

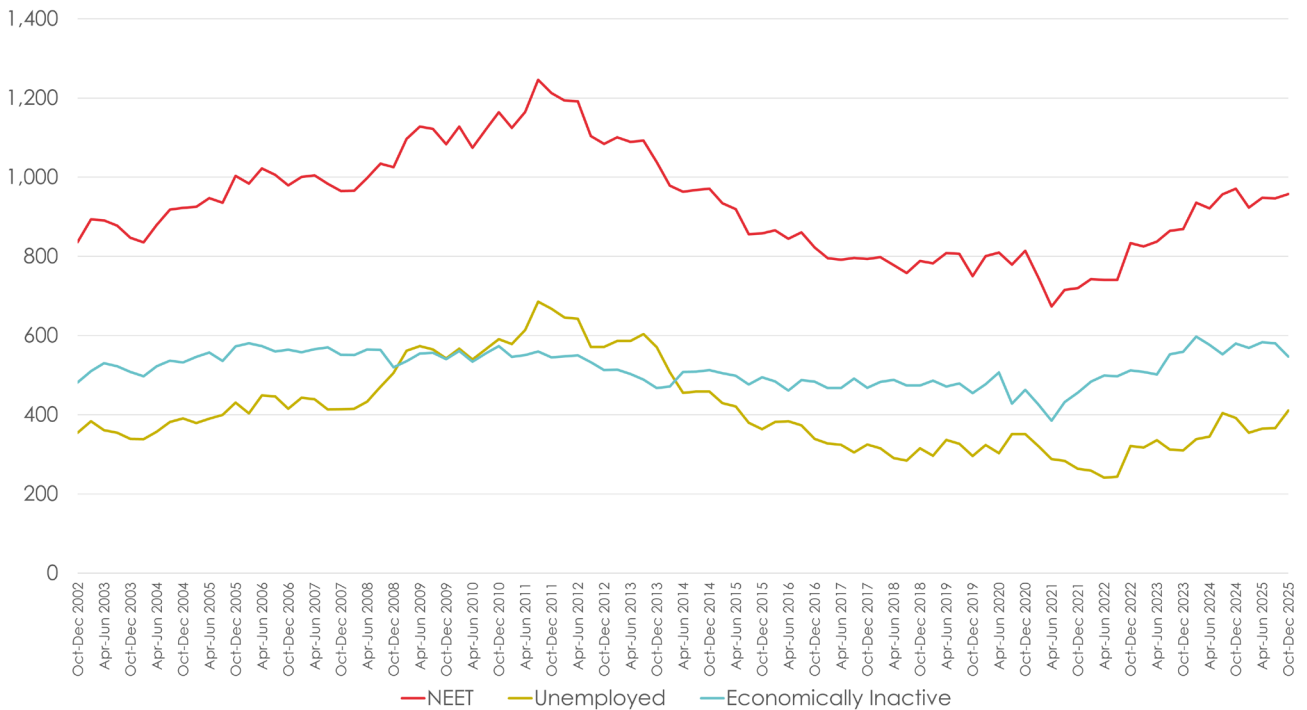
# Trends in young people not in education, employment or training

October – December 2025

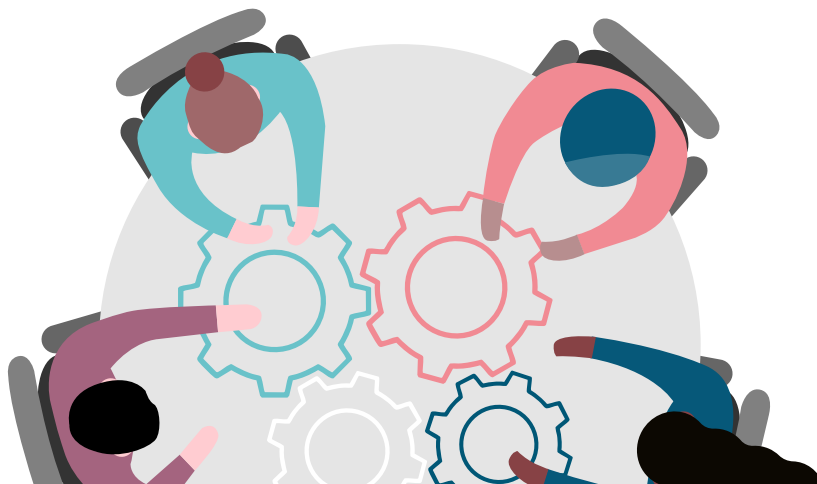
The latest data from the Office for National Statistics (ONS) shows that around 1 in 8 young people aged 16 to 24, or 12.8%, are not in education, employment, or training (NEET). In the last quarter of 2025, about 957,000 young people were NEET, with numbers remaining above 900,000 throughout the last 12 months. NEET levels remain stubbornly high, particularly compared to four years ago when the rate was 10.3% and 238,000 fewer young people were NEET.

