation and successful completion of the programme.

The bridging programme typically lasted 14 weeks. The intervention consisted of a 25-hour weekly schedule with the following components:²⁶

- **Classroom training:** Includes instruction in language (Danish) and mathematics, social and character skills (e.g., resilience, empathy – which is taught in Denmark, self-awareness) and community participation.
- **Educational internships:** Participants explore different educational tracks at schools and engage in job training in various roles and with different employers.
- **Mentorship:** Mentors provide support for personal and educational challenges. This relationship ends only when the participant secures a formal internship.

The intervention ended for the learner when their education was completed, or when a so-called 'plan B' was formulated for entering employment should the learner fail in this goal of engaging and/or completing their education. Each participant was assigned a single point of contact at the job centre to mediate any complications that might arise during participation on the programme, such as personal and family crises, or if the employer flagged a problem such as low levels of attendance or poor performance.²⁷

This intervention took place in mainstream educational settings, in contrast to other programmes in 'protected' environments such as production schools; the latter are set up outside of mainstream academic or vocational schools to cater for vulnerable youth such as early school leavers.²⁸ Activities were initially implemented at 12 locations before being rolled out nationally in 2015, following the successful pilot results. Typically, the activities took place in vocational schools, and were managed by the Danish Agency for Labour Market and Recruitment in collaboration with the Ministry of Education.²⁹

Cost: In the period 2013-2014, DKK 130 million (€17.4 million) were allocated to the pilot programme. Its successor, the implementation programme 'Extending the use of Building Bridge to Education - Bridge building as a first choice' (Udbredelse af brobygningsforløb – Brobygning som førstevalg) had a budget of DKK 25 million (€3.36 million) for 2016-2017.

3. Outcomes and considerations for future initiatives

Bridging the Gap led to statistically significant positive effects on educational enrolment and completion for those participating relative to other ALMPs implemented not only in

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Danish Government., (no date).

²⁹ Rosholm, Mikkelsen and Svarer.(2019).

Denmark, but internationally, particularly among disadvantaged groups. During the first year of enrolment, data showed a slight negative impact on employment rates for participants owing to the programme's design, which required participants to enrol in a combination of classroom and workplace-based learning, making them less active in seeking work.³⁰ However, 2.5 years after enrolment, participants were statistically more likely to be employed than the control group, i.e., NEETs not enrolled on the programme.³¹

The positive outcomes attributed to the programme saw no statistically significant differences when accounting for participant gender, age, or ethnicity, suggesting that the programme is effective across a broad range of life circumstances. Notably, the **programme was significantly more effective than other ALMPs for participants who left school without qualifications in mathematics or Danish, and those assessed as 'not ready for education' by caseworkers.**³² Further, the programme's effectiveness relative to other ALMPs increased in proportion to the assessed severity of participants suffering from psychiatric disorders as defined by the evaluators. This is an important achievement of the programme; while completion rates were lower for participants with such conditions compared to those without, they were substantially higher than completion rates in control groups. Comparatively, other ALMPs reviewed in the evaluation were significantly less effective for this category of participants.³³

The programme was cost-effective, demonstrating significant impacts on medium-term educational outcomes. Effect sizes were recorded as 0.31 for completing the basic vocational track and 0.10 for completing the main vocational track. This compares to an average effect size of 0.02 for similar interventions. The **programme proved to be more effective for individuals assessed as 'not ready for education' and for those with severe mental health conditions.** In a participant survey, four out of five individuals reported that the programme was relevant and provided sufficient motivation to progress in their lives.³⁴

4. Lessons relevant for the UK context

Target population: The Danish intervention is aimed at NEETs aged 18-29, which may include older NEETs than is usually the case in the UK. According to the available evidence, the fact that young people referred to the programme have been carefully selected by their case worker who decides whether they are eligible is a critical success factor. Importantly, the Danish approach categorises learners as either 'ready for education' or 'not ready for education', allowing for tailored support that addresses the specific needs of each group. Notably, the intervention was found to be particularly effective for more disadvantaged sub-groups like those assessed as 'not ready for education' or with severe mental disorders.³⁵ This, in turn, means that JobCentre Plus work coaches, including those working in Youth Hubs and youth employability coaches, should identify the NEET group that is most suitable for a particular programme through the use of appropriate profiling and screening tools and approaches. As in the Danish

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

example, this should take into account the young person's educational attainment and skills, including soft and basic skills; interests, career preferences and motivation; any previous work experience; and, crucially, social barriers and disadvantages that he/she faces. In doing so, the JobCentre Plus (or Youth Hub) work coach or youth employability coach will be able to prepare jointly with the young person concerned a tailored and individualised action plan in line with their specific situation and needs.