## Figure 1: NEET levels remain persistently high

Trends in NEET, unemployment and economic inactivity (for young people not in education and training), in thousands, ages 16 to 24, seasonally adjusted, 2002 to 2025, UK



Source: Labour Force Survey from the Office for National Statistics



## Methods and Definitions:

The longitudinal Annual Population Survey follows individuals for five consecutive quarters (around 15 months). For this analysis, cohorts from multiple survey waves are pooled to create a dataset covering a two-year period. A young person's NEET status is observed in their first and fifth quarter in the survey. These two observations provide a proxy for shorter- and longer-term NEET status, capturing whether someone is NEET at one or both points in time. However, this approach does not measure whether someone was continuously NEET between interviews, or whether they experienced NEET spells before entering or after leaving the survey.

### **Unemployed:**

Individuals who are not in employment and have been actively seeking work.

### **Economically Inactive:**

Individuals who are not in employment and have not been actively seeking work.

### **Short-Term NEET**

- Young people observed as NEET at either the start or end of the five-quarter period, but not both.
- May have been NEET before the observed period, intermittently during it, or after leaving the survey.
- Should be interpreted as observed NEET at one point, rather than a strict measure of short-term duration.

### **Long-Term NEET**

- Young people observed as NEET at both the start and end of the five-quarter period.
- Serves as a proxy for persistent NEET, but does not capture NEET status between the observed points, or before/after the survey period.
- Analysis from the five-quarter longitudinal Labour Force Survey (LFS) suggests that such mid-period transitions are relatively uncommon for the working age population [4.8%], but they cannot be ruled out.

### **Frictional unemployment**

- Frictional unemployment is the short-term unemployment that occurs when individuals are searching for new jobs or transitioning between jobs.
- Unlike cyclical or structural unemployment, frictional unemployment is often seen as voluntary and a natural part of a dynamic healthy economy.

# Characteristic differences between long- and short-term NEET populations

The quarterly ONS NEET statistics provides a snapshot of how many 16–24-year-olds are NEET at a given point in time<sup>1</sup>. However, it does not reveal how long a young person has spent being NEET. Further analysis is therefore required to better understand the differences between young people who are long-term NEET compared with those who flow in and out of NEET more quickly (short-term NEET).

A more granular understanding of the NEET population (distinguishing between long- and short-term NEET as well as examining demographic differences between these groups) is essential to diagnose the scale and complexity of the NEET challenge. This richer picture can help identify the factors associated with persistently high NEET rates and better inform the design of the public policy responses required to address the NEET challenge.

Long-term NEET status is likely to be associated with deeper structural barriers, greater scarring effects, and higher long-term fiscal and social costs. Given the strong evidence of the 'scarring' effect of being NEET on a young person's health and lifetime income prospects, long-term NEET young people therefore experience entrenched structural disadvantage in the labour market.<sup>2</sup> While young people who are NEET short-term may be experiencing frictional unemployment or temporary gaps in education or training, they are still at real risk of becoming NEET long-term.

Greater insight into who is NEET and for how long would help inform more effective targeting to reduce the flow of young people becoming NEET and to reduce time they remain NEET. Distinguishing between those who experience short-term NEET status and those who become long-term NEET therefore helps to identify which preventative approaches should be prioritised and where more intensive, sustained interventions are required.

To achieve a better picture of the NEET population, we have taken a snapshot of a young person's NEET status over a period of time using the two-year longitudinal Annual Population Survey (APS), linking individuals observed in consecutive survey years (see methodology box above). We have used proxies to define short- and long-term NEET. It is important to note that while this gives us some helpful insight, it comes with limitations, so these findings should be interpreted with caution, focusing on overall patterns rather than precise figures (for further details, please refer to the 'Methods and Definitions' section at the end of this report).