This is in line with the Danish approach, where substantial investment was directed towards making sure each participant has a tailored experience matching their specific needs and preferences and has a single point of contact at the job centre (who also acts as a mentor), as well as close monitoring throughout the intervention.³⁶ By doing so, complex barriers to enrolment in education and employment entry, such as mental health issues or criminal convictions, could be identified, and appropriate support could be provided from the outset.³⁷

Implementation: The provision of personalised support mentioned above goes hand in hand with having a single point of contact assigned to the young person by the job centre. Such a contact point helps maintain a stable and consistent channel of communication, while also allowing for a trusting and supportive relationship to be established.³⁸ That this point of contact further served as a mentor for the participant has also been attributed as a key factor in the programme's success.³⁹ Indeed, as mentors follow young people from the intervention's start phase to its anchoring stage (their start of regular educational programme, usually a vocational training programme), they do not get lost in the transition from the social assistance/ benefit system to vocational education or are overwhelmed when start their regular training. This is crucial as evidence suggests that the risk of dropping out of education, especially for vulnerable youth, is highest at/between key transition points in one's educational trajectory⁴⁰ and/or the first year after an educational transition.⁴¹ As evidence from the programme shows, their follow-up support increases the likelihood that participants will enrol in mainstream education.⁴² Implementing personalised support often requires significant resource. Staffing and funding issues can create challenges for personalisation and the continuity of support. In the UK, between September 2023 and November 2024, 57% of Job Centres reduced their support due to high case load among work coaches. Addressing this challenge would be important if the UK wanted to transfer aspects of the Danish approach.

Environment: Finally, in terms of the implementation of ALMPs in Denmark, including those aimed at young people/NEETs, this is highly decentralised, with municipalities playing a key role in ALMP design and provision, over which they enjoy considerable autonomy.⁴³ Indeed, each of Denmark's 98 municipalities operates its own job centre, which collaborates closely with local stakeholders such as employers, educational institutions, and social partners.⁴⁴ This decentralised model of ALMP design and delivery

³⁶ Rosholm, Mikkelsen and Svarer. (2019).

³⁷ Styrelsen for Arbejdsmarked og Rekruttering (STAR) and Ramboll. (2018).

³⁸ Ibid.; Rosholm, Mikkelsen and Svarer. (2019); Preisler. (2015).

³⁹ European Commission. (2015 & 2018); Bredgaard. (2018).

⁴⁰ ICF. (2013).

⁴¹ Elffers. (2012).

⁴² European Commission. (2018).

⁴³ OECD. (2021b); World Bank Group. (2023).

⁴⁴ OECD. (2024a).

contrasts sharply with the UK where there is a much greater degree of centralisation, with the DWP playing a key co-ordinating role. In future, there may be scope in the UK for greater decentralisation of NEET-related policy design and implementation, so that programmes are more closely aligned with local and regional contexts (and characteristics of the NEET population).

Outcomes: As mentioned earlier, the programme has been effective in (re)engaging NEETs in education (as well as in employment); indeed, it has been more effective for more disadvantaged NEET sub-groups such as those assessed to be 'not ready for education' and those with severe mental disorders. A number of programme features account for the programme's success that can inform NEET-related policy in the UK, including the following:

- Careful selection of participants: Ensuring that the participants are suitable for the programme increases the likelihood of successfully completing it.
- Targeted and individualised approach to address the specific cognitive, educational, health and social issues of the young person. Here the (educational) action plan that the job centre advisor together with the young person and the educational institution – typically a vocational school – plays a critical role. The plan is based on the young person's abilities, interests and needs.
- One (consistent) contact person at the job centre throughout the intervention who could help the young person navigate and address the complexities of the system, act as mediator for any complications or issues that could adversely affect his/her participation, etc.
- Mentoring support throughout the programme which also helps raise the young person's aspirations, enhance his/her soft skills such as self-confidence and self-belief and ensure his/her continued and active engagement. Crucially, the mentor also focuses on working with the young person in relation to removing his/her concrete barriers to participation in education or employment.
- Active follow-up of young participants after starting their education/ training or employment as well as during the short or regular internships / work experience placements ('tasters'); however, the intensity and form of such follow-up (e.g., text messages, phone calls, home visits) depends on the young person's needs.

The success of the programme has also been attributed to the adoption of lessons in good practice from previous interventions.⁴⁵

Overall, although the programme's targeted, individualised and tailored approach to individual's personal needs and preferences as well as its intensive and personalised participant support is costly, the evaluation evidence demonstrates that **its return on investment (RoI) is more than twice that of other ALMPs.**

Methods

Data analysis: We analysed available statistical data on the NEET rates.

⁴⁵ Preisler.(2015).

Document review: We used forward and backward citation searches from the sources identified as part of the main REA. The full list of sources consulted is presented in Notes and References.

PIET-T model: A conceptual model, that assumes that a combination of three elements (population, intervention, and environment) determines the outcomes of an intervention, was used to aid considerations for transferring interventions into other contexts.⁴⁶

Template for Intervention Description and Replication (TIDieR):⁴⁷ This was used to record – where possible – (i) name of the intervention; (ii) rationale or theory essential to the intervention; (iii) materials, procedures and activities used; (iv) details on providers and expertise needed; (v) modes and locations of delivery; (vi) duration, intensity and dose; (vii) information on personalised elements; (viii) modifications introduced; and (ix) implementation fidelity.

For the methodology used to select the case studies, and a full description of the methods, please see the final report: [Hofman, J., Hutton, E. & Nightingale, M. \(2025\). What Works: Reducing NEET Rates. Youth Futures](#)

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⁴⁶ Schloemer and Schröder-Bäck. (2018).

⁴⁷ Hoffmann et al. (2014).

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