1. Young people not in education, employment or training (NEET) - Office for National Statistics

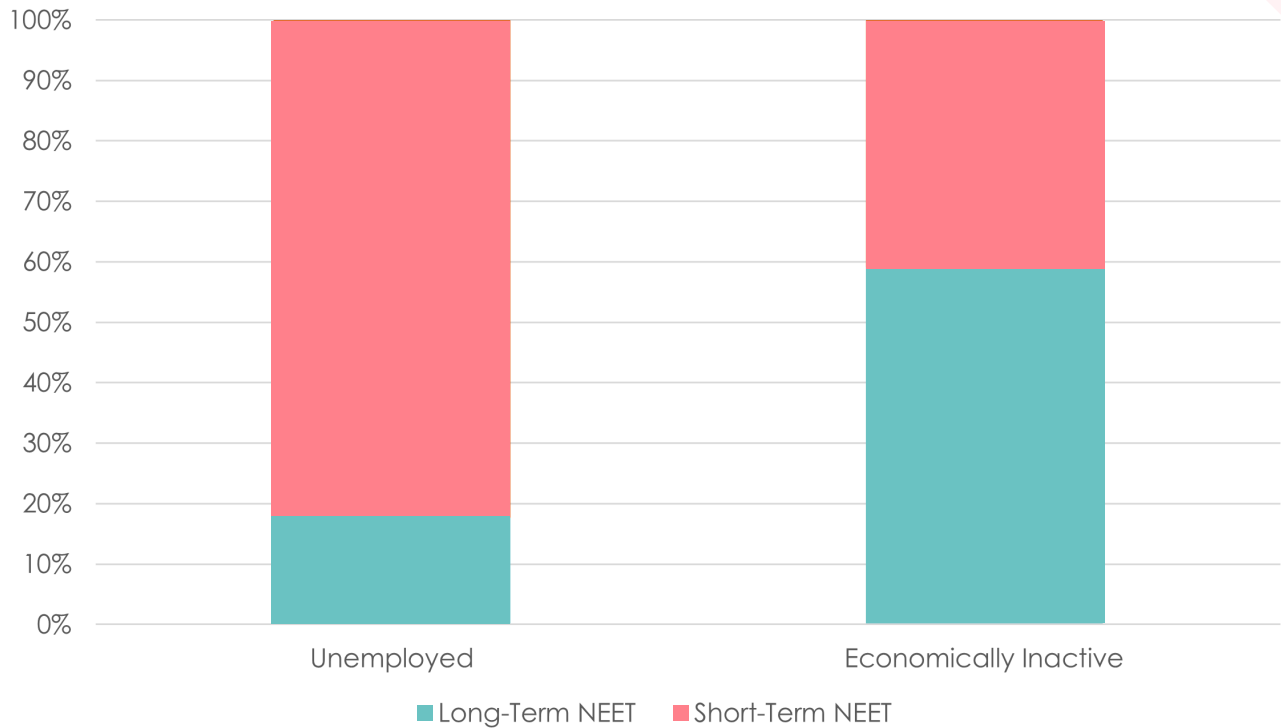
2. Paul Gregg, "Employment, economic inactivity and incapacity: past lessons and implications for future policy" (A thought paper written for the Commission for Healthier Working Lives, 2024); The Health Foundation, "How employment status affects our health," (2025), <https://www.health.org.uk/evidence-hub/work/employment-and-unemployment/how-employment-status-affects-our-health>



The analysis below compares the demographic and socioeconomic characteristics across long-term and short-term NEET.

## Figure 2: Long-term NEET status is strongly concentrated among those who are economically inactive rather than unemployed

Proportion of the NEET population by NEET duration and economic activity status, ages 16 to 24, January 2023 to December 2024, UK



**Source:** Two-Year Longitudinal Annual Population Survey from the Office for National Statistics

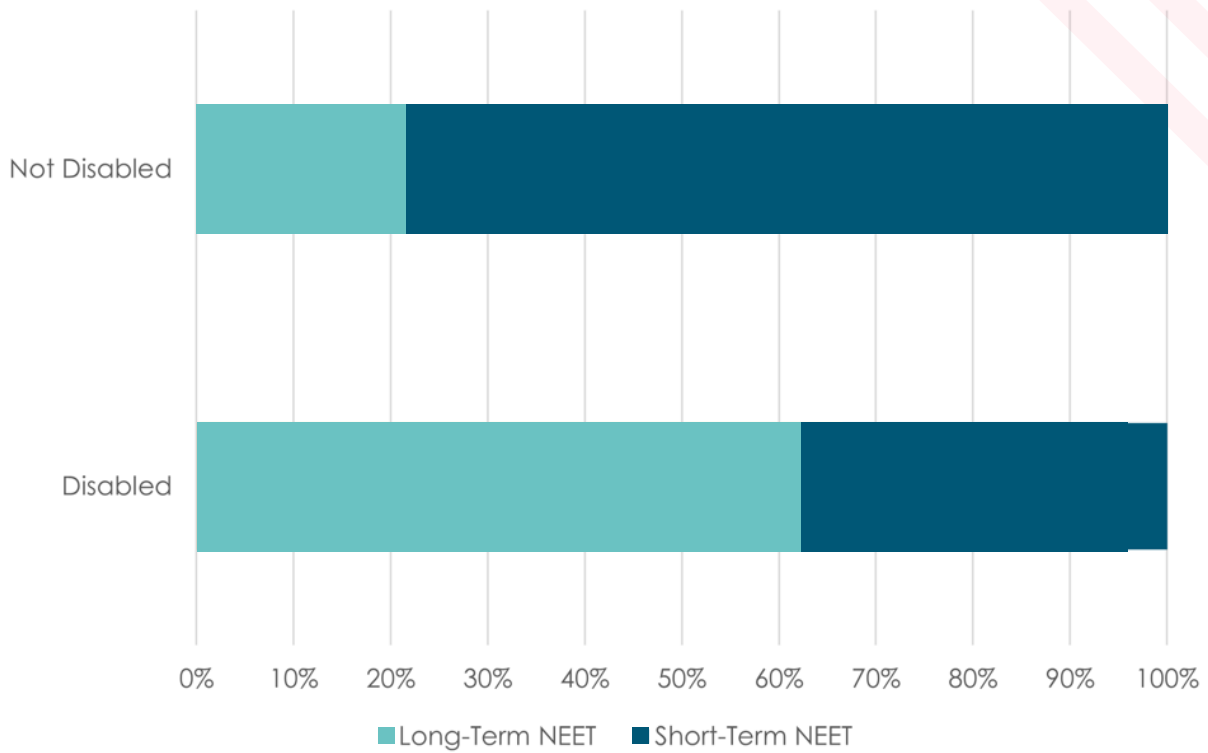
**Note:** For short-term NEET, economic activity status is taken from the quarter in which the individual was NEET. For long-term NEET, who are NEET in both time periods, economic activity is measured at Q5.

The data reveals pronounced differences between long and short-term groups by economic status. **Around 59% of economically inactive NEETs are long-term NEET, and looking at the long-term NEET group itself, 83% are economically inactive.** This indicates that long-term NEET status is closely associated with being outside the labour market altogether and a higher likelihood of disengagement with support services, in contrast to those who are short-term unemployed. The challenge for this group is therefore likely to extend beyond job search, skills and vacancy matching, pointing towards more complex barriers to participation.



### Figure 3: A large majority of disabled NEET young people are NEET long-term

Proportion of the NEET population by NEET duration and disability, ages 16 to 24, January 2023 to December 2024, UK



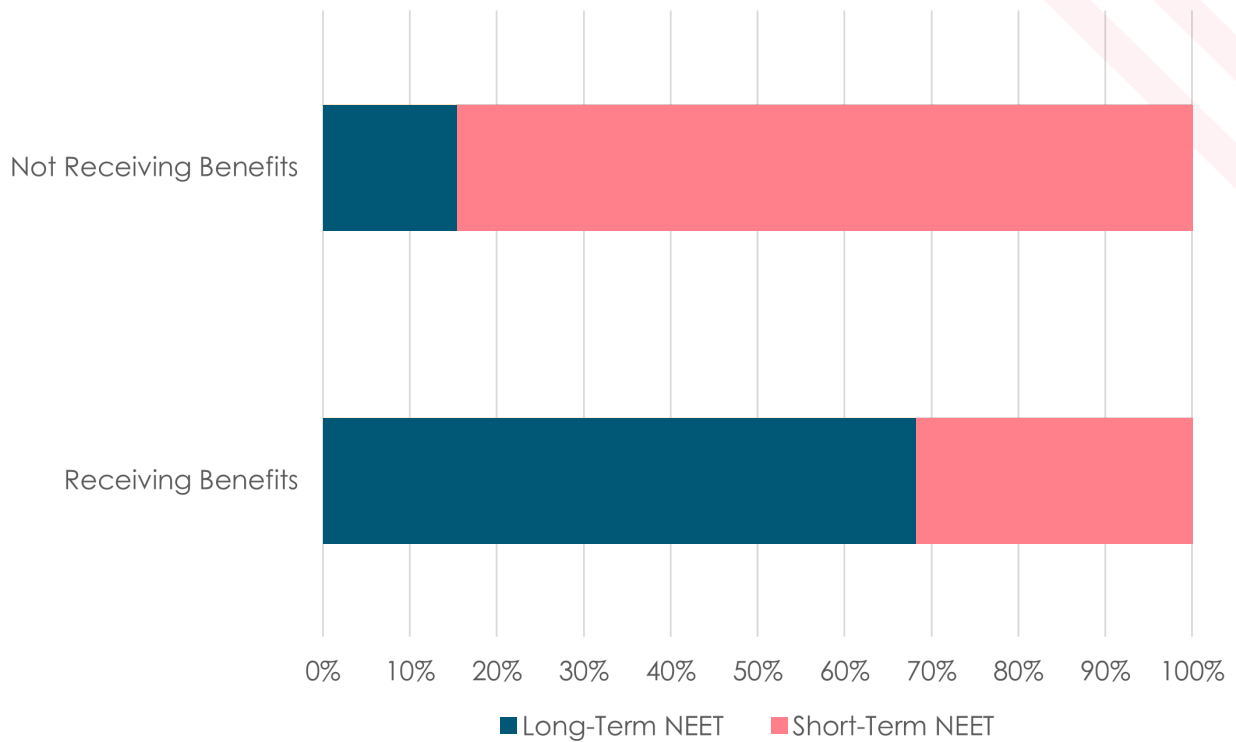
Source: Two-Year Longitudinal Annual Population Survey from the Office for National Statistics

Disability is one of the clearest dividing lines between long- and short-term NEET. **Among disabled young people who are NEET, 67% are long term NEET**, compared to 33% who are short-term NEET. In contrast, among the non-disabled NEET population, only 21% are long-term NEET. This substantial gap highlights the strong relationship between health-related barriers and longer-term labour market exclusion, reinforcing the importance of integrated employment and health support.



## Figure 4: Experience of being long term NEET is closely associated with benefit receipt

Proportion of the NEET population by NEET duration and benefits receipt, ages 16 to 24, January 2023 to December 2024, UK



**Source:** Two-Year Longitudinal Annual Population Survey from the Office for National Statistics

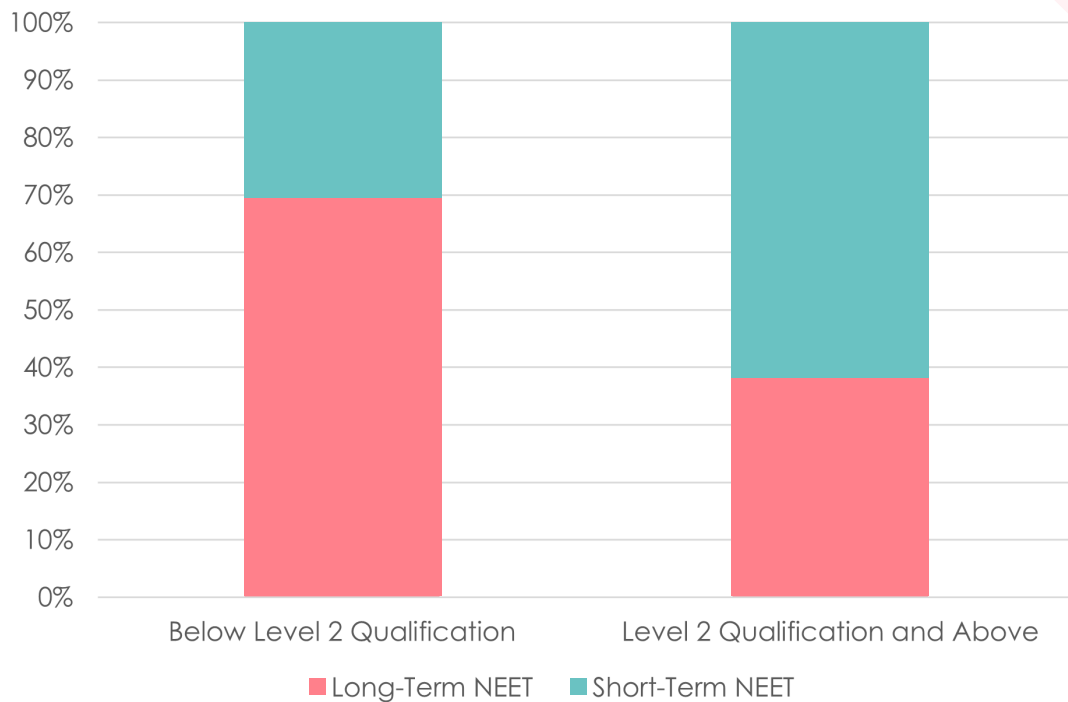
**Note:** The graph indicates a relationship between benefit receipt and the length of time spent NEET, rather than a causal effect. This pattern is likely driven by underlying disadvantage and greater support needs among young people who receive benefits.

The data paints a similar picture when we look at differences in benefit receipt between both groups. **Among NEET young people who are receiving benefits, 68% are long-term NEET, compared to 32% who are short-term NEET.** Conversely, among those not receiving benefits, 15% are long-term and 85% are short-term NEET. Benefit receipt appears closely associated with longer durations out of education and employment, likely reflecting underlying disadvantage and support needs.



## Figure 5: NEET young people without level 2 qualifications or above are considerably more likely to be long-term NEET

Proportion of the NEET population by NEET duration and highest qualification level, ages 18 to 24, January 2023 to December 2024, UK



**Source:** Two-Year Longitudinal Annual Population Survey from the Office for National Statistics

**Note:** The 'Below Level 2 Qualification' group includes individuals with no qualifications and those reporting 'other qualifications'. The 'other qualifications' category primarily captures qualifications below Level 2, but may include a small number of qualifications above Level 2 due to classification limitations in the Annual Population Survey.

Educational attainment is also strongly linked to duration.<sup>3</sup> **Among NEET young people who have not achieved a level 2 or above qualification and are 18 years or older, 69% are long-term NEET.** For those who have achieved a level 2 and above, the pattern reverses: 62% are short-term NEET and 38% long-term NEET. This reinforces the protective role of achieving Level 2 qualifications and above in reducing the likelihood of sustained periods out of education and work.<sup>4</sup>

3. Youth Futures Foundation, Risk factors for being NEET among young people, (Youth Futures Foundation, prepared by the National Centre for Social Research, 2023)

4. Youth Futures Foundation, Risk factors for being NEET among young people, (Youth Futures Foundation, prepared by the National Centre for Social Research, 2023)

## Conclusion

The findings indicate that long-term NEET status is concentrated among young people who are disabled, are economically inactive, in receipt of benefits and who have low qualifications. These are characteristics that are also often found to be overlapping.

The results of this analysis demonstrate the need for policy design and investment to particularly consider the needs and journeys of those young people who have a disability, those who are claiming benefits and those who do not have or are at risk of not achieving level 2 qualifications. The public policy response to the NEET challenge needs to consider the intersecting and compounding effect of the barriers young people experience which increase their risk of NEET and the factors associated with long-term NEET status. Once a young person becomes NEET the timing and design of support interventions is critical.

To address this challenge, public policy needs to focus on early NEET prevention, ensuring the system has enough capacity to deliver evidence-based support interventions to young people who are at risk of NEET and who have characteristics associated with long-term NEET status. Secondly, more intensive support needs to be available to NEET young people experiencing severe structural disadvantage; this support should be integrated across systems of employment, education, skills, welfare and health. Evidence of what works will be critical to informing successful further policy development including further evolution of the Youth Guarantee offer to young people.

Finally, the high proportion of economically inactive young people within the long-term NEET group reinforces the need for services to better reach and reengage young people into public employment support. Thoughtful join up between employment, skills and youth services will be essential in addressing this challenge.<sup>5</sup>

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5. Youth Futures Foundation, *The Missing Link: The role of trusted adult relationships in tackling the youth unemployment and inactivity challenge*, (London: Youth Futures Foundation, 2025).